

FAMILY DISINTEGRATION AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

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Abstract

This paper contends that family disintegrated is a social problem in any society today. As we prepare ourselves for the challenges of the 21st century. We shall accept that the parental roles in children's upbringing cannot be over emphasized. The paper attempts to explain the concept of a family disintegration. In doing this, the effects and critical perception was taken which review that a child living in the shadow of a broken home will feel bewildered. It goes further to examine the school environmental effect on students' performance from disintegrated homes. This paper identifies numerous ways of check-mating students' academic performance such as provision of school counsellors; active involvement of parents in school matters and so on. Finally, the paper concluded that individuals and parents alike have their respective roles to play so that the problems can be avoided.

The family is one of the most important social institutions established by the society for the purpose of propagation of the humans in society through the activities of procreation, primary socialization and social parenthood of the young. The family is the oldest of all other social institutions. A child's family is composed of his parents (father and mother) brothers and sisters if any. The significance of the family cannot be over-emphasized, in any society, it is considered to be the basic agency for education. Family may be rightly defined as the unit of a society. The justification for this definition is simple and that is, many families makeup a society. In essence what we are saying is that no families, no society.

Disintegration of families or break-ups is a story of growing incompatibility. Family disintegration therefore is the breakup or separation of husband and wife either due to quarrels, incompatibility and divorce. The result therefore is that the children are kept either with the husband or wife far apart. The implication of this is that the children lack the care of both parents. It is therefore in the light of this, that this paper attempts to explain the extent to which family disintegration affects student's academic performance in school.

The Family as a Socializing Agent

The family plays a crucial or delicate role in the socialization of a child. A child at birth is 'blank to some extent, he cannot differentiate between good or bad. He has no enemy or friend perse. He is totally innocent of every thing. What a child becomes in life is essentially determined by the types of family he hails from. As the founder of naturalistic approach to education, Jacques Rousseaus puts it, everything is good as it comes from the hands of the Creator, everything degenerates in the hands of man. The Author of Nature, -God- has created perfection: Man alone has sullied it.

This indicates that a child at birth is a 'perfect being however what he becomes later depend on the type of family he falls into. The importance of the family in a child's life is crucial since the family shapes the child's personality. The child's early socialization begins there and initial-experiences leave everlasting impact on the physical, intellectual, moral and spiritual developments of the child. No other agent of socialization is as important as its family.

In Yoruba tradition, the type of family a child hails from is depicted or determined by his mode of speech, behaviour and names. What seemed to be important was the total context in which the child was reared, rather than some specific method of handling the child.

A Critical Perception of Family Disintegration

According to African Encyclopedia (1974:327-328) disintegration taken as divorce means; “the breaking of the connections made between groups by marriages”. Writing on the consequences of family disintegration, Amadi (1982:35) observed that the child is going to be reared in an atmosphere of incomplete parentage. The child lacks the collective assistance of parents. Furthermore, disintegrated families more especially at the early stage of a child’s growth, lives behind, hash realities for the child. He often lacks that parental upbringing needed to balance his psychological outlook to life. Most of such children learn to bottle-up their feelings. Which most often ends up in one form of psychological trauma or the other.

Similarly, psychologists and sociologists believe that children from broken homes achieve less academically than children from united homes. This further agrees with the idea of Morrish (1972:165) that;

“... the child living in the shadow of broken family (home) will feel bewildered by comings and goings, and by the mere fact that essential relationships are not promoted, or are broken off and disrupted at a very impressionable time...”

Sometimes, when a woman separates from the husband, she leaves the home without her children. In some cases the man takes these children to his mother or relatives where they are likely to be brought up without affectionate marital care. In many cases, such children according to psychologists become delinquents.

Bigner (1984) points out that another element in the link is “the failure of adequate socialization”. In other words, the missing parent cannot play an adequate role model for the children or serve as an added source of authority in conformity to social roles.

Influence of Family Disintegration on Students Academic Performance

A child brought up in an unhappy background would generally suffer periods of general social inadequacy. Such a child might be ill-equipped to cope with the machinery of life in school.

At school, the child has divided attention which causes him absent-mindedness during learning periods. This is most likely to culminate finally to poor performance in school examinations, assignments and tests. This scenario is perhaps why Morrish (1972:165) remarked that “the child living in the shadow of a broken home will feel bewildered by comings and goings...” it is often said that several deprived children demonstrate that their conscience and potentialities are not fully developed.

Lennhoff (1960:36) posited that many delinquents children today, are the products of disintegrated homes ... he further that this is because the parents cannot give the children the most needed affection, direction and supervision. No doubt children who lack parental direction submit easily to strong force of the peer group. These children might easily take to smoking and joining secret cult groups. For the girls, some might find solace and happiness in the arms of a boy friend who sooner or later impregnates her or breaks her heart.

According to Onyekwere (1974:46) children from disintegrated families no matter how amiable still harbour strong feelings of unhappiness, anger and rejection as long as they live. Nord and West (2001) posits that a “troubled infested matrimonial atmosphere can

ruin the most promising individual, taking away productivity ...” this is because a child needs care, proper education, shelter, religious instruction, balance diet and parental guidance to know the rules and customs of his society so that he will be useful to his society.

Family disintegration has many negative effects on students because they lack basic socialization of the family and moreso; the greatest function of the family to the child is love and warmth. Where this is lacking, the student will not develop fully well intellectually, socially, emotionally and physically.

Pideon (1970:28) regards poor intelligence, poor peer interactions and inability to assert among equals as effects of disintegrated families, which subsequently affected the child’s learning at school. According to him, the child becomes frustrated and depressed. These feelings in turn lead to lack of effort and to further academic failures. Moreso, they are not checked by anyone at home after school to ascertain their level of performance in class work and attendance at school.

Influence of School Environmental on the Academic Performance of Students from Disintegrated Homes

It has been observed that most schools ignore the right conditions in a school system that creates a conducive atmosphere for students to learn effectively. Some students are labeled failures without proper identification of what their problems are; and as a result little or no attention is given to them to enable them cope.

The teacher unfriendliness, harsh nature and method of approach to personal related issues of students from disintegrated homes pose a lot of problems to them in activities inside or outside the classroom environment.

Mbakwem (2005:15) agrees that the “teachers’ quantity, quality and variety of teachers handling our classroom interaction processes” can actually affect classroom work.

Teachers, often times, might drive these students out of class for failure to provide learning materials or pay fees on time. Some are even prevented from taking periodic tests and examinations. Some also expose the students for their failure in academic work without identifying the root causes. These affected students in turn feel insulted and develop poor attitude to class work and emotionally feel inferior and this affects their academic performance in school. It also makes the student less interested and unwilling to continue his academic work, and as a result becomes an academic failure.

Additionally, the poor academic performance of a child could mean that he does not participate in the school extra-curricular activities. Where a child performs poorly at class work because of home influence, it is possible that the child exhibits laxity over official activities too. Uche (1980:33) stressed that in the school setting; the family also has an important influence on the child’s academic performance. What the child learns at home and from how his family motivates him towards education contributes to the child’s success or failure in school.

Control Strategies to Students Academic Performance

Attitude learned from parents to a great extent affect a child’s behaviour or performance. Parental love is a powerful determinant to behaviour. Children rejected by parents or those from broken homes are more likely to have academic problems than those reared from warmth and a loving environment. Nord et al (2001) agreed that when a child has parents who are understanding, who gives him support and who exercise positive guidance through examples and precepts, such a child has greater chances for mental health and consequently high school achievement than when these basic attributes are lacking.

Chauhan (1981) in his contribution found out that it is the motivational factor that is important in influencing student's school performance and not the mere fixed materials and economic conditions. He stressed that it is parent's involvement in tackling difficult home work that leads to better school work.

Akabue (1991) stated that disharmony in the home; biased parental performance for one child over the other can create difficulties. He noted that some parents neglect their responsibilities to their wards by failing to provide them with basic requirements: textbooks, uniforms, reasonable pocket money etc. This negligence leads to absenteeism, truancy, pilfering and negligence of their studies.

Bigner (1984:20) held that "supervision plays a great role in the academic life of children, where it lacks, they go astray". As a result of not being supervised by parents, children from disintegrated homes, may become failures because they move at a very slow pace when compared with others.

The child is expected to attend classes regularly, take home assignments promptly and participate in every aspect of school activities. Therefore, in a situation where both parents are apart, who aids the child? Presently, it is doubtful whether a child who is a victim of a broken home can still enjoy these benefits. Pidgeon (1970:64) suggests that the following under listed conditions will serve as control measures to the poor academic performance of learners from disintegrated families:

- a) Identifying and accepting children from disintegrated homes or families.
- b) A conscious integration of the children to new adjustments.
- c) Provision of school counsellors
- d) Active involvement of parent(s) in school matters.

Conclusion

Vernom (1987) upheld the views held by earlier researchers that children's home have a crucial influence on their academic performance. They also found out that in homes where there is an adequate child-parent interaction, the level of academic performance is bound to be higher than homes where such conditions were absent.

The important of parental roles in children's upbringing cannot be over-emphasized. An aberration of these roles in marital life would definitely affect the child adversely in the school and the larger society. Workable measures are necessary to bridge the yearning gap in the academic performance of students from disintegrated homes. These measures will further ensure adequate performance of those affected children or students.

Finally, family disintegration is a social problem in the society. Individuals and parents alike have their respective roles to play so that the problems can be avoided.

However, the home is the basic institution of socialization and education, and whatever influences the home exerts on the child is carried along as the child grows. Therefore the home is primarily an educational institution where the parents are the teachers. From this assertion, it is clear that "parents" and not a "parent" are very essential in the education of the child or student.

Recommendations

The psychologists believe that children from disintegrated homes achieve less academically than those in united homes.

- i. Parent should cover the gap created by disintegration in order not to expose the child to the trauma of failure.
- ii. Parents should realize that home influence is significant because it is the basic institution for providing the child's primary socialization and education.

- iii. Sociological findings have revealed that proper upbringing of the child demands both the efforts of husband and wife, father and mother and not just anyone of them alone. No doubt the performance of a child whether within or outside the academic sphere can be enhanced under a congenial atmosphere transparent in cooperation, unity and togetherness.
- iv. Both parents ought to pull their resources together in order to promote the child's academic performance and pursuit.
- v. School materials should be made available such as books, writing materials, etc and proper guidance and counselling by both parents and teachers must be regularized.
- vi. It should be realized that the child's educational background rests squarely on the shoulders of his parents. Parents must realize that the more stable the family is, the more secure the child will feel in the home and at school, and in the other social settings in which he finds himself. On the other hand, if the home is made stable, the child will learn some patterns of behaviour, perceptions of reality and habits of thinking which are special to his family.
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