

# A study about the impact of parental separation

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This study explores the impact of parental separation/divorce can have on a child's learning and development in the primary school classroom. The broad aim of the study was to explore teachers' classroom experiences of parental separation/divorce and its effect on teaching learning and development. The researcher aimed to gather an in depth and rich account of these experiences in the primary school classroom. This current chapter critically explores the most appropriate methods and tools that were used to gather data for this study. The researcher evaluates and outlines the design method undertaken, the participants that were involved and the materials that were used to gather the information and data relating to this study.

Ethical considerations are also outlined in this chapter. 3. 2 Aims of the study Having reviewed the literature on the topic of 'the effect parental separation/divorce can have on a child's learning and development' it is evident that there is a lack of Irish research conducted on the area. A breakdown in a family structure is becoming more common with 1 in every 10 marriages in Ireland ending in separation/divorce (Rainbow, 2018) with the figure of marriage separation rising from 116, 194 in 2011 to 118, 178 in 2016 (CSO, 2016). For this reason this study aims to provide an insight into the effect this breakdown in family structure is having on a child's learning and development.

This study aims to investigate to what extent does parental/separation divorce has on a child's learning and development and if it has an effect on a child's emotions, behaviour, capacity to learn and concentration in the classroom and whetherteacher's feel they have the adequate training to aid and help children during this change in their lives. 3. 3 Research DesignIn

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deciding on a research design for the study, the researcher considered both quantitative and qualitative approaches. According to (Patton ; Cochran, 2002) qualitative research 'is characterised by its aims, which relate to understanding some aspect of social life, and its methods which (in general) generate words, rather than numbers, as data for analysis and seeks to build a holistic and narrative description of a social or cultural phenomenon (Gall, Borg & Gall, 1996).

Qualitative approaches to research involve emerging questions and procedures, typically collecting data in the participants' setting, and analysing data inductively (Creswell, 2014). However, quantitative research 'generally produces objective numerical data that are generated without influence on behalf of the researcher' (Denscombe, 2010). It emphasises precision and sets out to explain phenomena by collecting numerical data that are analysed using mathematically based methods, and seeks to minimise bias and maximise objectivity (Rubin ; Babbie, 2010). Therefore taking both methodologies into account the researcher decided on a mixed-methods methodology approach for the purpose of this research.

The qualitative data provided an insight into the various ways children may be impacted by parental separation/divorce and the teachers own experiences and views in this area. On the other hand the quantitative data provided a numerical data insight into the extent of the way a child may be impacted by parental separation/divorce and the teachers own views and opinion's on the key area it can have an impact on and how prepared they feel they are to help a child through this change in their lives. In conclusion a mixed method approach enabled the researcher to gain rich and valuable

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information for the research and facilitated the research to achieve a full picture of the impact parental separation/divorce may be having on a child's learning and development in the primary school classroom. 3. 4 Data collection In order to collect the data the researcher interviewed 3 teachers who each taught different levels in the school; junior, middle and senior ends of the school.

The interviews were face to face and semi-structured using open ended questions and all 3 interviews were voice recorded. In order for the research to be fully representative of the sample the researcher conducted the interviews on teachers who taught in 3 different schools incorporating both town and country schools. One participant was a teacher in a country school in 5th and 6th class, another participant was a teacher in a populated town school in 3rd and 4th class and the final participant was a junior and senior infant teacher in a small country school. The class sizes varied from 21 pupils to 32 pupils with each participant stating they had a variety of ethnicities and learning support needs in the class. The aim of the interviews was to focus on the participants' own experiences of the impact of parental separation in the classroom, and the researcher decided on an unstructured interview approach.

The intention of the researcher was to build a rapport with the participants create a narrative about their subjective experiences of this area. During the interviews, many of the questions were spontaneous and built on the experiences of the teachers and their own opinions surrounding the area of parental separation/divorce and its effects it can have on a child's learning and development and the questions came as part of the natural interaction

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between researcher and participants. The unstructured approach allowed the researcher to ask questions as and when they were appropriate, and to further explore particular themes of interest the participant had. In order for the researcher to encourage a degree of consistency during the interview process among the 3 participants the researcher employed the use of an aide memoire to help guide the focus of the interview without disrupting the natural course of the discussion.

The interviews were recorded and were later transcribed for analysis. The recording of the interviews enabled the researcher to interact fully with the participant through the full interview and also permitted the researcher to provide a full textual account of the entire interview and everything that was said and highlighted. In the same context the survey's created employed a non bias approach, using a broad array of questions in order to not direct or lead the participant and also to ensure that a full rich picture of the teacher's opinions and experiences are gathered. The survey was created online and included 8 questions. These 8 questions ensured to not be misleading and aimed to reflect a teacher's own views understanding and knowledge around the area of parental separation/divorce and the impact it can have on a child's learning and development. 3. 5 Data analysis Thematic analysis was used in this study to analyse and interpret the data. This section provides an overview of the thematic analytical method and outlines its procedural application to the data collected in this study. Thematic analysis is a comprehensive process where researchers are enabled to identify numerous cross references between the data and the research's evolving themes (Hayes, 1997).

An inductive approach was therefore used to identify the themes. Similarly, (Marshall and Rossman, 2006) recommended that immersion in and familiarity with the research is an essential stage. Following this recommendation, the researcher transcribed each interview, thus familiarising herself with the data. Inductive analysis involved the process of discovering patterns and codes in the data (Patton, 2002). The researcher developed patterns by keeping notes on the transcripts that related to a fascinating and relevant point and used highlighters to link these codes together. It was important for the researcher to not have pre conceptions when conducting the interviews and analysing the surveys, consequently the researcher " has to explore and understand the social world through the participants' and their own perspectives; and explanations can only be offered at the level of meaning rather than cause" (Snape and Spencer as cited in Ritchie and Lewis, 2003, p. 23).

As a result the researcher ensured that all the data collected was reliable and dependable to provide clear, concise and meaningful conclusions from the data. 3. 6 Ethical considerations Prior to undertaking this study, ethical approval was sought and granted by the Hibernia College Ethics Committee. This study was therefore conducted to the highest ethical standards in line with the Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (BERA, 2011). When considering the ethical considerations, data protection guidelines were taken into account by the researcher. The researcher ensured that all data will be stored safely and securely in encrypted data files and hard copies of transcripts will be kept in a locked filing cabinet and all other identifiable data such as the names, phone numbers, and email addresses of

participants will be stored separate from other data collected in order to ensure anonymity and confidentiality is upheld.

The participants were also informed in their consent letter that they had access to the data. Keeping in line with the guidelines the researcher ensured that each participant received a clear information letter about the research area and their role. It stated that anonymity and confidentiality will be ascertained at all times. Before each interview, the participants signed a consent form and also informed that they were permitted to end the interview process at any time they wished. The prospective participants were then given time to consider their participation, without any duress, and were later contacted by the researcher for their decision. Throughout the data collection process, all interactions were carried out in a respectful and considerate manner. Interviews were conducted in the spirit of partnership, without manipulation. The names participants were not used on interview recordings and transcripts, and any identifiable information was stored separate from this data.

Throughout the data collection and data analysis the researcher ensured complete commitment, reliability and integrity. In accordance to Hibernia College Dublin the data will be kept for three years after the completion of the dissertation. The researcher will ensure that the data collected is only used for the purpose for which it was gathered and will not be shared with a third person. 3. 7 Limitations Firstly, the lack of experience the researcher had on conducting interviews arose as a possible limitation for conducting the research and collecting the data. In order for the researcher to gain

experience and confidence in conducting interviews the researcher performed mock interviews with 3 student teachers.

The mock interviews ensured that the researcher would not highlight opinions or response through facial expression and also show no bias towards the interview questions and topic (Bryman, 2004; Cohen et al., 2005 ; Reynolds, 1979). This aided the researcher when conducting the interviews with the 3 teachers to collect the data. Secondly, the interviews were semi-structured and conducted with teachers from 3 different schools. This took up a lot of time and had additional drawback on travel costs. Finally the online surveys also had its disadvantages. As the surveys were online a lot of people (teachers) tend not to take the time to complete them in comparison to a hardcopy.

As a result it took longer than expected for the researcher to get back the quota of answers that was needed to give an accurate representation of the data. 3. 8 Conclusion In conclusion, this chapter provided an analysis on how the researcher collected the data, taking into consideration the most appropriate methodology for this study. The researcher chose to use a mixed methods approach to collect and analysis the data collect during this research as it gives a layer of depth and validity to the research. The data collection methods complimented each other and provided valuable findings which will be presented in the next chapter.

The interview process and survey analysis will allow the researcher to gain an insight into the opinions and experiences of teachers from different backgrounds, various areas and different class levels. Following the chosen

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appropriate methodology, the researcher took into consideration the participants, materials, method design, ethical considerations and data analysis. The participants in the study gave their informed consent to the research, their anonymity and confidentiality maintained, and they will have access to the data and findings if desired. The participants of the interview were made feel comfortable during the interview process using the appropriate interview skills. The next chapter will outline the main findings of the present research which utilised a mixed-methods approach.