

PARENTAL CONJUGAL STABILITY AS PREDICTOR OF ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

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Abstract

The study investigated parental conjugal stability as predictor of academic achievement among secondary school students in Odeda Local Government Area of Ogun State. The study used descriptive survey technique and four null hypotheses guided the study. A self-designed questionnaire tagged "Parental Conjugal Stability and Academic Achievement Questionnaire (PCSAAQ)" with a reliability value of 0.73 was used to generate data for the study. A sample of 150 participants (75 male and 75 female junior secondary school students) from five schools was selected using stratified sampling method. Data obtained were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) and t-test statistics at 0.05 level of significance. Findings revealed a significant relationship between parental conjugal stability and academic achievement; thus, academic achievement of junior secondary school students is tied to their parents' conjugal stability, the result also showed a significant relationship between parental conjugal stability and students' cognitive ability; this implies that the cognitive ability of the junior secondary school students is a product of their parental conjugal stability. In addition, the result showed a significant relationship between parental conjugal stability and social interaction as the level of social interaction of the junior secondary school students was influenced by conjugal stability of their households. The result also indicated a significant gender difference in students' social interaction. In light of these findings, it was recommended among others that schools should implement programmes that provide support for families, such as counseling services and workshops on conflict resolution to strengthen parental relationships and, in turn, enhance students' academic achievement and that schools should collaborate with communities and organizations to provide resources for families experiencing instability to mitigate the impact of parental conflict on students' academic achievement.

Keywords: Parental, Conjugal Stability, Academic Achievement, Secondary School, Students

Introduction

Achievement in human's life can be seen as the level to which an individual can engage the use of effective and appropriate skills and knowledge to accomplish a given task. Academic achievement is the relative change in the behaviour of students based on marks scored in a standardized test which depicts the outcome of effective teaching and learning in a subject (Isukpa, 2014) in Oba-Adenuga (2020). Academic achievement can be referred to as metrics that measure and track academic progress and attainment. It is also a very important tool with which the success, ability and capability of a student to contribute to the development of a society is measured Kim (2017). Academic achievement is also known as to be largely important in the economic and technological development of the nation. Davis (2017) postulated that academic achievement is important variable that not only gives academic qualification but also prepares students for the future; irrespective of whichever career they choose such as politics, economy, science or technology. Academic achievement seems to permeate everything in life from smallest to the largest.

Parental conjugal stability refers to the strong, lasting and functional nature of a parents' marriage, which is crucial for creating a positive and supportive environment for children's development (Kang & Jaswal, 2009). It essentially means that when parents are legally married and their relationship is characterized by commitment, trust, and effective communication, leading to a stable home life for the children. Parental conjugal stability is highly potential and pervasive in promotion of positive parenting patterns like love, democratic behaviour, encouragement, acceptance and independence among children. Whereas parents having low level of conjugal stability will not be able to provide healthy atmosphere to their children (Kang & Jaswal, 2009).

Stability is the state of being consistent, upright, tranquil, well established. Instability, on the other hand, means the direct opposite of stability. A stable household is one which its united members accept each other's shortcomings, understand, and appreciate the contribution of each member, always ready to assist, forgive and think on how to see the progress of each member and the entire household (Hassan, 2016). Anyakoha, (2000) opined that conjugal instability is the degree to which families fail to provide continuity, cohesiveness and stability for children, while those that are able to do so are said to be stable. A cordial, parental conjugal and healthy relationship is expected to exist between a man and a woman, sharing common interest, goals of life, good and bad times and in most cases, the general philosophies of life. Education begins at home and parents are the first teachers that interact with the child (Olaitan, 2018). A child always watches and learns from his parents and childhood is the phase where parents' experiences are believed to exert their most significant and salient influence on the child in order to shape and prepare his life for future challenges. Latu (2018) stated that as a child grows, he often imitates his parents, and would continue to do so throughout his schooling age. Also, Barasa (2016) asserted that a stable conjugal relationship between parents is the bedrock of a child's ability to succeed in his academic work. Trends in literature tend to suggest that parental conjugal stability have the potential of predicting academic achievement of students. This may be as result of many factors since the parents are the first socializing agents the child gets to know at the beginning of life. The issue of parental conjugal stability has been a major focus of research in recent time. In general terms, it is sufficient to note that parental conjugal stability provides certain secure framework for the process of reproduction and the family is a medium for primary socialization (Moris, 2011). The changing structure from the traditional family structure comprising parents and their children to other forms of family structures that provide an alternative dependent system may have an influence on the academic

performance in secondary schools as students depend on the family for academic, emotional and material support.

Structurally, family can be divided into two; stable (intact) and unstable (broken) family due to parental level of conjugal commitment. The family is the foundation of education before the child goes to school and the personality that the child takes to school is determined by his home (Maduewesi & Emenogu, 2017). Family lays the psychosocial, moral and spiritual foundations in the overall development of the child. A closely-knitted family, solidified by love, understanding and respect for each other is certainly more likely to bring up a child well-disciplined and socially upright than a disagreeable family. What makes up a family is the father, mother and kids, not father and children alone or mother and children alone. Murphy, (2012) as cited in Muza and Mairo (2022) pointed out that both parents have their own roles to play in a child's education. The father is to provide every necessary tool for the educational advancement while the mother is expected to supplement the effort of the father. However, in the case where the father is absent and the mother is not privileged enough to cater for all the necessary and basic needs due to her absence as well as supervising the academic achievement of the child, by checking the academic records of the child or by going through their class and lesson notes or books every day, as well as giving of counseling supports when needed, these will affect the academic achievement of the child (Murphy, 2012 as cited in Muza & Mairo, 2022). Ella, Odok and Ella (2015) found that the nuclear family, which consists of two parents (male and female) and children were held in high esteem by society as being the ideal to raise children; as such children receive strength and stability from the two parents.

However, growing up in a household in which the parents have conjugal problems can adversely affect a child. Conjugal distress and conflicts are, for example, associated with anxiety, poor social competence, health problems, poor academic performance, and reduced cognitive performance among children (Oba-Adenuga, 2020). Egalite, (2016) reported that children from a stable parental background do better in school than those from an unstable parental background. Kinard and Reiherz (2014) asserted that children from unstable parental households are more hostile, hyperactive and aggressive in nature. Many of the problems that single parents have are similar to those with parental conjugal stability, but these problems seem more difficult to bear or manage when the home is being managed or handled by only one person. For example, many of these children feel hostile towards their parents as they grow up and try to be emancipated or independent. But in a situation, where the anger and rebellion are all directed towards one person, it may seem worse, if there is no one to bear it, not for the two to share (Kinard & Reiherz, 2014).

In Nigeria, the parental roles are culturally determined and distributed. The paternal roles are that of economic responsibilities and discipline of children, while the maternal roles are those of child-rearing, home training and playing of complementary roles (Wat, 2019). The child is morally, mentally upright and emotionally balanced when the caring responsibilities are carried out by both parents. As the concept of educational goal attainment has been evolving, researchers have shown interest in investigating group differences across this construct. Gender differences and or inequality have been examined in several studies. Basu (2018) opined that a substantial gap in academic performance between male and female students in junior secondary schools, with males outperforming females. Makwana and Kaji (2016) also reported that the way boys and girls adjust in relation with their academics in school, and other settings are similar but their social interaction, however, differs significantly.

Olafsson, and Steingrimsdottir (2020) listed the followings to be the characteristics of parental conjugal stability:

- Commitment and partnership: Parents in a stable marriage demonstrate a strong commitment to each other and the family, working together to meet the needs of their children.
- Effective Communication: Open and honest communication between parents helps resolve conflicts, make decisions, and support each other in parenting roles.
- Emotional Connection and Support: A stable marriage provides children with a secure base where they feel loved, valued, and emotionally supported by both parents.
- Positive Modeling: Students learn valuable social skills, including how to form and maintain healthy relationship, by observing their parents' interaction and conflict resolution strategies.
- Financial and Social Resources: A stable marriage often provides a more stable financial and social environment for children, reducing stress and providing access to resources and opportunities.

The study is hinged on the Structural Theory propounded by Minuchin in 1974. The theory states that marital problems arises where the personality of one partner is swallowed up by the personality of the other partner and problems also come up where one partner's interest is in conflict with the general interest in the marriage. It is a theory that focuses on marital stability especially where one partner in the marriage has the irrational tendency to take charge over his or her wishes on the other partner. The structural theory of marital stability is a well-known theory in family and marital counseling, as it proposes that marital stability should be promoted so that it does not affect the social, academic and moral development of children. According to the theorist, marital stability can only be achieved when one member's interest is in harmony with the general interests of the marriage, and when children are taught moral values that promote a peaceful and harmonious family life. The sense is that people who are in relationship or who wishes to be in relationship should ensure that the interest of one partner does not affect the other partner negatively which can bring about marital disharmony to the general interest of the relationship. Thus, the theory is relevant to this work as it explains that divorce and separation which are components of broken home or marital instability can affect both the family members and as well as academic success of children.

The theory has clarified the fact that children learn to adjust positively to academic work if the parents are supportive and establish a home environment where peace and harmony prevail. A child needs to be taught moral values from parents in order to develop good behaviour and live a responsible life. If parents fail to model good behaviour and inculcate moral values into children's minds, the young ones may likely exhibit deviant behaviour and fail to adjust positively to the demands of academic activities.

Statement of the Problem

Academic achievement of students is measured and tied to some activities which include among others, engagement in educational purposeful activities, acquisition of desired knowledge, skills and competences and academic achievement in school subjects. Students are expected to participate fully in academic work and develop interest in it so as to achieve academic goals. Sadly, in Odeda Local Government Area of Ogun State, the researchers observed a decline in academic achievement of junior secondary school students. This appears to be as a result of several factors

within the students and parental conjugal stability. This has resulted in a steady decline in their academic achievement as shown in Junior School Certificate Examination (JSSCE) results for the years 2020 to 2024. As such, stakeholders in the education industry such as parents, teachers, curriculum planners, counselors and evaluators are worried. Parental conjugal stability as an element of peaceful marital coexistence of parents play significant roles in the academic achievement of students, each of the parents have different but complementary roles to play in the overall success and development of their children; the role of the mother in the worthwhile nurturing of the children cannot totally be played by the father and vice versa. Thus, any glitch in the interplay of conjugal stability can impact the wellbeing and academic achievement of students. It is against this background that this study investigated parental conjugal stability as predictor of academic achievement among junior secondary school students in Odeda Local Government Area of Ogun State.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate parental conjugal stability as predictor of academic achievement among secondary school students in Odeda Local Government Area of Ogun State. Specifically, the study examined the following:

1. Parental conjugal stability as factors that affect academic achievement of junior secondary school students in Odeda Local Government Area of Ogun State.
2. Influence of parental conjugal stability on junior secondary school students' cognitive development in Odeda Local Government Area of Ogun State.
3. Impact of parental conjugal instability on social interaction of junior secondary school students in Odeda Local Government Area of Ogun State.
4. Gender disparities in social interaction of junior secondary school students based on parental conjugal stability in Odeda Local Government Area of Ogun State.

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses guided the study and were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

HO₁: There is no significant relationship between parental conjugal stability and academic achievement.

HO₂: There is no significant relationship between parental conjugal stability and students' cognitive ability

HO₃: There is no significant relationship between parental conjugal stability and students' social interaction.

HO₄: There is no significant difference in social interaction of students across gender based on their parental conjugal stability.

Methodology

Research Design: The study employed a correlational research design. This is a type of quantitative, non-experimental design used to determine the extent to which two or more variables are related. This design was deemed appropriate as it enabled the researcher to examine the relationship between parental conjugal stability and three student outcomes: cognitive ability, academic achievement, and social interaction, as well as to assess gender differences in social interaction.

Participants: The population of the study comprised all public co-educational Junior Secondary School two (II) students from Odeda Local Government Area of Ogun State. Only Junior

Secondary School two (JSS II) students were chosen for the study because they are adolescents; the developmental stage where cognitive, academic, and social skills are significantly shaped by family and environmental factors.

A total of 150 students made up the sample for the study. A multi-stage sampling technique was used to select the sample. At the first stage, purposive sampling was used to select schools with functional counselling units and accessible student records. At the second stage, stratified sampling was applied to ensure equal representation of male and female students. Finally, simple random sampling (balloting) was used to select the students from the strata. This approach ensured that the sample was representative, balanced by gender, and appropriate for generalizing the findings to the target population.

Instruments: The instrument used for data collection was a self-designed questionnaire tagged "Parental Conjugal Stability on Academic Achievement Questionnaire (PCSAAQ)" with a reliability value of 0.73 and a Civic Education achievement test. The instrument is divided into two parts. Section A focused on respondents' biographic data, such as gender, age, and class while Section B was based on items related to the formulated hypotheses which followed the format of the modified 4-Likertscale. Respondents responded to the items by selecting the options that they believe are the correct responses to the statements based on their opinions. Academic achievement data were obtained using a Civic Education achievement test.

Data Collection Procedure: Permission was obtained from school principals and relevant authorities. The researcher, with the help of trained assistants, administered the questionnaires and tests directly to the respondents during school hours. Students were assured of confidentiality, and instructions were carefully explained to avoid misunderstanding.

Data Analysis: Data obtained were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was used to test hypotheses 1, 2, and 3, while independent sample t-test was used to test hypothesis 4. All the four null hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Hypothesis One: There is no significant relationship between parental conjugal stability and students' academic achievement.

Table 1: Pearson Correlation Matrix for Parental Conjugal Stability and Students' Academic Achievement

Variables	Parental Conjugal Stability	Students' Academic Achievement	Mean	SD
Parental Conjugal Stability	1.00	.42**	15.13	8.61
Students' Academic Achievement	.42**	1.00	20.06	10.41

Note. $N = 150$; $p < .01$ (2-tailed).

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.

Table 1 shows the Pearson product-moment correlation conducted to examine the relationship between parental conjugal stability and students' academic achievement among secondary school students. The result showed a moderate, positive, and statistically significant relationship, $r(148)$

= .42, $p < .001$. This means that as parental conjugal stability increases, students tend to have higher academic achievement. Given the statistical significance ($p < .001$) and strength of the relationship ($r = .42$), the null hypothesis, which stated that there is no significant relationship between parental conjugal stability and students' academic achievement was rejected.

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant relationship between Parental Conjugal Stability and Students' Cognitive Ability.

Table 2: Pearson Correlation Matrix for Parental Conjugal Stability and Students' Cognitive Ability

Variables	Parental Conjugal Stability	Students' Cognitive Ability	Mean	SD
Parental Conjugal Stability	1.00	.57**	15.13	8.61
Students' Cognitive Ability	.57**	1.00	10.14	4.91

Note. $N = 150$; $p < .01$ (2-tailed).

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.

Table 2 shows the Pearson product-moment correlation conducted to examine the relationship between parental conjugal stability and students' cognitive ability. The table reveals that there was a high, positive correlation between the two variables, $r(148) = .57$, $p < .001$. This indicates that higher levels of parental conjugal stability are associated with higher levels of students' cognitive ability. Given the statistical significance ($p < .001$) and strength of the relationship ($r = .57$), the null hypothesis, which stated that there is no significant relationship between parental conjugal stability and students' cognitive ability was rejected.

Hypothesis Three: There is no significant relationship between parental conjugal stability and students' social interaction.

Table 3: Pearson Correlation Matrix for Parental Conjugal Stability and Students' Social Interaction

Variables	Parental Conjugal Stability	Students' Social Interaction	Mean	SD
Parental Conjugal Stability	1.00	.32**	15.13	8.61
Students' Social Interaction	.32**	1.00	13.75	3.12

Note. $N = 150$; $p < .01$ (2-tailed).

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.

Table 3 shows the Pearson product-moment correlation conducted to examine the relationship between parental conjugal stability and students' social interaction. The table reveals that there was a moderate, positive correlation between the two variables, $r(148) = .32$, $p < .001$. This indicates that higher levels of parental conjugal stability are associated with higher levels of students' social interaction. Given the statistical significance ($p < .001$) and strength of the relationship ($r = .32$), the null hypothesis, which stated that there is no significant relationship between parental conjugal stability and students' social interaction was rejected.

Hypothesis Four: There is no significant difference in students' social interaction across gender.

Table 4: Independent Samples t-test Comparing Social Interaction Across Gender

	Gender	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	df	t	Sig (2- tailed)	Result
Social Interaction	Male	75	12.15	2.21	148	5.32	.000	Rejected
	Female	75	13.97	2.12				

Note. $p < .01$ (2-tailed). t = independent samples t-test value.

Table 4 shows the summary of the independent samples t-test conducted to compare social interaction scores between male and female students. There was no significant difference in scores for males ($M = 12.15$, $SD = 2.21$) and females ($M = 13.97$, $SD = 2.12$); $t(148) = 5.32$, $p = .000$. There is a statistically significant difference in social interaction between male and female students. Female students demonstrated significantly higher social interaction than their male counterparts.

Discussion

In hypothesis one, the result showed a significant relationship between parental conjugal stability and academic achievement. This means that academic achievement of junior secondary school students to an extent is tied to their parents' conjugal stability. This suggests that students from homes with stable parental relationships tend to perform better academically than those from unstable homes. The result aligns with previous studies such as the work of Egalite, (2016) who reported that children from a stable parental background do better in school than those from an unstable parental background. Also, Barasa (2016) reported that a stable conjugal relationship between parents was the bedrock of a child's ability to succeed in his academic work. The changing structure from the traditional family structure comprising parents and their children to other forms of family structures that provide an alternative dependence system may have an influence on the academic performance in secondary schools as students depend on the family for academic, emotional and material support.

In hypothesis two, the result showed a significant relationship between parental conjugal stability and cognitive ability. This means that the cognitive ability of the junior secondary school students is to an extent, a product of their parental conjugal stability. This implies that cognitive functioning and thinking skills are positively influenced by the emotional and structural stability of the home environment. Stable parental relationships are likely to provide psychological security, reduce anxiety, and encourage cognitive exploration. This finding corroborates the assertion of Ella, Odok and Ella (2015) who reported that the nuclear family, which consists of two parents (male and female) and children were held in high esteem by society as being the ideal to raise children; as such children receive strength and stability from the two parents.

In hypothesis three, the result showed a significant relationship between parental conjugal stability and social interaction. This means that the level of social interaction of the junior secondary school students is to an extent, influenced by the parental conjugal stability of their households. This suggests that students from stable family backgrounds exhibit better social interaction skills. Stability at home may foster the development of prosocial behaviour, emotional regulation, and communication skills. Inconsistent or conflict-prone parental relationships may, on the other hand, lead to social withdrawal, aggression, or poor peer relationships. This result is consistent with the work of Kinard and Reiherz (2014), who asserted that children from unstable parental households

are more hostile, hyperactive and aggressive in nature. Many of the problems that single parents have are similar to those with parental conjugal stability, but these problems seem more difficult to bear or manage when the home is being tutored by only one person. For example, all children feel hostile towards their parents as they grow up and try to be emancipated or independent. But in a situation, where the anger and rebellion are all directed towards one person, it may seem worse, if there is no one to bear it, not for the two to share.

In hypothesis four, the result showed a significant gender difference in students' social interaction. This finding suggests that female students in this study demonstrated better interpersonal and social communication skills. This may be due to gender socialization practices, where girls are often encouraged to express emotions and develop empathy more than boys. As the concept of educational goal attainment has been evolving, researchers have shown interest in investigating group differences across this construct. Gender differences and or inequality have been examined in several studies. Basu (2018) reported that a substantial gap in academic performance between male and female students in junior secondary schools, with males outperforming females. Makwana and Kaji (2016) also reported that the way boys and girls adjust in relation with their academics in school, and other settings are similar but their social interaction, however, differs significantly.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings of this study have clearly highlighted the significant role that family dynamics play in educational outcomes. Parental conjugal stability plays a significant role in the development of students' academic achievement, cognitive ability, and social interaction. The findings indicate that stable parental relationships contribute positively to students' academic achievement by providing a supportive environment that fosters emotional well-being, motivation, and engagement in school activities. Conversely, instability in parental relationships often correlates with negative academic achievement, including lower grades and decreased school attendance. Moreover, a significant gender difference was found in social interaction, with female students exhibiting stronger social skills than males. This underscores the importance of nurturing family relationships and their impact on students' educational experiences. The study thus concludes that a stable conjugal family setting serves as a vital support system for optimal student growth and functioning within the school system.

Based on the findings and conclusion of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Schools should offer parental education programmes that focus on family stability, conflict resolution, and positive parenting. This would help reduce domestic instability and its negative impact on children.
2. Encouragement of greater parental involvement in school activities through regular meetings and workshops. Engaging parents in their children's education can create a more stable home environment that supports academic success.
3. Schools should collaborate with community and organizations to provide resources for families experiencing instability. Access to counseling and support groups can mitigate the impact of parental conflict on students' academic achievement.
4. Policymakers should consider including in the school curricula elements of social-emotional learning (SEL) and life skills education, especially targeting male students to strengthen their social interaction and emotional expression.

5. Efforts should be made to conduct longitudinal studies to explore the long-term effects of parental conjugal stability on academic achievement. This can provide deeper insights into how family structures influence educational trajectories.
6. The school's counseling team should be well-prepared for professional interventions on students from homes having marital challenges.

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