

## The Effect of Single Parenting on Student Academic Performance in Secondary Schools in Brunei

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**Abstract:** Single parent may have profound negative impacts on student's academic performance as parents' play an important role in most children's academic development. Previous research indicate that children from both parents perform better than children from single parent as due to the limited time single parent has to spend on their child's academic work. Hence, the purpose of this study is to investigate the effects of single parenting on academic performance of adolescent in one of the private schools in Brunei-Muara District. The researcher will use selective survey on the students from single parent. The academic performance records of the students were obtained from the school principal. With this study, counsellors, teachers and parents could help to enhance the children's academic performance and improve their grades. This will be achieved by, firstly, investigating whether there is a difference in academic performance between children of single parents and both parents. Secondly, to investigate the academic performance between genders of children from single-parent and two-parent families. Finally, the researcher will provide some recommendations or suggestions to help children from single parenthood in our society.

**Key words:** Single parent, both parents, gender differences, educational performance, suggestions

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### INTRODUCTION

There are various types of learning disruptions that influence students' academic performance in schools. Much research on underachievement in Brunei has focused on a variety of barriers to achievement. For example, a belief supposedly held by many people in Brunei is that students from single parent home backgrounds do not do well in school. This misconception appears to be based on the alleged increase in the divorce rate in the country. However, there is no empirical research evidence to confirm both of these attributions. One plausible hindrance to effective learning that has been extensively investigated in Brunei and else where is disability (Bradshaw and Mundia, 2005, 2006; Mundia, 2006, 2010a-c, 2012a; Haq and Mundia, 2011; Tait *et al.*, 2014a, b). All these studies confirmed that Brunei teachers need to have adequate skills to be able to handle and help students with high support needs due to disability. The studies do not discuss anything about the marital status of the children's parents. In view of these and other problems, various educational reforms were introduced to modify, for instance the curriculum, teaching methods and assessment strategies in the whole Brunei school system including the preschool level (MoE, 1997, 1998, 2007; Mundia, 2007, 2009, 2010d). To support the educational reforms, teacher education has also been reformed in Brunei to ensure that teachers are

effective in delivering quality education (Mundia, 2011a, 2012b-d, 2013; Haq and Mundia, 2012; Tait and Mundia 2012a, b; 2014a, b). In addition, the school assessments have been innovated to reinforce the curriculum and teaching changes (Mundia, 2010e). Education that is relevant to careers is now considered as very important (Mundia, 1998).

**Parents' marital status as a factor:** There is a growing number of children registered with DANA (Pengiran Muda Mahkota Al-Muhtadee Billah's Fund) in Brunei whose parents are not in intact marriages. In 2008, the number increased from 1,835 to current figure which stands at 3,536. The increase in the number of single parents in Brunei is due mainly to the death of one of the parents, divorce or separation. The role of single parent is essential as it will affect a child's life socially and academically. Therefore, the present study was interested to investigate the academic achievement of students from such family backgrounds. In general, academic attainment is crucial as it brings positive opportunities of individual success in life.

**Objectives of the study:** The purpose of the present study was to compare the academic performance of students from single parents and students from both parents and determine how happy students of parents with different marital statuses were.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The design, sample, instruments, procedures and data analysis used in the study are described.

**Design:** The type of research used in this study was the field survey. The reason for highlighting mathematics and English in the study was because the two subjects were the main and necessary selection criteria when advancing to college and university level of education.

**Sample:** The target population for this study comprised of all the students from one selected private school and a number of government schools in Brunei. The students were all from year 8-10 that consisted of a total of 186 students. The author was to ensure that the selected students were from single parents' homes and both parents' homes of different genders (male and female students). Students' age range were between 13 and 19 years old. Simple random sampling was then used to select those from two parent homes whereas students from single parent families were personally obtained from the record data provided by the teacher in-charge. Initially, a total of 205 questionnaires were distributed to the chosen students but only 186 students submitted were properly completed and usable protocols. The remaining 19 students were excluded from participating because their academic results were not obtainable. The participants' bio-data (gender, educational level and family type) are presented in Table 1.

**Instruments:** In Brunei, it is difficult to use questionnaires that are written in advanced English and that are too long (Mundia and Bakar, 2010; Mundia, 2011b). In view of this, a simple researcher-constructed demographical instrument was used to collect the required bio-data from the participants. In addition, the previous semester's grades for Mathematics and English were collected from the

schools. The whole Brunei government education system uses a standardised grading scheme under the ongoing school-based assessment procedures (where A = 80-100, B = 70-79, C = 60-69, D = 50-59, E = 40-49 and F = 0-39%).

**Data analysis:** Data were analysed using descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) using SPSS Version 22.

**Procedures:** Before collecting the data, school principal inspected the questionnaire to make sure that there was no physical or psychological harm anticipated from the research. The participants were informed about the purpose of the present study and the ethical issue of confidentiality. The participants voluntarily agreed to participate in the study. A pilot study was conducted with some students from year 8. Although, students found no difficulty in understanding the questionnaire based on the feedback obtained, the researcher explained further any meaning of difficult English statements and phrases on the instruments. Therefore, the researcher assumed that it is was not necessary to translate the instruments into Bahasa Melayu (Brunei's official language and the mother tongue of the majority).

**RESULTS**

Table 2 shows the statistics of parents' marital status as well as the grades obtained by students in the subject of Mathematics on the basis of parents' marital status. Table 2 indicates that there is no significant difference in the academic achievement (performance) between students from single parent family and those from both parent family at Mathematics. The data above shows that all students have the same rate of getting certain grades regardless they are from single or both parent families. To sum it up, the student academic performance are not necessary affected due to their upbringing in single parent or both parent families. Table 3 shows the statistics of parents' marital status as well as the grades obtained by students in the subject of English on the basis of parents' marital status.

Table 1: Demographic information (N = 186)

Variables	Groups	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	99	53
	Female	87	47
Age	13-14	44	24
	15-16	118	63
	17-18	21	11
	Others	3	2
Education	Year 9	56	30
	Year10	59	31
	Year 11	71	38
Family type	Single mother	80	83
	Single father	10	10
	Others	6	6
	Both parents	90	100

Table 2: Parental marital status and student achievement in Mathematics

Grades (marks)	Marital status		Total
	Single parents	Both parents	
F (0-39)	51	49	100
E (40-49)	21	17	38
D (50-59)	12	12	24
C (60-69)	6	7	13
B (70-79)	4	1	5
A (80-100)	2	4	6
Total	96	90	186

Table 3: Parental marital status and students' achievement in English

Grades (marks)	Marital status		Total
	Single parents	Both parents	
F (0-39)	8	9	17
E (40-49)	21	13	34
D (50-59)	17	13	30
C (60-69)	21	26	47
B (70-79)	18	25	43
A (80-100)	11	4	15
Total	96	90	186

Table 4: Parental marital status and student's academic achievement in Mathematics

Grades (marks)	Marital status				Total
	Divorced	Died	Separated	Both parent	
F (0-39)	16	34	5	45	100
E (40-49)	0	19	2	17	38
D (50-59)	3	8	2	11	24
C (60-69)	3	3	0	7	13
B (70-79)	1	3	0	1	5
A (80-100)	0	1	1	4	6
Total	23	68	10	85	186

Table 5: Parental marital status and student's academic achievement in English

Grades (marks)	Parental marital status				Total
	Divorced	Death	Separated	Both parent	
F (0-39)	5	6	0	6	17
E (40-49)	5	14	2	13	34
D (50-59)	5	8	4	13	30
C (60-69)	4	15	3	25	47
B (70-79)	2	15	1	25	43
A (80-100)	2	10	0	3	15
Total	23	68	10	85	186

The data in Table 3 indicates that there is no significant difference in the academic achievement (performance) between students of English subject from single parent family and those from both parent family.

Table 2 and 3 are showing the statistics of parents' marital status as well as the grades obtained by students in the subject of Mathematics on the basis of parents' marital status. It will depend on the difference in the parents' marital statuses which will have a significant influence on student's academic achievement (performance) in both subjects: Mathematics and English. This is to answer the first research question. Regardless whether the students come from any home environment or family type, the students have either same or lower academic achievement. Based from the chi-square and phi-coefficient result obtained, it shows there is no significant difference regardless of different marital statuses from single parent family and both parent family. Hence, their marital statuses had no significant influence toward the student's academic performance.

From the finding, it implies the same result that shows no significant differences between the marital statuses in

Table 6: Gender differences in mathematics achievement

Grades (marks)	Single parents		Total
	Females	Males	
F (0-39)	40	8	48
E (40-49)	17	1	18
D (50-59)	10	0	10
C (60-69)	5	0	5
B (70-79)	3	1	4
A (80-100)	2	0	2
Total	77	10	87

Table 7: Gender differences in English achievement

Grades (marks)	Single parents		Total
	Females	Males	
F (0-39)	7	1	8
E (40-49)	19	2	21
D (50-59)	11	3	14
C (60-69)	16	2	18
B (70-79)	16	2	18
A (80-100)	8	0	8
Total	77	10	87

Table 8: Gender differences in Mathematics achievement for students with single parents

Grades (marks)	Gender		Total
	Females	Males	
F (0-39)	25	26	51
E (40-49)	10	11	21
D (50-59)	10	2	12
C (60-69)	6	0	6
B (70-79)	2	2	4
A (80-100)	0	2	2
Total	53	43	96

single parent family and both parent family. This is to show that regardless of the parents' marital statuses, they have no major impact towards the student's academic performance in English.

Since, the researcher focuses on the effect of single parenting on student academic performance, Table 4 and 5 are provided to specifically show parents' marital status that are further divided into (divorced, death, separated and both parent) purposefully to analyse which type of all marital status does bring impact on the student's academic achievement.

Table 6 depicts that there is no significant differences towards students' academic performance in Mathematics regardless whether students living with either single mother or single father.

Table 7 depicts that there is no significant differences towards students' academic performance in English regardless whether students living with either single mother or single father.

The results from Table 8 and 9 are addition information to analyse both gender of the single parent itself to see any difference in upbringing lifestyles which may affect the student's academic performance.

From Table 8, it shows there is significant differences between students' gender differences from single parenting home in Mathematics performance. This can be

Table 9: Gender differences in English achievement for students with single parents

Grades (marks)	Gender		Total
	Females	Males	
F (0-39)	7	1	8
E (40-49)	9	12	21
D (50-59)	7	10	17
C (60-69)	12	9	21
B (70-79)	11	7	18
A (80-100)	7	4	11
Total	53	43	96

Table 10: Student's gender differences from both parenting home in Mathematics performance

Grades (marks)	Gender		Total
	Females	Males	
F (0-39)	17	32	49
E (40-49)	7	10	17
D (50-59)	5	7	12
C (60-69)	3	4	7
B (70-79)	1	0	1
A (80-100)	2	2	4
Total	35	55	90

Table 11: Gender differences in English performance

Grades (marks)	Gender		Total
	Females	Males	
F (0-39)	4	5	9
E (40-49)	5	8	13
D (50-59)	5	8	13
C (60-69)	10	16	26
B (70-79)	9	16	25
A (80-100)	2	2	4
Total	35	55	90

Table 12: Gender differences in English performance

Grades (marks)	Gender		Total
	Females	Males	
F (0-39)	4	5	9
E (40-49)	5	8	13
D (50-59)	5	8	13
C (60-69)	10	16	26
B (70-79)	9	16	25
A (80-100)	2	2	4
Total	35	55	90

seen from chi-square and phi-coefficient provided. From the data result, females' students performed better on scoring D and C compared to male students.

Comparing the relationship between Table 10 and 11 (Mathematics and English subjects) with gender differences from single parenting home, the negative correlation is not that significant. From the chi-square and phi-coefficient, it shows that there is no significant difference between students' gender differences from single parenting home in English performance.

Table 9 depicts that there is no significant relationship between genders differences from both parenting home in Mathematics performance. Male

students from both parenting did poorer than female students. But then, the differences is insignificant according to the chi-square and phi-coefficient results.

No significant between the two groups based on the chi-square and phi coefficient results. Hence, there is no significant difference between students' genders differences from both parenting home in English performance.

To sum it up, Table 7-10 show the significant difference of gender differences of adolescent from single parent and both parent in academic performance in both subjects: Mathematics and English. This is to answer the second research question. Table 12 shows that students living with living single parents were just as happy as those staying with both parents.

## DISCUSSION

The study identifies the effect that single parent family and both parent family have on the academic performance of secondary school students. Based on the findings of this study, there is no significant differences between the academic performance or achievement of students from single parent family and those from both parent homes. The results obtained in the study reveals that there is no correlation or relationship between the type of home of the students and their academic performance in both subjects. These findings are in congruence with the findings of other researchers such as Ushie *et al.* (2012) and Oluwatosin (2011) who investigated that single parent family does not necessarily affect students' academic performance. However, these results disagree with Obieke (2013) which states that there is significant difference in academic performance of adolescents raised in single parent home and those raised in intact home. The explanation for no correlation in the relationship between student from single parent families or both parent families as it depends on the living environment that the students live in that brings an impact on their self-growth and academic performance. Furthermore, the finding of the study also shows that there is no significant differences between genders of adolescent from single parent and both parent in academic performance in English subject. However, there is a significant differences between genders of adolescents from single parent only in academic performance in Mathematics. In this subject, female students from single parent home were able to perform better than male students. Male student from single parent home may be more adversely affected in term of intellectual development in Mathematic. This supports the finding of

Alawode in 2000 that females performed better than males in academic performance. Uwaifo (2008) mentioned that the presence of other family members or friends might bring positive influences on the adolescents that suffer from tension resulting from variable family structure. Other reason could be that the students are considered mature enough to face any slightly changes in family structure and hence can adjust to the lifestyle in given times.

### CONCLUSION

Based on the finding from the present study, the researcher concluded that students from single parent home may not necessarily do badly in academic. When comparing both single parent and both parents' families, there is no relevant differences despite the different nature in their family type when it comes to their children's academic rate of performance. Although as earlier mentioned, there is a slight difference in terms of the academic performance when it comes to this particular subject Mathematics between students of different gender from single parents. Overall, not all students from single parents are doing badly in academic compared to students from both parents. Since, the results data showed that male students from single parent are adversely affected in their academic performance in Mathematics subject compared to female students both counselling and educational interventions can target to help these students to gain insight into the problem and its possible solution.

### LIMITATIONS

Since, there is not a lot of single fathers in Brunei, the researcher used other case studies as references to compare any data collected. The researcher's research was hindered due to time constraints as there are certain difficulties which in this case was the unavailability of the students as they were busy with exam revision or school holidays. It would be better if other researcher could replicate similar tests on the students from other different schools. Secondly, the researcher concentrated on the Brunei-Muara region only. The area of study is only to be generalised to urban schools. Rural school-children might produce a different data set. Thirdly, it can be difficult to analyse the effects of single and both parent on student's performance as some of the parents remarried. From the researcher's perspective that parents who remarried can have differing effects on the student's academic performance too. Furthermore, some schools did not accept her request to participate in her research and

that limit the author's time in collecting data and also to obtain a proper representative sample for the research. Lastly, the exact reasons for knowing the student happiness in relation to what factors, the researcher failed to provide as she did not further do interview with these students.

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