

Parental Conflict as Correlate of Secondary School Students' Adjustment in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja

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Abstract

Original Research Article

The study investigated parental conflict as correlate of secondary school students' adjustment in the Federal Capital Territory Abuja, Nigeria. The study employed a descriptive survey design. Five research questions and three null hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. A total of three hundred and eighty-four students were drawn from the sampled schools. The instrument was self-constructed questionnaire, titled Parental Conflict as Correlate of Secondary School Students' Adjustment Questionnaire (PCCSSAQ). The instrument contains 25 items and three sections; section A has the personal information, section B contains items on parental conflict and C contains items on the adjustment measures and it was vetted through the use of test-retest reliability and face and content validity techniques. Reliability index of 0.72 and 0.84 for the PCCSSAQ are found to be appropriate for the study. The Data collected was statistically analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The study revealed that although parental conflict is relatively low among the students, students still demonstrate inadequate adjustment skills. It was also established that there is no significant link between parental conflict and students' adjustment, nor are there notable differences in adjustment outcomes based on gender or age. The study recommended that the services of a counselor/psychologist should be employed to provide the necessary support for children suffering emotional problems due to marital conflict. Marital conflict should be avoided among married couple due to the hazardous effect it may have on the adjustment capacity and academic performance of their wards. Parents should make effort to resolve marital conflict before it escalates into hostilities and violence.

Keywords: Parental Conflict, Adjustment, Academic Performance, Conflict.

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INTRODUCTION

Conflict generally refers to the absence of peace and harmony in a given environment. Within the family setting, conflict occurs when the usual flow of interaction and understanding among members is disrupted due to various reasons (Mike, 2010). These conflicts may arise between spouses or between parents and their children, often stemming from issues such as lack of trust, communication breakdown, disrespect, alcoholism, or unemployment.

Parental conflict, in particular, refers to disagreements or tension that occur among family members - be it between spouses, parents and their children, siblings, or extended family. Such conflicts can lead to serious consequences like separation, sibling rivalry, and strained parent-child relationships. According to Murphy (2015), parental conflict plays a central role in shaping the child's education through its influence. When conflict is frequent in the home, children are likely to suffer setbacks in their academic pursuits due to psychological and emotional stress. Many students are often ill-equipped to handle the

challenges posed by such family discord, which can manifest in poor academic and emotional outcomes.

Adjustment is the process by which individuals learn to cope with and respond effectively to the demands of their surroundings. It encompasses how one relates with others, manages responsibilities, copes with stress, and achieves personal fulfillment. In the context of school, adjustment refers to how well a student adapts to academic demands and the school environment. From the time children step out of their family homes and begin formal schooling, they are required to continually adjust to new settings. These adjustments are influenced by earlier life experiences. Early positive adaptation lays the foundation for future stability. As adolescents transition from primary to secondary school, they face several social and educational challenges. This shift often brings with it psychological stress and emotional upheaval. Phelam (2014) notes that transitioning to high school is rarely easy, and for many adolescents, the experience can be particularly stressful. Entering senior secondary school presents additional difficulties as students are expected to live apart from family and friends, take on new responsibilities, adapt to



rigorous academic expectations, and develop fresh social relationships. Students unable to develop effective coping mechanisms may struggle to adjust, which negatively impacts their academic performance.

The school environment plays a key role in shaping a child's personality. It provides opportunities for peer interaction, forming friendships, and engaging in social groups. During adolescence, peer relationships become central to a child's social life. With maturity, these interactions become more complex. Support from peers can significantly enhance students' ability to adjust, not just in school, but in life generally. Conversely, poor adjustment can lead to stress, which often results in underachievement. Adolescents are especially prone to stress, partly because of the pressure from parents to excel. When students fail to meet these expectations, they may develop frustration, low self-esteem, aggression, or depression. These emotional responses are linked to their inability to adapt to school demands, especially if they come from homes filled with conflict, lack of moral grounding, or weak emotional bonds with caregivers (Wei & William, 2004).

This study focuses on how well students adjust academically and behaviorally in school. Not all students find it easy to adapt to the academic environment. Those who struggle may exhibit disruptive behaviors such as fighting, bullying, truancy, and low academic achievement. Hence, school adjustment efforts must address both behavioral and academic issues. The ever-changing nature of the school environment demands that students continually reassess and improve their behaviors and attitudes - an essential aspect of personal development, and a major role of education.

Conflicts at home can undermine students' ability to adapt effectively to school life. Children raised in homes marred by conflict often experience feelings of anger, sadness, anxiety, and hopelessness (Grych & Fincham, 2010). Kiura (2010) emphasized that a successful marital relationship depends on self-awareness, mutual understanding, love, communication, and conflict resolution skills. He also noted the critical role of parents in guiding their children's education and overall life direction. When harmony is lacking in the home, children may face setbacks in their emotional, intellectual, physical, and social development, ultimately affecting their academic goals and adjustment in school. The distress from home often follows them into school and social spaces, burdening them with the weight of family dysfunction.

In light of these concerns, this study aims to explore the relationship between parental conflict and the adjustment of secondary school students in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The increasing prevalence of parental conflict and its disturbing effects on students' ability to adjust academically and behaviorally has become a serious concern for key stakeholders, including students, parents, educators, school administrators, policy-makers, and

mental health professionals. A peaceful, stable, and supportive home environment is known to positively impact a child's development, while a household filled with tension, hostility, and disharmony can have a deeply negative influence. According to Cuning (2003), the type of family environment a child is raised in significantly shapes the overall trajectory of the child's life. Successful academic adjustment often requires solid support from parents. However, when such support is lacking or inconsistent due to parental instability or conflict, children may become emotionally burdened and may disengage from school-related activities.

Parental harmony serves as a foundational factor for a child's academic progress and emotional well-being. In contrast, ongoing parental strife can result in inconsistent parenting practices and reduced sensitivity to the child's educational and emotional needs. Stephen (2003) emphasized that unstable parenting environments often diminish the quality of parent-child bonds, leading to poor involvement in schoolwork, irregular school attendance, and minimal supervision outside the home. These factors together can significantly hinder a child's adjustment in school. Low parental involvement has been directly linked to student absenteeism, disengagement, and ultimately, higher school dropout rates.

Sroufe (2003) noted that between 4% and 20% of the variation in children's poor school performance and emotional maladjustment can be traced to the level of instability present within the family. In such unstable environments, parents often struggle to fulfill their roles, resulting in less time spent overseeing school tasks, monitoring behavior, and engaging in meaningful communication with their children. This often leads to higher levels of truancy and a more negative attitude toward education, particularly among adolescents.

Given these concerns, this study seeks to explore the impact of parental conflict on the academic adjustment of students attending senior secondary schools in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, Nigeria.

To guide this investigation, the following research questions and hypotheses have been developed:

1. What is the extent of parental conflict among students in senior secondary schools within the FCT?
2. What is the level of academic adjustment among these students?
3. What connection exists between students' academic adjustment and parental conflict?
4. Is there a significant difference between parental conflict and student adjustment due to gender?
5. Is there any significant difference between parental conflict and adjustment due to age of the students?

Hypotheses:

There exists no substantial disparity between students' academic adjustment and parental conflict.

No substantial disparity exists between boys and girls regarding parental conflict and adjustment.

No substantial difference exists between parental conflict and students' adjustment about age.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopts a descriptive survey design. The population of this study consists of all the 10340 public senior secondary schools students II (SS2) in all the sixty (60) senior public secondary schools in the FCT, Abuja. A total of three hundred and eighty-four (384) SSS2 senior secondary school students will be sampled using stratified sampling technique. The instruments used to collect information from the respondents are two. The first instrument will be self-constructed questionnaire, titled

Parental Conflict as Correlate of Secondary School Students' Adjustment Questionnaire (PCCSSAQ). The instrument contains 15 items and two sections; section A has the personal information, B contains items on parental conflict and C contains items on the adjustment measures and it was vetted through the use of test-retest reliability and face and content validity techniques. Reliability index of 0.72 and 0.84 for the PCCSSAQ are found to be appropriate for the study. The Data collected is statistically analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics.

RESULTS

Research Question One: What is the level of parental conflict in the FCT senior secondary schools?

Table 1: Status of Parental Conflict among Secondary School Students in FCT
N= 384

S/N	Items	Mean	Std. Dev	Decision
1	I frequently observe my parents fighting.	2.63	1.03	Agree
2	My parents shout a lot when they fight.	2.38	0.93	Disagree
2	My parents continue to be angry with each other even after they stop fighting.	2.43	0.99	Disagree
4	When my parents fight, I am frightened.	2.52	0.96	Agree
5	When my parents fight, I am not sure what to do.	2.62	0.98	Agree
6	My parents frequently argue over my school activities.	2.25	1.00	Disagree
7	When my parents fight, I am typically to blame.	2.38	1.05	Disagree
8	When my parents argue, I feel compel to choose side.	2.40	0.99	Disagree
9	Because they are unhappy together, my parents fight.	2.50	1.03	Agree
	Sectional Mean	2.46	0.99	

The result on Table 1 shows Status of Parental conflict among secondary school students in Federal Capital Territory. The responses indicate agreement or disagreement variously with the items. The sectional mean of 2.46 shown disagreement, which indicate low status of

parental conflict among secondary school students in FCT. Incidence of parental conflict is therefore not prominent of among parents of secondary school students in FCT.

Research Question Two: What is the level of student's academic adjustment in the FCT senior secondary schools?

Table 2: Adjustment Capacity of Students in Secondary Schools in FCT
N=384

S/N	Items	Mean	Std. Dev	Decision
1	I have well defined academic goals	3.17	0.90	Agree
2	I consider school certificate important	3.11	0.86	Agree
3	I doubt value of school certificate	2.27	0.92	Disagree
4	I am up to date with academic work	2.76	1.05	Agree
5	I am not motivated to study	2.12	1.03	Disagree
6	I attend classes regularly	2.76	1.00	Agree
6	I always find academic work difficult	2.14	0.88	Disagree
8	I am satisfied with my academic performance	2.59	1.00	Agree
9	I often find it difficult to finish my homework due to my parents' disturbance	2.31	0.95	Disagree
10	I have trouble concentrating because of the disharmony between my parents	2.23	1.01	Disagree
11	I struggle to study for my exams because my parents' conflict borders me a lot	2.24	0.97	Disagree
12	Even though my parents are not educated, they still ensure that I stay focus on my study.	2.54	0.96	Agree

13	I find it difficult to pass my exams because my parents show little interest in my academic work.	2.22	0.93	Disagree
14	I do not do well academically, considering my effort	2.34	0.93	Disagree
15	I have challenge doing my assignment	2.29	0.88	Disagree
	Sectional Mean	2.47	0.95	

Table 2 presents data with respect to adjustment capacity of students in secondary schools in Federal Capital Territory Abuja. The analysis shows agreement with 5 items, while there is disagreement with all other items. The

sectional mean of 2.47 indicates that students in secondary schools in Federal Capital Territory Abuja have poor adjustment capacity.

The null hypotheses in this section were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

H₀₁: There exists no substantial disparity between parental conflict and students' academic adjustment.

Table 3: Model Summary for Test of Parental Conflict and Students' Academic Adjustment

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.082 ^a	.007	.004	.79304

Predictors: (Constant), Student Adjustment

From **Table 3**, the R value, the multiple correlation coefficient is a measure of the quality of the prediction of the dependent variable. An R- value of 0.082 indicates low level of influence of parental conflict on academic adjustment.

The R Square called the coefficient of determination shows the proportion of variance in the dependent variable that can be explained by the independent variables. The R

square value of .007 indicates that 0.7% of the variability of independent variable (academic adjustment) can be explained on the basis of the dependent variable (parental conflict).

To determine the statistical significance of influence on academic adjustment by parental conflict, analysis was carried out and results as presented on Table 3.

Table 3B: ANOVA Table for Test of Influence on Academic Adjustment by Parental Conflict

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Decision
1	Regression	1.621	1	1.621	2.577	.109 ^b	Accepted
	Residual	240.246	382	.629			
	Total	241.867	383				

Dependent Variable: Parental Conflict

Predictors: (Constant), Student Adjustment

Table 3b shows whether the independent variable significantly influence the dependent variable. A significant value of .109 (more than the 0.05 level of significance) shows that the independent variable do not significantly influence the dependent variable. The

hypothesis is therefore accepted. This implies that parental conflict does not significantly influence students' adjustment in secondary schools in Federal Capital Territory Abuja.

H₀₂: No substantial disparity exists between boys and girls regarding parental conflict and adjustment.

Table 4: t-test on Difference in Parental Conflict and Adjustment of Male and Female Students

	Gender	N	Mean	S.D	t-value	df	Sig(2-tailed)	Decision
Parental Conflict	Male	247	2.46	0.83	0.170	382	0.865	Accepted
	Female	137	2.45	0.72				
Student Adjustment	Male	247	2.48	0.46	0.562	382	0.574	Accepted
	Female	137	2.46	0.40				

The analysis on Table 4 has been carried out to determine difference in parental conflict and students’ adjustment due to gender in Abuja’s senior secondary schools. A substantial value of .865 (above the 0.05 level of significance) depicts no substantial difference. Therefore, the hypothesis was accepted. This depicts that no substantial difference in parental conflict regarding gender of the students.

Similarly, to ascertain difference in students’ adjustment

in secondary school students due to their gender in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. A substantial value of .574 (above the 0.05 level of significance) depicts no substantial difference. Therefore, the hypothesis was accepted. This means no substantial difference in students’ adjustment due to gender of students in Abuja.

Ho3: No substantial difference exists between students’ adjustment and parental conflict about age.

Table 5: One-way ANOVA for Difference in Parental Conflict and Adjustment on the Basis of Age

Variable	Age	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig	Decision
Parental Conflicts	Between Groups	1.215	2	.608	.962	.383	Accepted
	Within Groups	240.652	381	.632			
	Total	241.867	383				
Adjustment	Between Groups	1.431	2	.715	3.725	.025	Accepted
	Within Groups	73.175	381	.192			
	Total	74.606	383				

The test result on Table 5 was done to determine difference in parental conflict on students regarding age. With substantial value of .383 (above the 0.05 level of significance), the researcher found that there is no substantial difference in parental conflict on students regarding age. The hypothesis is therefore accepted.

On difference in students’ adjustments due to age the significant value of .025 (more than the 0.05 level of significance), shows that there is no significant difference in students’ adjustments due to age. The hypothesis is therefore accepted.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The study’s initial key finding revealed that while the level of parental conflict was low among the participants, students generally exhibited poor adjustment abilities. Furthermore, the results showed that parental conflict did not have a statistically significant impact on students’ adjustment in senior secondary schools within the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. This outcome aligns with earlier research conducted by Omoniyi & Oyafunke (2014), Ezeoba (2015), and Oguntaye (2017), who similarly found no significant influence of family instability on students’ ability to adjust academically. One possible explanation is that students at the senior secondary level are typically in the formal operational stage of cognitive development, as outlined by Piaget. At this stage, they may have developed the capacity to compartmentalize issues at home and focus on school-related tasks. Additionally, the influence of peer support might contribute positively to their adjustment process.

Another important outcome of the study showed that there was no statistically significant difference in adjustment between male and female students facing parental conflict. This suggests that gender does not significantly influence how students respond to or are affected by parental disputes in the home. This result supports the findings of Agharuwhe and Nkechi (2018), who concluded that male and female students do not differ significantly in their

academic adjustment or performance in secondary schools. Likewise, Ngwoke and Ezeoba (2019) observed that both boys and girls are capable of achieving academic stability and success when provided with equal opportunities and supportive environments. This finding implies that both genders possess similar capacities to adapt, and that effective, relevant academic activities benefit students equally, regardless of gender.

Additionally, the study found no significant difference in student adjustment due to age in relation to parental conflict. This aligns with the research conducted by Arthur and Evans (2019), who reported that students’ academic performance and adjustment are not significantly influenced by their age when parental conflict is present. They concluded that adolescents in school tend to demonstrate similar levels of academic engagement and adjustment, regardless of age differences.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study set out to examine the parental conflict as correlate of secondary school students’ adjustment in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Abuja, Nigeria. Based on the findings, the study concludes that although parental conflict is relatively low among the surveyed population, students still demonstrate inadequate adjustment skills. It also established that there is no significant link between parental conflict and students’ adjustment, nor are there notable differences in adjustment outcomes based on gender and age.

In light of these findings, the following recommendations are made:

First, schools should employ the services of professional counselors or psychologists who can offer targeted support to students experiencing emotional or adjustment difficulties. Couples are strongly encouraged to avoid marital conflict, considering its potential negative impact on their children’s well-being and academic adjustment.



Early intervention and resolution of disputes within the home should be prioritized to prevent the escalation of conflicts into more harmful situations.

Furthermore, strong parent-child bonds should be fostered in the home environment, as these attachments play a vital role in enhancing children's academic performance and social adjustment. Social workers engaging with families are advised to conduct awareness campaigns and educational programs to inform parents of the possible effects of unresolved conflicts on their children's schooling. Finally, parents experiencing marital difficulties should be encouraged to seek guidance from social workers or professional family counselors to learn constructive ways to resolve conflicts and support their children's capacity to adjust and thrive both academically and emotionally.

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