




Marriage Dissolution: Children's Life Experiences Through Socio-Affective Dimension*

Disolución del matrimonio: experiencias de vida de niños y niñas a través de la dimensión socioafectiva

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Abstract

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This text shows how important it is to work on socio-affective dimension, keeping in mind its impact on children's life. Similarly, this research was based on the qualitative paradigm and had the ethnographic reference as a type of research; on the other hand, techniques such as the non-participant observation, the unstructured interview and the workshop were used. Among the most meaningful results, it is presented the persistent affectation that the divorce process of parents has during the socio-affective dimension development of children. Moreover, marriage dissolution is an analog issue that influence them as well, therefore respective psychological and emotional consequences are indicated.

Keywords: children, education, motivation, parents, socio-affective.

Resumen

Este texto muestra la importancia de trabajar la dimensión socioafectiva, teniendo en cuenta su impacto en la vida de los niños. De igual forma, esta investigación se basó en el paradigma cualitativo y tuvo como tipo de investigación el referente etnográfico; por otro lado, se utilizaron técnicas como la observación no participante, la entrevista no estructurada y el taller. Entre los resultados más significativos, se presenta la persistente afectación que tiene el proceso de divorcio de los padres durante el desarrollo de la dimensión socioafectiva de los hijos. Asimismo, la disolución del matrimonio es una cuestión análoga que también influye en ellos, por lo que se indican las respectivas consecuencias psicológicas y emocionales.

Palabras clave: educación, niños, motivación, padres, socioafectivo.

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Introduction

The socio-affective dimension plays a crucial role in the life of the human being, therefore when it is affected, it brings strong changes in the usual development of a person from any perspective. Bácares (2019) states that socio-affective dimension is perceived as the process in which human beings obtain optimum understanding, conditions, and faculties to identify and manage their emotions, as well as to express affection and concern for others, creating effective relationships, controlling strong situations, and taking decisions responsibly.

Hence, it is necessary when assimilating any strong process—as it is, in this case, the legal process of parents' divorce—it is pertinent to ask for external help to make it more bearable for those people who are involved, and even more if there are children as well. Bearing in mind that family is, without a doubt, where the individual establishes the foundations as a sociable being but facing an event that implies such a drastic change, it ends up having repercussions on sons or daughters, whose parents are divorced or are in this process. In accordance with Casallas (2023), Parents are always important at school, because they are the main engine of their children's education, and they must have a good and strategic learning implications. Regardless the educational level—from preschool to higher education—when a situation arises with a student, it is essential that the institution tries to approach parents, although teachers can and should positively influence students, there are problems that have their origin at home, and it is necessary to know them from the root in order to be solved.

This article refers to the relationship between divorce and the development of socio-affective dimension; also, how these two categories are directly linked to a legal process of family breakup, bringing with it countless changes in people's lives who undergo the process. Vélez *et al.*, (2023) declare that socio-affective dimension is typical of the activities inside the classroom, and outside it, such as recess or snack. It must be possible in all preschool activities, however, there are times when it must be done intentionally.

To begin with, it is necessary to define several concepts that will be recurrent throughout this text; correspondingly, the term 'socio-affective dimension' will be defined, as well as what it entails in the child's life, all of this in order to understand and give meaning to emotional and personal development.

Theoretical Framework

It is imperative to be clear about a series of concepts that have to do with the core of this paper. Hence, this theoretical discussion is started by defining what is understood when referring about the development of 'socio-affective dimension', since it will be possible to comprehend what this conception encompasses (Figure 1).

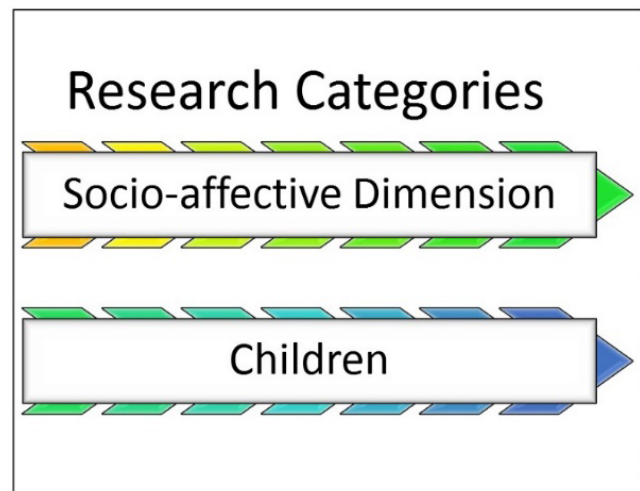


Figure 1. Categorical concepts that guided the research process

Source: personal design.

When it comes to socio-affective dimension aspects, a reference is made to all those processes or gradual changes that occur in people's personality, in emotions and in social areas of everyone. Consequently, in words of Castañeda *et al.*, (2017) "The socio-affective dimension is really important for the development of children from an early age, that is why this research wanted to work on this dimension so that students have a favorable development and training within their academic process" (p. 26). The socio-affective dimension cannot be understood detached from the social one, that is why it has

been called “Socio-affective”, specially to emphasize the fact that social interaction determines the child’s psychic life, taking into account that in the development of socio-affective dimension the best selected variables are: family communication, the help given to children in their⁴ emotional development and children’s expectations.

On the other hand, González *et al.*, (2020) mention that “the socio-affective dimension is evident in the daily life of each child, who daily recognize and express their emotions, strengthening their interpersonal relationships and creating affective ties with the people around them” (p. 7). It is known that children plays a fundamental role in their own autonomy development to consolidate relationships that they establish with their peers, parents, siblings, teachers and adults; therefore, they can create their personal way of living, feeling and expressing emotions and feelings regarding the world around them: “Harmonious development of the socio-affective dimension is a primary goal in the pre-school age and has important consequences from the educational point of view (Silva and Valbusa, 2017, p. 37).

It is worth to mention that three key aspects can be highlighted regarding the socio-affective dimension of boys and girls, such as the attachment figure, the school, and the environment. It is essential to have the family as the first entity that forms behavior, since this dimension enables the child to participate in many *individualities* with their own expressions of their personal development in different areas. Furthermore, in training processes of the school foundations are required, which can only be built from the first link of acceptance and compliance in the norm with a significance towards oneself and towards others.

Thus, for Arrubla *et al.*, (2016) socio-affective dimension is strongly related to corporal and cognitive dimensions. Nevertheless, for working at school it is necessary to indicate that in this process the family involvement is remarkable, taking into consideration that the social context is also responsible for an adequate training in self-esteem, autonomy,

and respectful relationships towards others, which is basically the dimension development ideal.

On the other hand, it is demonstrated that parental divorce has an imminent impact on socio-affective dimension, insomuch as the way these adults interact with their children are reflected in their emotional well-being: “Parental divorce is a major life event for the parents and children concerned and might result in traumatic stress. Consequently, it has become a developmental challenge for many children to cope with the divorce of their parents” (Schaan *et al.*, 2019, p. 91). As a consequence, the divorce process can be a tough experience and its result could show children’s anxiety, sadness and emotional distress. Additionally, the way children interact may change, thus they might lose contact with usual friends and also with family members who were associated to their former spouse.

It is undeniable that parental divorce has a negative impact on children; through their socio-affective development it is likely they have negative feelings toward life, so academic problems performance and low self-esteem tend to be present in daily life. In words of Caksen (2021): “age-appropriate explanation and counseling for the child and advice and guidance for the parents, as well as recommendation of reading material, may help reduce the potential negative effects of divorce” (p. 2). It’s necessary to highlight that the impact of parental divorce can vary depending on the individual and the circumstances surrounding marriage dissolution itself.

To think about children and their education is similar to simultaneously ponder about both adults and society in general, in a context that promotes well-being and the possibility of achieving human development. Thereby, it is required to teach children from the beginning of their lives to fully feel an environment of love, trust, respect and socialization, so that the normal development of their social skills is not going to be affected.

Indeed, considering what has been stated about the development of socio-affective dimension, it is possible to broaden the concept of the child’s life. In words of Iwelumor *et al.*, (2020): “Children are perceived to be existentially important because they give life meaning, make life stable, improve overall life satisfaction, and are regarded as the best things

4 In this paper the subject pronoun “they”, object pronoun “them”, and possessive adjective “their”, are going to be used to avoid a sexist speech.

one can have in life.” (p. 306). Similarly, Norqobi-lova and To'Rayeva (2022) declare that:

Children are distinguished by faster transmission of nerve information; their intracerebral system, which has a large number of connections, is more branched. Psychophysiological studies have shown that children have increased biochemical and electrical activity of the brain, early speech and excellent memory based on abstract thinking. (p. 57)

Although in this article it is evident that family, as well as school and society, plays a fundamental role in the development of boys' and girls' socio-affective dimension, it is also important to specify that children strengthen their own socio-affective development through their attitude towards autonomy and personality in order to work on the environment that surrounds them.

To sum up, this section will be closed by establishing that the house (the domestic family) constitutes the center of the child's life. This situation has existed at all times, and even more in the past than at present, in which the family tends to loosen its ties, “but apart from this, it is still been a remarkable factor during children development lifetime (Cardona, *et al.*, 2019). Consequently, as mentioned above, the socio-affective dimension cannot be understood apart from the social one; furthermore, this is about the way in which children will communicate and express themselves for the rest of their live with their peers. School and Family are a fundamental pillar that affects infants' life:

Parent-teacher relations also depend on the position of the society where the school and family are located and the impacts of the social context of their development. Many pedagogues, psychologists, sociologists who have taken interdisciplinary studies, especially with the problem of family-school cooperation, have sought to find the means by which the goal will be achieved. (Zymleraj, 2018, p. 263)

The development of socio-affective dimension becomes the most important support for the ordinary children's growth, since it is from this labor that the rest of the competences can be strengthened.

Therefore, the family is the first entity to intensify such a development.

Research Methodology

This research is guided by the qualitative paradigm. Hence, according to Valencia *et al.*, (2020), the qualitative paradigm refers to an understandable and descriptive research procedure, therefore feelings and testimonies are taken into consideration. With a methodological strategy from ethnography, it is a study focused on the human's actions meanings and social life: “All ethnographic studies are based on social relationships, a learning researcher, and first-hand natural observations over long periods of time” (Yanik, 2017, p. 116). This research is inclined in a broad sense, then sociocultural studies can be conceived, specifically those that recognize culture as a constituent dimension of social order. The culturalist perspective is based on an interpretative vision with a methodological interest that lies in revealing these realities perceived by actors involved in the action.

The population was set from boys and girls between 8 and 10 years old, belonging to the third and fourth grades of elementary school. For a sample of 16 boys and girls who are in third and fourth grade of elementary school, whose socioeconomic strata range are between 1, 2 and 3, with characteristics of divorced parents. In addition, 2 teachers from the educational institution participated, as well as 16 parents of the chosen children. All in all, there are 34 participants (Table 1).

The techniques that are presented below were used during the research study: Workshop (applied to parents, during a school for parents, held at the Santa Elena Rural Educational Institution). Non-Participant Observation (it is provided in order to avoid influencing the participants' behavior). The Unstructured Interview is applied to boys and girls, plus 2 in-service teachers from third and fourth grade from the Educational Institution (Unstructured Interview is intended to seek the responses naturalness).

The process of analysis and triangulation of the information collected during the application of these techniques was as follows: Field Journal for the information collected from the Unstructured

Table 1. Units of analysis contextualization

Educational Institution	Grade	Parents	Teachers	Students	
Santa Elena Rural Educational Institution	Third and fourth grade	16	2	Girls 9	Boys 7
Total of Participants				34	

Source: personal design. Participants' selection from the population.

Interviews applied to the children and teachers, a format with previously established parameters for the Non-Participant Observation and Questionnaires for the Workshop with parents. After that, the information was systematized through a categorical matrix where the most relevant information from each of these categories worked was considered (divorce and socio-affective dimension).

Results and Discussion

In this section, only and exclusively, the results obtained in the study are exposed. The data collected are the product of qualitative techniques applications, carried out on children with characteristics of divorced parents, to their parents and teachers as well.

This item begins giving an explanation about the application of the Unstructured Interview, and with the Workshop accomplished with the parents of the children who were interviewed, where the categories that concern the development of the socio-affective dimension based on different aspects of parental divorce were selected. Similarly, a father who went through the divorce process stated the following to the question: "do you know what your son felt or feels about the divorce?": "At first Camila was very rude, rebellious and disobedient... she said that she no longer wanted to go to school and that she wanted to go living with her mother... but I told her to get used to the fact that she was no longer there..." (Parent 3, personal communication, March 23rd, 2020). It can be seen that for this girl the divorce process of her parents affected her life emotionally, to the point of refusing to go to school due to fear of rejection by her classmates.

According to what was mentioned above, in a study regarding the impact of parents' separation on

their children, the following was found, as a trending symptom of the states that children experience after a separation between father and mother:

Sadness is considered to be one of the core symptoms of depression by most authors. Its clinical importance for the depressive syndrome has been attested to by various studies. Among the arguments for its clinical value is the fact that sadness is present in an increasing number of patients when depression grows in severity. (Mouchet & Baylé, 2022, p. 322)

In accordance with the categories initially listed (development of socio-affective dimension and parental divorce), the study previously presented shows similarities in its results. Therefore, referring to the units of analysis, the emptiness feeling because of parents' separation affects children in their growth and development throughout different spheres of life; and with all this, manifestations of irritability, anxiety and isolation show up. Moreover, some children express feelings of guilt, aggressiveness, instability and sometimes a deep shyness, which makes difficult an optimum socialization to take place.

The relevance of strengthening socio-affective dimension in boys and girls is to conceptualize children as affective beings, because they are involved with capacities of exploration and socialization. Childhood is a significant stage of learning where minors' environment should provide itself wide opportunities that promote the development of specific behaviors and values related to the future life of infants, thus obtaining better results as people.

On the other hand, from the interviews it was found what a third-grade student expressed. It should be noted that this testimony is brought

up from a girl who —after the divorce process— received psychological help:

Yes! At first, I was angry with my mom more than anything, because we didn't want her to go away and leave us, and when she left, we didn't want to see her because she left us and my dad, but it's normal now. (Student 4, personal communication, March 21st, 2020)

As a consequence, regarding the importance of socio-affective dimension, it can be referred that whether a good divorce process is not carried out between both parents, this dimension will be completely affected as long as psychological support is not provided. For instance, it will be a calmer way for children to understand what is happening and thus naturally assimilate the trance they are going through, taking into account that this event generates a breakdown in their family nucleus, which will imply many changes in their emotional life mainly as well as in their development of social skills. Similarly, it is presented a study that sought to explore the influence of affective dimensions while teaching the achievement of significant learning in students of Educational Sciences. Among its results, it was exhibited the following:

The consideration of this topic is relevant due to poorly developed skills of self-control of students and insufficient attention to modern teaching materials. Since learning is a social process of imitation and identification, starting in the affective sphere, in the learning process of self-control, affective learning strategies used by students can provide invaluable assistance. (Серебрянцева, 2020, p. 59)

The aforementioned way of teaching considers the extent to which it is possible establishing that close bond between teachers and students and the other way round, where schoolchildren will build emotional coping mechanisms and resilience. Therefore, the importance of knowing the attitudes of children regarding the feelings and emotions that they express from their experiences, bearing in mind that socio-affective dimension plays a

fundamental role in human beings' life, ergo it cannot be detached from relationships with peers.

In the research that served as a basis to write this article —through a non-participant observation— it was found that most of the children with all characteristics already mentioned along this text are learners with very good academic performance, but they find it difficult to interact with people in their school environment. Thus, it is observed once again how the separation of the parents affects the children, causing anxiety when changes are present in their existence, it is the anguish of losing the relationship and affective communication with both parents and even with the rest of the people around them.

Furthermore, it is transcendental to maintain relationships with both parental figures as a factor of emotional stabilization, so it is necessary for ex-partners to be able to cooperate in child-rearing practices, in order to be a support in the legal separation process without becoming a major nightmare for children.

When attention and children's quality daily treatment decrease —due to factors such as separation— it could be reflected in multiple facets. One of these is the educational-school one:

The results of testing effect differences on academic and subjective wellbeing between divorced single-father families, stepparent families, and conflict-ridden intact families. It shows that the self-evaluated academic performance of children from divorced single-father families was lower than that of conflict-ridden intact families, and caregiver-evaluated academic performance of children from stepparent families was lower than that of conflict-ridden intact families. (Zhang, 2020, p. 17)

Based on the results of this study, the category 'development of socio-affective dimension' indicates that the children's emotional developmental stage determines their ability to generate coherent and constructive meanings; likewise, to make sense of emotional events, and that is going to have deep implications for their emotional well-being. Generally, all stress that parents carry during the separation process —which is sometimes processed on

bad terms by one of the two— makes them forget or neglect the moment of crisis that children usually go through. Hence, they leave aside many issues then children do not know what stance to assume, therefore they experience emotional confusion, since many times they do not even know why the divorce is taking place. When they were asked: “how do you feel about the changes that occurred during the separation of your parents?” One of the students expressed the following:

I am already very calm with my parents' separation and my little brothers are very rebellious, but that is not because they are separated. We never moved home and my parents never stopped giving us everything, but it's better this way because we go out more and spend more time together and mom doesn't cry for dad anymore. (Student 12, personal communication, March 21st, 2020)

Family is considered the basic primary group, in which individuals' personal development occurs and the most intimate and close degree of relationships between its members (parents and children). These values are fundamental in order to correctly live in society. Thus, as mentioned above, one of the biggest and most painful crises that people go through —especially children during their parents' separation— often generates instability; also, changes in feelings as well as behaviors, affecting different fields where they operate.

Having as a reference what was previously mentioned, it is necessary to strengthen the school as an institution to provide accompaniment to children during different moments that the issue of parents' separation brings. Hence, in an inquiry about socio-affective development in the school environment —through cooperative physical challenges in children of fifth grade of elementary school— it was found this: “Teachers have essential roles in creating effective communication in the class. They must have influential factors such as personality, material acquisition, classroom management, speaking ability, classroom circumstance conditioning, having individuality principle, and open-minded” (Darmuki *et al.*, 2017, p. 45). One of the most important

aspects in the development of socio-affective dimension is the accompaniment that is given to children at home, school and society itself:

The formation of a family begins with social thoughts referring that the family is the first unit and the first institution in society where the relationships contained in it are mostly direct relationships. That's where individuals develop early stages of the socialization process, and through individual interaction acquire their knowledge, skills, interests, values, emotions and attitudes in life. (Roostin, 2018, p. 2)

Although it is clear that the family is the first entity that prepares children for a good development of the socio-affective dimension, school and society also have a great responsibility, insomuch as it is based on social skills and the relationship that infants have with peers to express feelings and emotions; moreover, it is necessary for them to get ready for being trained in values and thus understand all differences that there are between one individual and another. Accordingly, they acquire the ability to relate and solve problems throughout their life.

In addition, when it comes to socio-affective aspects, references are made to all those processes or gradual changes that occur in human's personality, in their emotions and in social areas. Human beings are, above all, social people who survive in a world where they cohabit. This world should be perfect for children to express themselves, communicate, feel and think.

For these reasons, all training and education children commonly receive during their first years of life by all adults, their peers and their context are considered of great importance, inasmuch as these are the beginning for the development of each one in different aspects of their life.

Conclusions

Divorce impacts childhood, but when there is responsible accompaniment, it is a trance that children overcome over time without impeding their socio-affective development, allowing them to establish social skills like any other learner, because separation does not only affect their world at home,

but it often represents changes in housing, friends, schools and colleagues, which makes it more difficult to assimilate the process.

In this research, the development of these participants' socio-affective dimension, in its majority, is affected due to the divorce processes poorly carried out by their parents, which implies that this could be the main cause for children to suffer great emotional changes, specially by not receiving external help to face this situation more easily.

Along this inquiry, parents show that they do not deal with the issue of divorce with their children. This generates uncertainties, insecurity, mistrust, fears and feelings of guilt in minors, since it makes them think that they are the reason why the separation took place. Therefore, it is difficult for them to express their feelings and emotions to other people in their environment.

It can be noticed that these parents deny their children the possibility of being part of the process in a calm and bearable way, and sometimes they put infants in a stressful situation, in which they do not know what stance to take regarding the figure with whom they will not live. As a consequence, the divorce matter must be a process accomplished on good terms, so children are not in a situation of anguish, taking into account that for them it already implies a great emotional burden and perhaps they will not know how to handle it.

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