

Factors Influencing the Learning of Senior Secondary Students Separated from Their Parents

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ABSTRACT

The role of parents is crucial in determining students' learning achievements. Parental separation significantly affects student performance. In the 1AB and 1C schools within the Trincomalee Education Division, the learning achievements of senior secondary students whose parents have recently separated are notably low. Therefore, this study aims to identify factors, aside from parental separation, that have influenced their learning achievements. This research, designed as a descriptive quantitative survey, 152 senior secondary students separated from their parents, studying in 10 schools in the area, selected through a stratified random sampling method. Quantitative data obtained from questionnaires and documents were analyzed using descriptive statistical analysis techniques. This study has revealed the following findings. The analysis was interpreted using a Likert scale (very high 4 - very low 1). Individual ($M = 2.5$), family ($M = 2.8$), socioeconomic ($M = 3.9$), and school ($M = 2.5$) factors significantly influenced the learning of separated senior secondary students. However, socioeconomic factors exert a much greater influence on students' learning achievement than the other factors. Additionally, there was a positive correlation between students' learning achievement scores and these factors. In fact, socioeconomic factors ($r = 0.674$) show a very strong positive correlation with students' learning achievement compared to the other factors.

Keywords: Students separated from their parents, learning achievement, influencing factors.

INTRODUCTION

The influence of parents on children's learning achievement is widely recognized as a fundamental factor in educational development, with research emphasizing that a child's formal and informal education begins within the home setting, where parents serve as their first and most influential teachers (Karunanithy, 2004). The children who grow with their parents or guardians display excellent social skills and behaviors and also gain high standard and marks in their parents (Sivananthan, 2021).

However, family dynamics and circumstances, such as parental separation, migration, or economic hardship, can significantly disrupt this developmental process. Parental separation, whether due to divorce, migration, or financial constraints, poses substantial challenges not only to children's emotional and psychological well-being but also to their academic progress. Children from single parent families are at a heightened risk of experiencing psychological problems such as depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem (Testow & Minaye, 2022), which can diminish their confidence and willingness to participate actively in school activities (Nwosu & Okonkwo, 2021).

According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, children undergoing family separation often find their basic needs such as physiological safety, protection, esteem, and self-efficacy unmet, which results in heightened distress and impairs their capacity to learn effectively. Family separation, regardless of its cause, tends to generate feelings of loneliness, insecurity, and stress that impede cognitive, emotional, and social development (Liu et al., 2024). Empirical findings highlight that parental presence provides essential emotional support and guidance, fostering a conducive environment for learning, while separation diminishes focus, motivation, and perseverance (Smith et al., 2021).

Additionally, economic hardship and societal attitudes toward family disruption further compound these effects, potentially restricting access to educational resources, lowering motivation, and negatively impacting social integration and self-esteem (Kim & Park, 2019; Chen & Wang, 2022). Given these complexities, understanding the multifaceted impacts of parental separation on children's educational outcomes is crucial for developing targeted interventions that aim to support vulnerable students and promote resilience in the face of familial instability.

In the Trincomalee Education Division, a significant proportion (38%) of senior secondary students in 1AB and 1C schools experience parental separation. This circumstance correlates with diminished academic performance, evidenced by a G.C.E. (O/L) pass rate of 27% for current Grades 12 and 13 students and a 35% average term exam pass rate for Grades 10 and 11 students (Examination schedule, 2024). Consequently, this study seeks to determine the family-related, individual-related, socioeconomic, and school-related factors that contribute to the learning challenges faced by these students.

Objectives of the Study

1. To identify factors affecting the learning of senior secondary students separated from their parents.
2. To investigate the relationship between learning achievement and influencing factors of senior secondary students separated from their parents.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Various studies have been conducted domestically and internationally on the direct and indirect impact of parental involvement on children's learning achievement. The results of the most important studies are presented here. Education begins at home, making parents the child's first teachers. Education aims to prepare children for society (Cole & Sylvia, 2017). Parental separation can negatively impact children's school attendance and lead to social isolation (Hanson & Strobe, 2022). Children are compelled to separate from one or both of their parents, either physically or permanently, due to various factors such as death, foreign travel, parental divorce, work migration, war, and natural disasters (Nouferkhanth, 2022). Children undergoing parental separation benefit from support from the surviving parent or guardian, strong family networks, and positive school relationships, including teacher empathy and peer inclusion. However, dysfunctional family practices can exacerbate the negative effects of separation (Hill et al., 2023).

Safe housing enhances their resilience and enables them to remain engaged in school activities (Chandigarh et al., 2021). A study by Perera (2021) found that senior secondary school students with single parents encounter various challenges in their academic pursuits, indicating that initiatives to support their educational development should be implemented at the school level. Children who undergo parental divorce, separation, or abandonment tend to perform poorly in school and experience developmental issues (Fotoh, 2021). The relationship between teachers and students, classroom environment and parents of students play an important role in students' choice of technology stream (Sivananthan et al., 2024). Parental involvement in their children's lives fosters confidence in their education, diminishes academic disengagement, and boosts engagement with learning (Abic Ntekane, 2018). To raise achievement, schools and classrooms must be resourceful, teacher-student relationships must be effective, students must set up a learning environment at home, and parents must actively participate in meetings (Sivananthan & Wedikandage, 2023).

In countries such as Sri Lanka, children who are separated from their parents encounter social changes and issues stemming from loneliness and depression, grief, psychological challenges, and abnormal behavior. Particularly due to the professional relocation of the mother, children may experience feelings of loneliness, anger, lack of affection, fear, and anxiety. This can lead to significant psychological stress among them (Laxman Singh Kunwar, 2022).

METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a descriptive quantitative survey design. It was carried out in 10 schools with the highest number of separated students in the 1AB and 1C categories within the Trincomalee divisional education. A total

of 152 senior secondary students from these schools were selected as samples based on school type, gender, and class through a stratified sampling technique. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, employing methods such as mean, median, standard deviation, and correlation.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The data obtained for this study were analyzed and interpreted separately according to the study objectives. During the analysis, the data were interpreted based on the Likert scale level (very high - 4, high - 3, low-2, very low - 1).

Factors affecting the learning of senior secondary students separated from their parents

Factors influencing the learning of students separated from their parents have been assessed through various variables, with their means and standard deviations calculated. These factors are categorized into individual, family, socioeconomic, and school aspects, as shown in the table below.

Table 1 Factors affecting the learning of senior secondary students separated from their parents.

Factors	N	Mean	S.D
Individual	152	2.5	0.30724
Family	152	2.8	0.29467
Socioeconomic	152	3.9	0.45934
School	152	2.5	0.31307
Valid N (listwise)	152		

Individual factors

The individual factors influencing the learning of students separated from their parents have been assessed using the following variables, with their mean and standard deviation calculated: cognitive abilities, motivation, learning style, arousal and psychological well-being, physical health, attention and concentration, prior subject knowledge and experience, language ability, personality traits, and self-control skills. According to Table 1, the mean (M) of the scores from (N) 152 students regarding the individual factors that influenced their learning is 2.5, with a standard deviation (SD) of 0.30724. Thus, the data indicates that individual factors significantly impact the learning of senior secondary school students who have been separated from their parents.

Family Factors

The family factors influencing the learning of students separated from their parents have been evaluated using the following variables, with their mean and standard deviation calculated: learning style, parental educational level, parental attitude towards education, family structure and stability, parenting style, language and communication at home, and extracurricular activities. According to Table 1, the mean (M) of the scores from (N) 152 students regarding the family factors that influenced their learning is 2.8, with a standard deviation (SD) of 0.29467. Thus, the data indicates that family factors significantly affect the learning of senior secondary school students who have been separated from their parents.

Socioeconomic Factors

The socioeconomic factors influencing the learning of students separated from their parents have been evaluated using the following variables, with their mean and standard deviation calculated: socio-economic status, cultural expectations, societal perceptions, extracurricular activities, social support, parental occupation and income, access to technology, need for learning equipment, household stability, health, and nutrition. In accordance with

Table 1, the mean (M) of the scores from (N) 152 students regarding the Socioeconomic factors that influenced their learning is 3.9, with a standard deviation (SD) of 0.45934. Thus, the data indicates that socioeconomic factors have the highest impact on the learning of senior secondary school students who have been separated from their parents.

School factors

The school factors influencing the learning of students separated from their parents have been evaluated using the following variables, with their mean and standard deviation calculated: peer influence, school resources, quality of curriculum, teacher-student relationship, classroom environment, school culture, teacher quality, teacher experience, training, and school leadership. According to Table 1, the mean (M) of the scores from (N) 152 students regarding the school factors that influenced their learning is 2.5, with a standard deviation (SD) of 0.31307. Thus, the data indicates that school factors significantly impact the learning of senior secondary school students who have been separated from their parents.

The relationship between student learning achievement and the factors influencing

The relationship between students' learning achievement scores and factors affecting it was calculated using Spearman's correlation coefficient and is shown in the table below.

Table 2 The relationship between students' learning achievement and the factors influencing it

Dependent Variable	Spearman's Rho	Independent Variable			
		Individual Factors	Family Factors	Socio Economic Factors	School Factors
Student Learning Achievement					
	Correlation (r)	0.574*	0.583*	0.674*	0.553*
	Sig.(2-tailed)	0.006	0.005	0.000	0.007
	N	152	152	152	152

According to Table 2, the p-value between the dependent variable and the independent variables is less than 0.05, indicating a statistical correlation. Consequently, there is a moderately strong positive correlation between individual factors ($r = 0.574$, $p = 0.006$), a moderately strong positive correlation between students' learning achievement and family factors ($r = 0.583$, $p = 0.005$), a very strong positive correlation between socioeconomic factors ($r = 0.674$, $p = 0.000$), and a moderately strong positive correlation between school factors ($r = 0.553$, $p = 0.007$). Thus, the data indicate that socioeconomic factors have a more significant impact on students' learning achievement than other factors.

CONCLUSIONS

Individual (M = 2.5), family (M = 2.8), socioeconomic (M = 3.9), and school (M = 2.5) factors significantly influenced the learning of separated senior secondary students. However, socioeconomic factors exert a much greater influence on students' learning achievement than the other factors. Additionally, there was a positive correlation between students' learning achievement scores and these factors. In fact, socioeconomic factors (67.4%) have a very strong positive correlation with students' learning achievement compared to the other factors. The results of this study are also consistent with the findings of Delfino (2019) and Hornby & Blackwell (2018), which indicate that social barriers and low economic conditions adversely affect the academic achievement of children from separated parents.

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