



Exploration of Self-Concept and Academic Achievement of Students After the Experience of Broken Home Families

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Abstract

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The rising divorce rate in Indonesia poses a significant challenge for students from broken homes, often negatively impacting their self-concept and academic achievement. Although some literature generalizes this impact as always negative, preliminary observations show that some individuals are able to excel despite these challenges. This study aims to explore in depth how students from broken homes perceive themselves and how this affects their academic achievement. This qualitative study uses a case study approach with purposive sampling techniques to select three main informants, and data is collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews and non-participatory observation. The results show significant variations in the formation of self-concept; individuals with a positive self-concept see bitter experiences as motivation to achieve, while those with a negative self-concept tend to lose motivation. Thus, how individuals interpret their experiences is a key factor that determines resilience and academic success. This study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of psychological resilience in dealing with family trauma.

INTRODUCTION

The family is a primary pillar in the formation of an individual's character, self-concept, and academic success. A whole, loving, and emotionally stable family environment is a crucial foundation for a child's psychological and social development (Hasiana & Aisyah, 2025; Wang, 2023). However, modern social reality shows a significant increase in divorce cases, leading to the phenomenon of "broken homes." Data

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from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) in 2023 recorded more than 500,000 divorce cases annually in Indonesia (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2023), meaning thousands of children, including university students, have to face the dynamics of a no longer harmonious family life. This situation often leaves deep emotional scars and has long-term effects on a child's self-concept and academic achievement. Students from broken homes face complex challenges, such as an identity crisis, decreased motivation to learn, and difficulties in interpersonal relationships (Dhuha & Maybe, 2025; Humairah & Komalasari, 2024; Mabuza, 2025). This unstable psychosocial condition can significantly affect their academic performance, with the potential to even cause them to drop out of their studies. This crisis is highly relevant given that a positive self-concept plays a crucial role in a student's ability to cope with academic pressure (Setiawan & Sa'idah, 2024). Conversely, a negative self-concept makes them more vulnerable to stress and loss of motivation. Therefore, it is important to understand how students define themselves after the experience of a broken home and how this condition affects their academic achievement.

Studies on the impact of broken homes on individuals have been a focus of various disciplines. A study by Syamsidar et al. (2025) found that most children from broken homes experience various negative psychological impacts, such as deep loneliness, low self-esteem, excessive anxiety, a tendency toward aggressive behavior, and social withdrawal. Then there is a study by Sarnoto et al. (2024) regarding the impact of broken homes on the focus and academic achievement of adolescents. Akinde & Akinleke (2024) researched how broken households can affect the academic performance of undergraduate students in Nigeria. Haq & Khan (2024) found that broken home conditions contributed to poor student achievement in most cases. However, it was also noted that not all children from broken homes have poor academic performance. Abrantes & Casinillo (2020) analyzed how the problems faced by high school students from broken homes affect academic achievement.

Although many studies have been conducted on the impact of broken homes—ranging from the research of Syamsidar et al. (2025), which highlights psychological impacts like loneliness and anxiety, to Sarnoto et al. (2024) and Akinde & Akinleke (2024), which link it to a decline in academic achievement—the existing literature tends to generalize this impact as always being negative. The dominant narrative is that children from broken homes are vulnerable to academic and psychological problems.

This paradigm, however, ignores a more nuanced reality. As acknowledged by Haq & Khan (2024), not all individuals from broken homes have poor academic performance. In fact, initial observations in this study found contradictory empirical evidence: some students from broken homes are not only able to maintain, but even show a positive self-concept and exceptional academic achievement. They are active in various campus activities and show high resilience. This is the research gap that this study aims to bridge. Instead of just focusing on what's wrong, this research has novelty by exploring in depth how some individuals are able to thrive amidst these challenges. With a qualitative approach, this research will not only examine the negative impacts but also delve into the subjective experiences, narratives, and adaptive strategies that enable them

to achieve success. This provides a more complete perspective on psychological resilience in the face of family trauma and, ultimately, offers practical guidance for a more effective and inclusive educational support system.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach, which aims to deeply understand the phenomenon of self-concept and academic achievement in students after experiencing a broken home. This approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to holistically explore the subjective experiences of individuals, including psychological and social dynamics that cannot be measured by a quantitative approach alone (Hardani et al., 2020). The subjects in this study are students from broken homes, which are families that experienced parental separation or divorce while the subjects were still in school. Three main informants were selected using purposive sampling, a technique for deliberately choosing subjects based on specific criteria. These criteria are: (1) active undergraduate students at a state or private university in West Sumatra, (2) their parents' divorce occurred at least one year before the study was conducted, and (3) they are willing to be informants and are open about sharing personal experiences related to their family, self-concept, and academic process. The research was conducted in and around Solok City, with interview locations mutually agreed upon by the researcher and informants for comfort and emotional security.

In this study, data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews from March to April 2025. The interview guide was developed based on Carl Rogers' theory of self-concept and indicators of academic achievement, with interviews lasting between 60 and 90 minutes. In addition, the researcher also conducted non-participatory observation to enrich the understanding of verbal data. To ensure validity, this study used source triangulation (comparing the data of the main informants with information from additional informants) and member checking (asking informants to review the researcher's interpretation). The collected data were then analyzed with thematic analysis, where information was grouped into major themes to be presented in a descriptive narrative format. Although the limited number of informants is a limitation that means the findings cannot be generalized, this approach provides a deep and contextual understanding of the subjects' experiences.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Self-Concept of Students After Experiencing a Broken Home

There are significant differences among the informants in how they each rebuilt their self-concept after the experience of parental separation. Student T showed a high ability to adapt and develop a positive self-concept, while student F showed a decrease in self-esteem and emotional instability that affected his academic performance. The research findings show a significant difference in the formation of students' self-concept after experiencing a broken home. Informant T, a law student, showed a positive self-concept with a strong perception of her ability to manage her life and studies

independently. She interpreted her parents' separation as a motivation to become more mature and responsible. This is evident in her statement:

"At first it was really hard, man. But I thought, how long am I going to be sad? In the end, I wanted to prove that I can succeed even though my family is not whole. My parents may be separated, but that doesn't define who I am. I have to define my own life. I want to be a successful person, not out of revenge, but for myself."

Conversely, participant F, a management student, was trapped in a negative self-concept due to difficulty processing the divorce experience. He felt worthless and constantly compared himself to others. The gap between his perceived "failed" actual self and his "perfect" ideal self created great emotional pressure. The lack of emotional support from his parents after the divorce, coupled with his tendency to compare himself, made F feel isolated and doubt his abilities. This created a narrative of failure that he internalized, which impacted his overall view of himself. He said:

"I often feel that life is unfair. Why me? I often compare myself to other friends. Others have a complete family; I have to face everything alone. In the end, I became lazy to go to college. What's the point, my parents aren't even proud of me."

Meanwhile, participant S, an engineering student, showed a self-concept that was in the process of recovery. He acknowledged the emotional pain and devastation he experienced but had a strong drive to rise. Although he still struggled with feelings of instability, he consciously tried to rebuild his self-image through academic and social activities. S's story highlights that resilience is a process. Although he did not recover as quickly as T, he showed a reflective ability and a desire to change his destiny, which is a crucial first step toward forming a healthier self-concept. He said:

"At first I was really devastated, I lost my way. I felt like I had no one to lean on anymore. But then I thought, I can't keep going on like this. I have to get up for myself."

Based on these findings, a fundamental difference is seen in Student T and Student F, who have very different perspectives on their family situations. Student T, a law student, showed strong self-acceptance and a realistic self-image. Instead of being devastated by her parents' separation, she used the experience as motivation to excel and become a more mature person. This attitude is in line with Carl Rogers' theory of positive self-concept, where acceptance of past experiences is a key foundation (Hidayat & Santosa, 2024; Maurer et al., 2023). The positive support from her mother and lecturers also played a big role in strengthening her beliefs, making her feel worthy, resilient, and confident that her life's success was in her own hands.

In contrast, Student F, a management student, was trapped in a negative self-concept. He felt worthless and constantly compared his life to that of friends who had complete families. The lack of emotional support from his parents worsened his feelings,

causing him to doubt his own abilities and find it difficult to set academic goals. The gap between the "perfect" expectation and the "failed" reality created great emotional pressure, which ultimately caused him to lose the motivation to excel. This condition shows how important social support and the internalization of experience are in forming self-efficacy. Between these two cases, there is Student S from the engineering department who is in the recovery stage. Although his parents' separation was painful, he showed a strong desire to get up and not continue to be devastated. His story highlights that rebuilding one's self-concept is a process that takes time, but the awareness and motivation to change are crucial first steps.

In general, these findings conclude that the experience of a broken home does not always have a negative impact. In addition, it is not the only determinant of self-concept, but how an individual interprets and responds to the experience is very decisive. The impact greatly depends on how the individual rebuilds their self-concept. Positive support from the environment and the individual's ability to interpret a bitter experience as motivation to achieve are key to forming a healthy and resilient self-concept (Gómez & Rivas, 2022; Yeung et al., 2014).

These findings are in line with the results of studies by Aturohma et al. (2025), Dixson et al. (2025), and Sainz et al. (2025), which state that students with positive self-concepts tend to have high achievement motivation, even if they come from broken families. Conversely, individuals with a negative self-concept tend to have psychological barriers to achieving academic success, including low self-control, difficulty with time management, and minimal involvement in supportive academic activities. In addition, these findings are in line with Carl Rogers' theory (1961) (in Vashetina, 2018) which states that self-concept is formed through the interaction between actual experience and self-image. When a person accepts and understands themselves positively, a healthy self-concept will be formed, even when facing stressful conditions (Lumbantobing, 2020; Martín-Talavera et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2023). However, without adequate environmental support, a traumatic experience such as parental divorce can lead to the formation of a negative self-concept.

Academic Achievement of Students from Broken Homes

Participation in academic activities is also an important indicator in distinguishing the two student profiles. Student T was actively involved in organizations, seminars, and self-development activities, which enriched her academic experience and strengthened her self-confidence. Student F tended to withdraw from the campus environment, felt awkward in social situations, and showed resistance to academic challenges. This reinforces the finding that self-concept influences student engagement in academic dynamics. In the academic aspect, there is a close correlation between self-concept and learning performance. Informant T showed high academic achievement, with a cumulative grade point average (GPA) above 3.00, active participation in debate competitions, and becoming a campus organization leader. When asked about her motivation, she answered:

"Achievement, for me, is a form of 'therapy' as well as positive 'revenge.' I want people to see me as a high-achieving student, not as a child who is a victim of divorce. I believe that if I can succeed on campus, I can also succeed in the future."

This shows that a positive self-concept fosters a passion for learning and confidence to compete in an academic environment. On the other hand, F experienced a significant decline in academic achievement. His negative self-concept damaged his motivation to learn, making him unsure of his abilities. His feeling of isolation and the belief that his parents were not proud of him hindered him emotionally. The feeling of isolation he experienced also made him withdraw from the campus social environment, which further worsened his achievements. This shows how emotional limitations can lead to academic limitations. He said:

"I have no motivation to achieve. I often ask, 'What's the point of me achieving and being proud, my parents aren't even proud of me.' Those kinds of thoughts keep coming up. In the end, I lost interest in being active on campus. I felt like a failure, and I felt like no one cared."

Meanwhile, S showed fluctuating achievement, rising and falling according to his emotional condition. Although he had a drive to succeed, he was still often hampered by feelings of anxiety and sadness. He realized that better emotional management was needed to maintain his academic stability. He said:

"When I feel motivated, I can study late into the night and all my assignments get done. But when I feel sad or anxious, I can't touch a book at all. My GPA goes up and down. I realize I have to be more in control of myself."

S's story highlights that although he has a growth mindset, the process is not linear and requires consistent time and support. Based on these findings, it can be seen that self-concept and emotional condition have a great influence on the academic achievement of students from broken homes. Student T, who has a positive self-concept, sees her achievements as a way to prove herself and overcome family problems. This makes her motivated, active on campus, and achieve high results. In contrast, Student F has a negative self-concept. He feels that no one cares, including his parents, so he loses the passion to achieve. This feeling makes him withdraw from his social and academic environment, which leads to a significant decline in achievement. Meanwhile, Student S shows a unique case. He has the will to progress, but his achievements often fluctuate depending on his emotional condition. When he feels happy, he can focus on studying. However, when he is sad or anxious, he loses motivation, which shows that emotional control is very important for maintaining academic stability.

These findings strengthen McClelland's (1961) theory (in Suhartini & Rivaldo, 2022) about achievement motivation, which states that individuals with high achievement motivation have a strong drive to succeed and compete healthily (Alkhawaldeh & Alla, 2025; Rodjanatham & Badir, 2025). However, this motivation is greatly influenced by

previous emotional experiences. Students with a negative self-concept tend to view academic challenges as a threat, not an opportunity, so their achievement declines (Gao & Ali, 2024; Jansen et al., 2022; Sainz et al., 2025). These findings strengthen Carl Rogers' theory of self-concept, which states that personal experiences that are processed positively can form a healthy self-concept, which in turn affects an individual's behavior and achievements (Arwansyah & Suharyanto, 2025; Nabila & Yandri, 2024; Nguyen et al., 2025). Student T is an example of how a person can self-actualize even if they come from a broken home. Meanwhile, Student F shows how family experiences that are not processed healthily actually become a barrier to self-development and academic achievement.

Overall, the results of this study indicate that a broken home is not an absolute determinant of a person's success or failure. What distinguishes them is how individuals interpret and respond to the experience. Students with a positive self-concept tend to be more resilient, confident, and able to achieve, while those with a negative self-concept are more vulnerable to emotional pressure and have difficulty in academic achievement.

CONCLUSION

The experience of students from broken homes does not absolutely determine their success or failure in terms of self-concept and academic achievement. On the contrary, the most significant determining factor is how the individual interprets and responds to the experience. Students with a positive self-concept, such as Student T, are able to turn a bitter experience into motivation to achieve, showing high resilience and a strong belief that their lives are determined by their own efforts. Conversely, students with a negative self-concept, such as Student F, tend to feel worthless, lose motivation, and withdraw from their social and academic environments. The case of Student S shows that the recovery process is not an easy journey and takes time, but the will to rise up is the main key.

This self-concept condition is directly correlated with academic achievement. Students with a positive self-concept see academic challenges as an opportunity to prove themselves, which encourages them to achieve high results. This is in line with the theory of achievement motivation which states that the drive to succeed is greatly influenced by previous emotional experiences. Conversely, students with a negative self-concept tend to experience a decline in achievement due to a loss of interest and self-confidence. These findings confirm that emotional support and the ability to manage emotions are crucial in maintaining academic stability. Thus, this article concludes that a broken home is not a verdict, but rather a variable that triggers different psychological responses, where resilience and a positive interpretation of the experience are the main keys to achieving success.

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