

RELATIONSHIP AMONG PARENTAL STRESS LEVEL, PUPILS' SOCIAL COMPETENCE AND SCHOOL ADJUSTMENT IN ENUGU STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study investigated the relationship among parental stress level, pupils' social competence, and school adjustment in Nsukka Local Government Education Authority (LGEA) of Enugu State, Nigeria. The study adopted a correlation survey research design. Four research questions and four null hypotheses guided the study. The population of the study comprised all 3678 primary three pupils in the 98 primary schools (1678 pupils from 51 public schools and 2000 pupils from 47 private schools) in Nsukka LGEA. A sample of 200 pupils was selected through proportionate stratified random sampling technique to make for an in-depth study. The instrument for the study was three sets of researcher designed questionnaire identified as: Parental Stress Level Questionnaire (PSLQ); Pupils' Social Competence Scale (PSCS); and Pupils' School Adjustment Scale (PSAS). PSLQ, PSCS and PSAS were validated by specialists. The PSLQ had parents as the respondents while PSCS and PSAS had the class teachers as the raters. Data collected were analyzed using regression analysis for hypotheses 1 and 2; and t test statistic for hypotheses 3 and 4. The major findings of the study revealed that PSL was significantly related to PSC and PSA with PSL accounting for 2.6% and 34.1 % of the variance in PSC and PSA respectively. The findings also revealed that gender had significant influence on PSC but had no significant influence on PSA. The educational implication of the findings of this study is that controlling parental stress level can engender the pupils' development of social competence and the necessary skills to adjust well in school irrespective of gender. The researcher therefore recommended that all concerned – the government, the school, the society and the parents themselves should have a re-think on all the precursors of high parental stress level as that will go a long way in enhancing healthy parent-child interactions needed for development of social competence and proper school adjustment. The researcher further recommended that parents, teachers and other child advocates should not see gender as a barrier to pupils' development rather they should provide equal access to environments that are conducive for every child to develop and learn.

Introduction

Education is ordinarily seen as a process of preparing people for life. It is a means of transferring and improving upon the culture, the norms, the skills and attitude of a people from one generation to another. According to Karen and Egbenta (2014), education is an instrument for developing the nation and the hidden talents in an individual. It evolves from the home as informal education setting from where the child transits to a formal education setting generally referred to as a school. School can be defined as a social unit established by government, non-governmental organizations or individuals as a formal agency where people learn about the custom, attitudes and ways of doing things in their society. In Nigeria, formal schooling is organized into three major levels- the primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education (FRN, 2014). Whichever level, the outcome may depend to an extent on the level of adjustment to school and school related activities by the child as the child transits from home to school. In this study, school is restricted to primary school also known as primary education which is the first level of formal education in Nigeria and designed for children aged 6 – 12years.

School adjustment relates to the process of adapting to the roles and responsibilities of being a school child. Agbakwuru (2012) defined school adjustment as the degree of school acculturation required or adaptation necessary for maximizing the educational fit between the child's unique characteristics, distinct nature and the requirements of a new learning environment. According to Liu & Wang (2005), school adjustment involves not only pupils' progress and achievement but also their attitudes towards school, anxieties, loneliness, social support and academic motivation. It is so because a child transiting from home to school often faces a lot of challenges. These challenges may arise as a result of change in the school physical environment which is completely different from the child's home environment; the school social group which alienates the child from the parents and siblings; and the regimented life style different from freedom the child is used to at home among others. In this study, school adjustment is taken to include all the skills, attitudes and strategies which pupils employ to survive and excel in primary school away from home.

From the foregoing, school adjustment is not a straight jacket process. It is multi faceted. Weiten, Dunn and Hammer (2008), outlined the aspects of school adjustment to include physical, academic, psychological and social adjustments. A child can only benefit from school and school related activities if the child adjusts well in all these aspects of school life. Poor school adjustment on the other hand may make the child to engage in truancy, bullying, drug use, drug abuse, stealing, being rude to teachers and constituted

authorities, indecent dressing, cult activities, examination malpractice among others. Evidence from research about children's involvement in crime, criminal activities, disruptive and destructive behaviors as well as poor academic achievement lives one in doubt as to the level of pupils' adjustment in school and school related activities. Such research evidences include (Parker, 2014; Hobbies, 2016; Miamoh, 2016) School adjustment in this study is defined as all the strategies, attitudes, skills and processes employed by the child in adapting to the demands of being a primary school child. School adjustment generally demands a lot of interpersonal relationships and may therefore be determined by the child's level of social competence.

Social competence refers to the ability of an individual to move on well with others. It may manifest in the way the child communicates and interacts with peers and or with adults in the home, school or other social environments. Social competence has been described as involving the personal knowledge and skills which persons develop in order to deal effectively with the many choices, challenges, and opportunities in life (Leffert, Benson, & Roehlkepartan, 1997). Also, Kostelnik (2002) earlier conceptualized social competence as consisting of six categories of competence: adoption of social values, development of a sense of personal identity, acquisition of interpersonal skills, learning how to regulate personal behavior in accordance with societal expectations, planning and decision-making, and development of cultural competence. Children who are socially incompetent therefore may be at risk. According to Illinois State Board of Education (2014), socially incompetent children are generally disliked, aggressive and disruptive; and have difficulty establishing and sustaining close relationships with other children. Social competence involves acquisition of basic social skills needed for healthy social intercourse such as high self esteem, self confidence, honesty, humility, empathy, industriousness, patience, resilience and others. Social competence is therefore critical for children to have healthy social relations with family members, peers and the wider society and especially in school where teacher-pupil and pupil-pupil interactions are unavoidable. Contextually, social competence is here defined as the interpersonal and pro-social skills possessed by pupils to enable them make effective use of all the learning experiences in school. They include honesty, neatness, patience, resilience, hard work, obedience and others.

In primary schools, pupils are faced with the challenge of getting on well with the teachers, management and other pupils from diverse home backgrounds. When pupils fail to develop appropriate social competence and possibly become antisocial, behavior problems are imminent. Research evidence has it that, children who are anti social may find it challenging

engaging in healthy social relationships in the home, school and society (Sullivan, Johnson, Owens & Conway, 2014). Such children may also find it difficult regulating themselves, moving along well with peers, being good team players, being attentive to teachers in the classroom, obeying rules and regulations among other social behavioral problems. Behavioural problems generally run counter to academic achievement and life skills development which are paramount for effective living in any society. Considering the place of middle childhood (the primary school age) in human development and the importance of primary education as the bedrock upon which other levels of education are built, there is need for pupils to develop into socially competent individuals.

In the process of preparing the children to be socially competent, the family has a fundamental role to play. From birth, the home especially the parents are expected to guide the child in developing basic trust and subsequently autonomy upon which development of other social life skills hinges. Unfortunately, the extent to which the family is performing this role is becoming worrisome due to the rate at which family psychodynamics are changing in the contemporary society. Such changes are evident in modern child rearing practices, family economic activities, management of family income, and family structure among others. All of these contribute to the observed stress and burnout among parents. In the contemporary society, there is every tendency for increased parental stress. Parents are getting more and more involved in events and responsibilities outside the home and parenting. And influence of extended family members is also waning day by day.

From the foregoing parental stress may be on the increase. Parental stress is defined by Patnaik (2014), as an inevitable, normal experience that is felt when an individual is unsure of how to meet the demands of the immediate environment. The National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (NSCDC, 2015) however, stated that depending on the context, stress can be positive and conducive for healthy development; simply tolerable with no strong effects; or toxic and conducive for physical, emotional and mental impairments. In this study, parental stress refers to stress that parents experience not only because of child rearing, but also due to their social and environmental circumstances, responsibilities and everyday life. Increase in parental stress may make parents to be more alienated from their parenting demands which may impact negatively on the development of young children. McKenry and Price, (2005) opined that parental stress brings about decline in the quality of parenting and leads to a variety of negative children's outcomes, such as feelings of rejection, lowered self-esteem, disruptive and aggressive behaviors and social withdrawal. McKenry and Price further stated that less

distressed parents tend to be more responsive, warm, rational, and moderate in the kinds of control they use with children. The children under them exhibit such characteristics as high self-esteem, high achievement drive, effective social skills, and ability to achieve a balance between conforming to parents and gaining autonomy. Erikson in Ngwoke and Ngwoke (2017) also stressed the need for development of autonomy in middle childhood as a basis for the development of ego identity. Development of ego identity demands that the learning environment for the growing child should be safe, healthy, nurturing and responsive.

The home which is an integral part of the learning environment for the growing child should be child friendly, and developmentally appropriate for the growing child. Unfortunately, many homes in Nigeria today appear not to be supportive and appropriate for learning in terms of their physical, social and emotional environments. Homes seem to be filled with appliances, facilities and structures that are ironically not appropriate for children's development. Parents and other significant adults also appear to be engaging themselves in activities and responsibilities that detract their normal parenting duties and alienate them from children. The effort to rear children under such environmental conditions may contribute greatly to parental stress. For instance a home with ceramic floor tiles, electronic appliances, and highly breakable home utensils impede children's free movement thereby restricting their opportunity for exploration without hindrance and hurt. When the home environment is not physically child friendly and the adult figures are not readily available for the supervision required, then the children's social development becomes jeopardized. Some parents may try to cushion such stressful conditions by using play-safe strategies.

Some of the strategies include: getting the children's needs provided; getting the children's homework perfectly done; their dresses perfectly washed and ironed but without involving the children just to please the teachers and others who may feel concerned, with the hope of avoiding public embarrassment. Such parents may also prefer to keep the children in school all day just to avert the trouble of leaving them alone in the home since the parents and other significant adults may not be there for the children. Such practices may not be healthy for the child as children need to be part of their personal growth and development. It may also indirectly end up increasing the stress suffered by the parents. The influence of home environment on pupils' social skills development and school adjustment may relate to gender stereotype in child rearing practices.

Gender is a psychological construct which is used to describe the attributes of being feminine or masculine. It is often socially construed.

According to Mbotto and Bassey, (2004), gender is a term used to describe the social expectations of boy child and girl child in term of attitudes and behavior. On the basis of gender in this study, pupils are grouped into boys and girls. This distinction tends to influence the socialization processes provided for children in the home. Appropriate sex-roles and sex-typed behaviors according to Nnachi (2010) are often learned, guided and transmitted by cultural stereotypes and reactions. Casual observations also reveals that in the traditional African societies, female children are expected to identify themselves more with the motherhood roles and be more cooperative in household tasks than boys are. They are also expected to be more submissive, kind, gentle, responsive, empathic, and generally pro-social than boys from the very earliest age (Ofoha, 2012). It is more accepted for boys to be outgoing and less cooperative in household tasks than the girls.

Gender biased socialization may not engender pupils' social competence and school adjustment. It may make the girl child not to assert herself properly and not to engage in a career part of her interest when such career is ascribed to masculinity. In the same manner the boy child may become unnecessarily too aggressive making him to be antisocial which is inimical to development of pro-social skills and proper school adjustment. On gendered socialization, Santrock (2001) opined that negative gender stereotypes hinder children's ability to fulfill their potential by limiting their choices. So, given stereotypic gender roles prescribing more order-oriented and well-controlled behaviour for girls than for boys, it is possible that gender may have significant influence on pupils' social competence and school adjustment. Current research evidence (Gome, & Pereira, 2014) also revealed significant difference in the social skills development between boy child and girl child and with the girls being more pro- social than the boys. However, to Ogwuche, Adikwu and Ossai (2017), it is the pattern of socialization provided for the children that makes the whole difference. Ogwuche, Adikwu and Ossai therefore concluded that if every child is empowered and given proper orientation about life and what it takes to fulfill their life potentials, irrespective of gender, culture, or religion, it will be difficult for any child to suffer artificial limitations as a result of gender stereotype.

Ideally, parents need to be there for the children to anchor needed opportunities and experiences necessary for the development of basic social skills by growing children. Ironically the many growing needs of the modern family, the meager economic standing of many families and the expanding social engagement of the present day parents in Nigeria are apparently taking away from critical parenting responsibilities. This emerging family psychodynamics apparently deprive children the care and comfort for robust

social and emotional development that help cushion the challenges of school and adult life. The problem of this study put in question form therefore was: what is the relationship among parental stress level, pupils' social competence and school adjustment?

Generally, the study investigated the relationship among parental stress level, pupils' social competence and school adjustment in Enugu State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to determine:

1. The relationship between parental stress level and pupils' social competence.
2. The relationship between parental stress level and pupils' school adjustment.
3. The influence of gender on pupils' social competence
4. The influence of gender on pupils' school adjustment

The following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of probability.

1. There is no significant relationship between parental stress level and pupils' social competence.
2. There is no significant relationship between parental stress level and pupils' school adjustment.
3. There is no significant difference in the mean score of male and female pupils on PSAS
4. There is no significant difference in the mean score of male and female pupils on PSCS

Methodology

The study adopted a co-relational survey research design. The population of the study comprised all 3678 primary three pupils in the 98 primary schools (1678 pupils from 51 public schools and 2000 pupils from 47 private schools) in Nsukka LGEA. To make for an in-depth study, a sample of 200 pupils was selected using proportionate stratified random sampling technique. The instrument for the study was three sets of researcher designed questionnaire titled: Parental Stress Level Questionnaire (PSLQ); Pupils' Social Competence Scale (PSCS); and Pupils School Adjustment Scale (PSAS). PSLQ, PSCS, and PSAS were validated by three specialists in childhood education and measurement and evaluation, all from University of Nigeria, Nsukka. PSLQ had two sections. Section A, sought information on personal data of the parents and that of their respective primary three children, while section B was a 15 item, 4 point scale which sought information on the parents' stress factors with response options and weighting as follows: Very highly stressful (VHS) =4; Highly stressful (HS) =3; Moderately Stressful

(MS) = 2; and Lowly stressful (LS) =1with parents as the respondents and were reached through PTA meetings in the selected schools..Children whose parents failed to respond to PSLQ were eliminated from the study. Schools that had less than 40 primary three pupils were not sampled. Data on Pupils' social competence and school adjustment were collected with the instruments: PSCS and PSAS respectively with the class teachers as the raters. PSCS and PSAS had 30 items and 25 items on 4point scale respectively with response options: Very often (VO) =4; Often (O) =3; Sometimes (S) =2 and Never (N) =1. Data collected with PSLQ, PSCS and PSAS were analyzed using Regression analysis to test hypotheses 1 and 2; and t test statistic to test hypotheses 3 and 4 respectively.

Results

Ho1: There is no significant relationship between parents stress level and pupils' social competence.

Table 1: Summary Table of Regression Analysis Showing the Relationship between Parents' Stress Level and Pupils' Social Competence

Variables	N	Mean	SD	R	R ²	Df	P	Decision
PSL	200	51.00	2.58	0.160	0.026	1,198	0.024	Sig
PSC		69.30	8.05					

Data in Table 1 shows that parents' stress level was significantly related to pupils' social competence, $F(1, 198) = 5.20$, $p = 0.024$, $R = .16$, $\beta = -.160$. Given the R^2 of 0.03, the result suggests that parents' stress level accounted for 2.6% of the variance in pupils' social competence. The remaining 97.4% can be attributed to other factors not explained by the model. Therefore, the hypothesis which stated that there is no significant relationship between parents' stress level and pupils' social competence is rejected.

Ho2: There is no significant relationship between parents stress level and pupils' school adjustment

Table 2: Summary Table of Regression Analysis Showing the Relationship between Parents Stress Level and Pupils' School Adjustment

Variables	N	Mean	SD	R	R ²	Df	P	Decision
PSL	200	51.00	2.58	0.587	0.341	1, 198	0.000	Sig.
PSA		60.70	6.51					

Data in Table 2 shows that parents stress level was significantly related to pupils' school adjustment, $F(1, 198) = 104.17, p = 0.000, R = .59, \beta = .587$. Given the R^2 of 0.34, the result suggests that parents stress level accounted for 34.1% of the variance in pupils' school adjustment. The remaining 65.9% can be attributed to other factors not explained by the model. Therefore, the hypothesis which stated that there is no significant relationship between parents stress level and pupils' school adjustment is rejected.

Ho3: There is no significant influence of gender on pupils' social competence.

Table 3: Result of t-test Statistic Showing the Influence of Gender on Pupils' Social Competence

Gender	N	Mean	SD	Df	T	df	P	95%CI	Decision
Male	80	66.25	3.0	198	-	198	0.000	-7.266, -	Sig
Female	200	71.33	9.5						

Data in Table 3 shows that there was a significant influence of gender on pupils' social competence, $t(198) = -4.593, p = 0.000, 95\%CI = -7.266, -2.901$. As shown in the Table, female pupils reported higher mean social competence score ($M = 71.33, SD = 9.57$) compared to the male pupils with ($M = 66.25, SD = 3.05$). Therefore, the hypothesis which stated that there is no significant influence of gender on pupils' social competence is rejected.

Ho4: There is no significant influence of gender on pupils' school adjustment.

Table 4: Result of t-test Statistic Showing the Influence of Gender on Pupils' School Adjustment

Gender	N	Mean	SD	Df	T	Df	P	95%CI	Decision
Male	80	60.75	8.95	198	.088	198	0.930	-1.775, 1.941	Not Sig.
Female	200	60.67	6.24						

Data in Table 4 shows that there was no significant influence of gender on pupils' school adjustment, $t(198) = .088, p = 0.930, 95\%CI = -1.775, 1.941$. As shown in the Table, both male and female pupils reported similar mean school adjustment scores. Therefore, the hypothesis which stated that there is no significant influence of gender on pupils' school adjustment is not rejected.

Summary of Results

The major findings of the study include:

1. Parents stress level was significantly related to pupils' social competence where parents' stress level accounted for 2.6% of the variance in pupils' social competence.
2. Parents stress level was significantly related to pupils' school adjustment where parents' stress level accounted for 34.1% of the variance in pupils' school adjustment.
3. There was a significant influence of gender on pupils' social competence as female pupils reported higher mean social competence score compared to the male pupils.
4. There was no significant influence of gender on pupils' school adjustment as male and female pupils reported similar mean school adjustment scores.

Discussion

The findings of this study revealed that parents' stress level was significantly related to pupils' social competence with parents' stress level accounting for 2.6% of the variance in pupils' social competence. This finding is in line with McKenry, and Price, (2005) who observed significant relationship between parent's stress level and children's social competence. Specifically the finding by McKenry and Price showed that high parental stress level brings about decline in the quality of parenting and leads to a variety of negative children's outcomes, such as feelings of rejection, lowered self-esteem, disruptive and aggressive behaviors and social withdrawal. McKenry and Price further observed that less distressed parents on the other hand, tend to be more responsive, warm, rational, and moderate in the kinds of control they use with children, making the children under them to exhibit such characteristics as high self-esteem, high achievement drive, effective social skills, and ability to achieve a balance between conforming to parents and gaining autonomy. This finding may be explained by the fact that children depend to a large extent on parents for development of social skills and social competence. By implication, when parents are highly stressed, their interaction pattern with children may be highly affected.

The findings of this study further revealed that parents stress level was significantly related to pupils' school adjustment with parents' stress level accounting for 34.1% of the variance in pupils' school adjustment. This finding supports Kean (2005) who studied the effect of some precursors of parental stress such as income and level of education on pupils' academic achievement which is an aspect of school adjustment. This finding is further

supported by Sullivan, Johnson, Owens & Conway (2014), who observed indirect relationship between parents' stress level and children's school adjustment. The authors observed that parents' stress affected their belief and behavior towards their children. By implication, children whose parents are highly stressed may be more anti social. Anti-social behaviour will make it more challenging for children to engage in healthy social relationships in the school, home and society. Such children may also find it difficult regulating themselves, moving along well with peers, being good team players, being attentive to teachers in the classroom, obeying rules and regulations. These social and behavioural problems are manifestations of poor social competence which had earlier been linked to high parental stress level and subsequently leads to poor school adjustment.

The findings of this study further revealed a significant influence of gender on pupils' social competence with female pupils having higher mean score on a social competence scale compared to their male counterparts. This finding lends credence to Santrock (2001), who opined that gendered socialization hinders children's ability to fulfill their potential by limiting their choices. The finding is also in agreement with Gome & Pereira (2014) who observed that there were significant differences in the level of basic social skills between male and female children. Their findings indicated that girls showed behaviours based on social cooperation and social interaction while boys showed attention problem and overactive and anti social behaviours. According to Ofoha, (2012) the girl child is expected to be more submissive, kind, gentle, responsive, empathic, and generally pro-social than boys from the very earliest age.

Finally the findings of this study revealed that there was no significant influence of gender on pupils' school adjustment. Both male and female pupils reported similar mean school adjustment scores. This finding tends to support Ogwuche, Adikwu and Ossai (2017) who observed that if every child is empowered and given proper orientation about life and what it takes to fulfill their life potentials, irrespective of gender, culture, or religion, it will be difficult for any child to suffer artificial limitations as a result of gender both in the school and at home.

Conclusion

On the basis of the findings of this study, the researcher concludes that parents' high stress level is antithetical to pupils' social competence and school adjustment. In other words, while it may not be possible for parents to be completely free from stress, excessive stress will hamper their children's development of social competence and school adjustment. The researcher also concludes that while gender is a major issue in development of social

competence among primary school children, it is not a critical factor in pupils' school adjustment if proper social competence has been developed by the pupils.

Recommendations

The researcher therefore recommends that effort should be made to maintain a moderate parental stress level to enable them have quality and healthy interactions and relationships with their children. In other words, all concerned – the government, the school, the society and the parents themselves should have a re-think on all the precursors of parental stress so that parents will not be stressed to a point of hampering pupils' development of social competence. Also the researcher recommends that parents, teachers and other child advocates should not see gender as a barrier to pupils' development.

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