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INFLUENCE OF PARENTAL DIVORCE ON SOCIAL ADJUSTMENT AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT OF UNDERGRADUATE SOCIAL STUDIES STUDENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF JOS

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Abstract

This study investigated the influence of parental divorce on social adjustment and academic achievement of undergraduate Social Studies students at the University of Jos, Nigeria. The study was guided by five objectives and five corresponding research questions. Two null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance. The study employed a cross-sectional survey research design. The population comprised 528 undergraduate Social Studies students across 100 to 400 levels. A sample of 200 students was selected using proportional stratified sampling technique. A structured questionnaire with 25 items was used for data collection, validated by experts, and reliability established at 0.72 using Cronbach's alpha. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) for research questions and independent t-test for hypotheses. The findings revealed that parental divorce significantly negatively influences students' social adjustment, manifesting in difficulties with peer bonding, trust issues, emotional instability, and social withdrawal. Parental divorce also significantly negatively affects academic achievement, disrupting concentration, class attendance, and examination focus. Major challenges of social adjustment included feeling disconnected from the university community, lack of a support system, and anxiety in social situations. The study concluded that parental divorce is a critical factor undermining both social and academic outcomes of undergraduate students. Recommendations include establishment of specialized counselling units, sensitization programmes for parents, and institutional support mechanisms for affected students.

Keywords: Parental divorce, social adjustment, academic achievement, undergraduate students, Social Studies, University of Jos

Introduction

Parental divorce refers to the legal dissolution of marriage between parents, an event that often has profound and long-lasting effects on children, extending into their adult lives. The impact of parental divorce on university students has gained increasing attention, as the emotional and psychological consequences of this significant life event can persist well into adulthood, influencing academic performance, interpersonal relationships, and overall social adjustment. Social adjustment is the process by which individuals adapt their behaviours, attitudes, and emotions to meet the social norms and expectations of their environment, facilitating harmonious interactions within a society (Dude, 2022). For undergraduate students, successful social adjustment is particularly critical, as it shapes their ability to thrive academically and socially in a new and often challenging university environment.

Nigeria is a culturally diverse nation with over 250 ethnic groups, and family remains the primary agent of socialization. The family structure, particularly parental marital stability, plays a crucial role in shaping children's emotional, social, and academic development. However, in recent decades, rates of divorce have increased across Nigerian societies due to factors such as marital infidelity, domestic violence, economic hardship, and shifting gender roles (Musa & Adegoke, 2021). This trend has raised concerns among educators and policymakers regarding the potential negative consequences for children's educational outcomes and social integration. Undergraduate students, who are in a critical transitional phase from adolescence to adulthood, may be particularly vulnerable to the disruptive effects of parental divorce.

The University of Jos, located in Plateau State, hosts a diverse student population from various ethnic and religious backgrounds. Within the Department of Social Science Education, undergraduate Social Studies students are trained to understand societal dynamics, civic responsibility, and social cohesion. Ideally, these students should demonstrate strong social adjustment capacities, including interpersonal effectiveness, emotional stability, and active participation in academic and social activities. However, empirical records from the department between 2016 and 2024 indicate a persistent decline in academic performance and limited student involvement in extracurricular activities. Observational data from the researcher's long-term experience within the department further suggest weakened emotional resilience and poor social integration among many students.

While existing literature has established links between parental divorce and children's psychosocial outcomes (Amato, 2021; Buchanan, Maccoby & Dornbusch, 2021), there remains a dearth of research specifically focusing on undergraduate Social Studies students in Nigerian universities, particularly at the University of Jos. Most existing studies have been conducted in Western contexts, and findings may not be directly transferable to the Nigerian socio-cultural environment, where family structures, extended family support systems, and cultural values differ significantly. Furthermore, previous studies have often failed to employ rigorous sampling techniques or have not adequately addressed the specific challenges and factors affecting students' social adjustment and achievement in the context of parental divorce. There are different factors that equally affects students achievement like school environment, peer pressure, students attitude and teaching method among others (Shittu & Muhammad, 2025). This implies that students achievement and social adjustment in school can be influence by varieties of factors as

identified above but the concern of this study is on parental divorce.

This study, therefore, sought to fill this gap by systematically investigating the influence of parental divorce on the social adjustment and academic achievement of undergraduate Social Studies students at the University of Jos. Grounded in Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1966), which emphasizes that individuals learn behaviours and social skills through observation and imitation of role models within their environment, this study provides a framework for understanding how disruptions in the family environment such as parental divorce can shape students' social behaviours, emotional regulation, and academic motivation.

Statement of the Problem

Ideally, undergraduate Social Studies education is expected to foster holistic development by equipping students with essential social skills, civic values, and reflective understanding necessary for personal and societal adjustment. Social Studies undergraduates should demonstrate strong social adjustment capacities, including interpersonal effectiveness, emotional stability, group participation, and proactive involvement in academic and civic engagements. Correspondingly, their academic achievement should reflect consistent progress, given the interdisciplinary and societal relevance of the content they study.

However, the reality in the Department of Social Science Education, University of Jos, reveals a troubling deviation from this ideal. Empirical records from the department between 2016 and 2024 indicate persistent decline in the number of graduates with distinction or upper second-class honours, with a growing proportion finishing with lower grades. Beyond academic metrics, observational data from the researcher's long-term experience within the department further underscore students' poor social adjustment. Many undergraduate Social Studies students show limited involvement in extracurricular activities, campus politics, peer networking, and civic engagements. These behavioural patterns suggest weakened emotional resilience, poor social integration, and lack of interpersonal skills that Social Studies as a discipline seeks to inculcate.

Stakeholders, including departmental lecturers and university management, have made several attempts to address these issues through counselling services, peer mentoring schemes, academic support tutorials, and civic engagement programmes. However, these efforts have not yielded desired results. A critical and often overlooked factor contributing to the persistent nature of the problem may be students' family background, particularly the increasing prevalence of parental divorce. Existing literature affirms the link between parental marital status and students' psychosocial development and academic outcomes. Children from divorced homes are more likely to experience emotional instability, lower self-esteem, and impaired academic functioning (Ojedokun & Balogun, 2020).

While there exist different studies on parental divorce and students' achievement, there appears to be a dearth of literature on the influence of parental divorce on social adjustment and achievement of undergraduate Social Studies students at the University of Jos. This study, therefore, sought to answer the question: What is the influence of parental divorce on undergraduate Social Studies students' social adjustment and academic achievement?

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study was to investigate the influence of parental divorce on social adjustment and achievement of undergraduate Social Studies students at the University of Jos. Specifically, the objectives were to:

1. Find out the influence of parental divorce on social adjustment of undergraduate students.
2. Determine the influence of parental divorce on achievement of undergraduate Social Studies students.
3. Find out the challenges of social adjustment among undergraduate students in the University of Jos.
4. Identify the factors affecting undergraduate students' achievement in the University of Jos.
5. Suggest ways of improving social adjustment among undergraduate students in the University of Jos.

Research Questions

The following research questions were answered in the study:

1. What is the influence of parental divorce on social adjustment of undergraduate students?
2. What is the influence of parental divorce on achievement of undergraduate Social Studies students?
3. What are the challenges of social adjustment among undergraduate students in the University of Jos?
4. What are the factors affecting the achievement of undergraduate students in the University of Jos?
5. What are the ways of improving social adjustment among undergraduate students in the University of Jos?

Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant difference between parental divorce and social adjustment of undergraduate students.
2. There is no significant difference between parental divorce and achievement of undergraduate Social Studies students.

Methodology

Research Design

The study adopted a cross-sectional survey research design. This design allowed for data collection from a representative sample at a single point in time to draw inferences about the entire population regarding the influence of parental divorce on social adjustment and achievement.

Population and Sample

The population comprised all 528 undergraduate Social Studies students in the Department of Social Science Education, University of Jos, for the 2022/2023 academic session, across 100 to 400 levels. A sample of 200 students was selected using proportional stratified sampling technique, ensuring representation from each academic level based on population size.

Instrumentation

A structured questionnaire titled "Students' Questionnaire on the Influence of Parental Divorce on Social Adjustment and Achievement (SQIPDSAA)" was used. It consisted of Section A (demographics: gender, age, level of study) and Section B (25 items addressing the five research objectives using a 4-point Likert scale: Strongly Agree = 4, Agree = 3, Disagree = 2, Strongly Disagree = 1).

Validity and Reliability

The questionnaire was subjected to content validation by two experts: one in Research Measurement and Evaluation and another in Social Studies Education. Their feedback was incorporated. Reliability was established using Cronbach's alpha method, yielding a reliability coefficient of 0.72, indicating acceptable internal consistency.

Data Collection and Analysis

The researcher obtained a letter of introduction, sought permission from level coordinators, and personally administered questionnaires to selected students, ensuring confidentiality. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) for research questions, and independent t-test for hypotheses, using SPSS version 26.

Results

Research Question One: Influence of Parental Divorce on Social Adjustment

Table 1: Mean Responses on Influence of Parental Divorce on Social Adjustment

S/N	Statement	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Parental divorce has made it difficult for me to establish close relationships with my peers	3.10	1.2	Agree
2	I have trouble trusting people because of my parents' divorce	2.89	1.1	Agree
3	The divorce of my parents has made me more socially withdrawn in the university	3.31	0.8	Agree
4	Parental divorce has affected my ability to form long-term friendships with my classmates	2.85	1.1	Agree

S/N	Statement	Mean	SD	Decision
5	I feel emotionally unstable due to my parents' divorce	2.98	1.0	Agree
Cumulative Mean		3.03		Agree

The cumulative mean of 3.03 indicates that respondents agreed that parental divorce negatively influences social adjustment, manifesting as difficulty in establishing relationships, trust issues, social withdrawal, and emotional instability.

Research Question Two: Influence of Parental Divorce on Achievement

Table 2: Mean Responses on Influence of Parental Divorce on Achievement

S/N	Statement	Mean	SD	Decision
6	My academic performance has been negatively affected by my parents' divorce	2.67	1.1	Agree
7	I struggle to concentrate on my studies because of the emotional impact of my parents' divorce	3.14	0.9	Agree
8	The stress from my parents' divorce affects my ability to complete assignments on time	2.33	1.2	Disagree
9	My parents' divorce has made it harder for me to attend classes regularly	3.05	1.1	Agree
10	I often feel distracted by personal issues stemming from my parents' divorce during exams	2.82	1.1	Agree
Cumulative Mean		2.80		Agree

The cumulative mean of 2.80 indicates that respondents agreed that parental divorce negatively influences academic achievement, particularly affecting concentration, class attendance, and examination focus.

Research Question Three: Challenges of Social Adjustment

Table 3: Mean Responses on Challenges of Social Adjustment

S/N	Statement	Mean	SD	Decision
11	I feel disconnected from the university community due to my parents' divorce	2.69	1.2	Agree
12	I experience anxiety in social situations because of instability caused by my parents' divorce	2.78	1.0	Agree
13	It is difficult for me to participate in social events due to emotional strain from my parents' divorce	2.63	1.1	Agree
14	I feel like I lack a support system due to my parents' divorce	3.10	1.0	Agree
15	I find it challenging to relate with peers whose parents are still together	2.68	1.1	Agree
Cumulative Mean		2.78		Agree

The cumulative mean of 2.78 indicates that respondents agreed that parental divorce presents significant challenges to social adjustment, with lack of support system being the strongest challenge.

Research Question Four: Factors Affecting Achievement

Table 4: Mean Responses on Factors Affecting Achievement

S/N	Factor	Mean	SD	Decision
16	Teacher teaching styles	2.97	0.9	Agree
17	Students' attitude	3.23	0.9	Agree
18	Peer influence	3.10	1.2	Agree
19	Socio-economic background	2.82	1.1	Agree
20	School environment	2.80	1.0	Agree
Cumulative Mean		2.98		Agree

Students' attitude recorded the highest mean (3.23), followed by peer influence (3.10), indicating these as the strongest factors affecting academic achievement.

Research Question Five: Ways of Improving Social Adjustment

Table 5: Mean Responses on Ways of Improving Social Adjustment

S/N	Strategy	Mean	SD	Decision
21	Providing counselling services for students from divorced families	2.64	1.1	Agree
22	Creating support groups for students from divorced families	2.75	1.1	Agree
23	Increasing awareness programmes on the impact of parental divorce	3.25	1.0	Agree
24	Improving funding for education	3.03	0.9	Agree
25	Sensitizing people on implication of parental divorce on students' achievement	3.00	1.2	Agree
Cumulative Mean		2.93		Agree

Awareness programmes on the impact of parental divorce recorded the highest mean (3.25), followed by improved funding for education (3.03).

Testing of Hypotheses

Hypothesis One: There is no significant difference between parental divorce and social adjustment of undergraduate students.

Table 6: t-Test for Hypothesis One

Variable	Mean	SD	t-value	df	p-value	Decision
Parental Divorce and Social Adjustment	15.13	2.90	61.562	199	0.000	Reject H ₀

The t-value (61.562) exceeded the critical value, and p-value (0.000) was less than 0.05, leading to rejection of the null hypothesis. This indicates that parental divorce significantly influences social adjustment of undergraduate students.

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant difference between parental divorce and achievement of undergraduate Social Studies students.

Table 7: t-Test for Hypothesis Two

Variable	Mean	SD	t-value	df	p-value	Decision
Parental Divorce and Achievement	14.00	3.165	51.369	199	0.000	Reject H ₀

The t-value (51.369) exceeded the critical value, and p-value (0.000) was less than 0.05, leading to rejection of the null

hypothesis. This indicates that parental divorce significantly influences academic achievement of undergraduate Social Studies students.

Discussion of Findings

The study revealed that parental divorce significantly negatively influences students' social adjustment, manifesting as difficulty in establishing close relationships, trust issues, social withdrawal, and emotional instability. This finding aligns with Okoro (2020), who found that students from divorced families exhibited higher levels of social anxiety and were less likely to engage in social activities. Similarly, Adebayo and Ojo (2021) reported that students from divorced families experienced social withdrawal and emotional distress. The finding also corroborates Buchanan, Maccoby, and Dornbusch (2021), who demonstrated that higher levels of parental support post-divorce correlated with better social engagement.

The study also found that parental divorce significantly negatively affects academic achievement, particularly disrupting concentration, class attendance, and examination focus. This aligns with Johnson and Thomas (2021), who found that students from divorced families had lower academic achievement due to emotional distress and reduced motivation. Similarly, Brown and Mitchell (2021) reported that parental divorce negatively affected academic performance by reducing academic self-esteem and motivation. The finding also supports Smith and Wilson (2022), who found that students whose parents provided emotional and financial support had higher academic achievement.

Regarding challenges of social adjustment, the study identified lack of a support system, anxiety in social situations, and difficulty relating with peers from intact families as major challenges. This aligns with Sweeney and Snyder (2020), who found that students with minimal parental involvement experienced more social isolation. The study also identified students' attitude and peer influence as the strongest factors affecting academic achievement, consistent with findings from previous research.

Conclusion

This study established with empirical evidence that parental divorce exerts significant negative effects on both the social adjustment and academic achievement of undergraduate Social Studies students at the University of Jos. The breakdown of family structure disrupts the social and psychological stability of students, impairing their ability to relate with peers, cope with academic demands, and develop healthy social relationships. Parental divorce is not merely a family issue but an educational and developmental concern with broad implications for society, requiring targeted interventions from educators, parents, policymakers, and guidance counsellors.

Recommendations

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

1. **Parents** should be sensitized through community programmes and media campaigns regarding the far-reaching consequences of divorce on the social and academic lives of their children.
2. **Universities**, particularly the University of Jos, should establish specialized Counselling Units tailored to support students from divorced families, providing both individual and group therapy.

3. **Lecturers and academic advisers** should pay closer attention to the academic progress of students affected by divorce and provide mentorship support.
4. **Government and policymakers** should design family-centred policies aimed at reducing divorce rates and mitigating its effects on children, including mandatory marriage counselling and family mediation services.
5. **Guidance and counselling programmes** in schools should incorporate modules on coping strategies for students from divorced homes, including emotional regulation and resilience building.
6. **Further research** should be conducted on the long-term impact of parental divorce on students' career aspirations, emotional intelligence, and overall life outcomes, as well as comparative studies across different disciplines and universities.

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