

# Comparative Analysis of the Learning Behavior of Children in Institutionalized and Biological Homes in Lagos

Oladele Mutalib ADEYEMI Ph.D

Department of Educational Foundation and Counselling Psychology Early Childhood Education unit, Lagos State University Ojo, Lagos, Nigeria.

deletalib@gmail.com

**Abstract:** *The study had two specific objectives: to examine how health issues affected children's learning behaviour in institutionalised and biological homes and to investigate how the environment contributed to children's learning behaviour in both institutionalised and biological homes in Lagos, Nigeria. The study found that there was awareness regarding the presence of institutionalised homes in Lagos state and that children are now being seen and heard, with the potential to perform better in an enabling environment. The study employed a survey research design using a blended approach of quantitative. The results showed a significant difference in children's learning behaviour in institutionalised and biological homes, with children from biological homes performing better. The hypothesis which stated that there would be no significant difference in learning behaviour between institutionalised and biological homes was rejected. It was concluded that children in institutionalised homes had parents who were absent, deceased, or unable to care for them but were cooperative and supportive of each other and had access to adequate medical care. The study recommended that the government needs to provide financial and material support for institutionalised homes, while corporations and individuals should also contribute to society. Parents should also receive counselling to prevent family separation and children's partial or total abandonment in society.*

**Keywords:** Institutionalised Homes, Learning Behaviour, Biological Children, Caregivers

## Introduction

Behaviour can be synonymous with conduct, approach, manner, and attitude. However, psychologists view behaviour as more than just manner, conduct, attitude, or approach. To a psychologist, behaviour encompasses any activity that can be observed, recorded, and measured. This includes what living beings or organisms do, as well as what people say or write. Behaviour refers to the totality of a person's activities, encompassing everything they do or engage in. As defined by Akinade & Adedipe (2004), behaviour also includes actions that do not endanger or threaten the life and property of the person displaying them, as well as those around them. Every society, whether primitive or civilised, has acceptable ways of behaving that are referred to as societal norms. Members of a particular environment must abide by these norms at any given time and period. Our individual behaviour, whether good or bad, is judged by members of society. While behaviour can be categorised as either good or bad, it can also be described as obedient (abient) or disobedient (adient).

To illustrate, an abient behaviour is exhibited when one avoids others or tends to withdraw, keep off or move away from other people. This behaviour can often be traced back to a pupil who has been punished or flogged by a teacher. In such cases, the pupil may try to avoid that teacher and not want anything to do with them for some time. Alternatively, if a pupil receives a failed grade in a particular subject, such as the English language, they may try to avoid the subject and anything related to it. On the other hand, adient behaviour is the opposite of an abient behaviour. This means that instead of trying to avoid a person or situation, adient behaviour tends to be attracted to them. However, learning cannot be directly observed. Instead, it can only be inferred from behavioural changes, according to Neil Martin, Neil Carlson and William Buskot (2007). Nevertheless, the founding father of behaviourism, John B. Watson, argued that two categories could be observable to the eye and implicit behaviour measurable by special equipment. Furthermore, all changes in behaviour are caused by learning; it could be physical or mental conditions like fearfulness, fatigue or distraction. According to Bolarin (2019), learning occurs within the nervous system, while experience alters the structure and chemistry of the brain and may eventually affect the individual's subsequent behaviour. Learning changes how we perceive, act, think and feel. It produces changes in the nervous system by affecting the circuits responsible for perceptions (Carlson, 2005). Learning allows us to adapt to our environment and respond to changes in it, particularly in terms of one's ability to exhibit appropriate behaviour in appropriate situations.

Child abandonment occurs when a parent or guardian intentionally withholds emotional, physical, and financial support from a child without considering the child's safety and welfare. Abandonment can take on various forms, including physical abandonment, where a child is left somewhere without any intention of the parent returning, and emotional abandonment, where a child is denied emotional support, physical supervision, and other necessities of life while residing in the home. Children who live in an environment without parents or surrogate parents and whose care is provided by a few paid adult caregivers are said to be institutionalised. If up

to ten children live in such an environment, the caregivers may need to attend to the needs of 5-6 children simultaneously, creating a more professional parental relationship devoid of emotions. Orphans and abandoned children have become a global issue, and Nigeria, including Lagos, is not an exception.

The alarming increase in the number of "baby factories" and the indiscriminate dumping of innocent children on refuse sites, restrooms, and gutters have become a daily occurrence, particularly in Lagos. These issues have dominated the front pages of our daily news and demand urgent attention to create awareness and put an end to such acts. Institutionalised homes should be given more credence as a solution to this problem.

News Time Magazine recently revealed that Freedle, the CEO of a technology industry worth \$62 million, was abandoned in a refuse dump over 30 years ago. However, he was later taken in and adopted by Nathan and Belty Figgers, who lived nearby in Quincy, Florida (USA). This corroborates Abidogun's (2015) opinion that abandoned children can become important personalities who excel in their careers in the future. He believes that abandonment should not be viewed as an end but rather as a means to an end. The well-being and future of the 153 million orphans and vulnerable children around the world should be a crucial focus for policymakers and practitioners. The Millennium Development Goals and the Education for All movement recognise the importance of educating these vulnerable children. In fact, the 2011 Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS has set a goal of increasing school attendance for abandoned children as a key indicator of progress. UNICEF (2014) highlights the importance of ensuring that these children are allowed to receive an education, which can help improve their chances for a better future. It is, therefore, imperative for governments and stakeholders to prioritise the education and well-being of these vulnerable children. Institutional care refers to the situation where a child has been under the care of someone other than their biological parents or relatives for a period of 90 days or more. This is known as institutionalisation, according to Browne (2009). Osanyin (2012) views institutionalised homes as an effective way of providing care and support for vulnerable children, such as orphans, destitute and abandoned children, by meeting their immediate needs.

Non-governmental organisations throughout the country provide institutional care to children whose families are unable to provide adequate care due to poverty, illness, or the absence of immediate family members. Many of these children are semi-orphans, with only one parent still alive, making it difficult for that parent to provide sufficient care. As a result, they are placed in institutional care. According to Abidogun (2014), institutionalised homes provide care to children by individuals other than their biological parents. Despite the psychological challenges that children in institutionalised homes may face, some have become lawyers, teachers, medical doctors, and other important members of society. Abidogun suggests that abandonment should be seen as a means to an end rather than an end in itself.

Some abandoned children spend their formative years in institutional care, such as orphanages, where they may not receive the individual attention and stimulation necessary for proper development. The damaging effects of deprivation and under-stimulation on children's personalities, egos and intellectual development have been documented by Province (2009) and Lipton (2015), as cited by Abidogun (2019). The timing of abandonment or rejection is also critical, as material deprivation can have the greatest impact on infants ranging from a few days or weeks to one and a half years old. The second notable point is that therapists are familiar with the concept of "object loss," which refers to losing a relationship with another person who has abandoned them. Object loss deals with a child's psychological and physical abandonment after a certain age when they realise that they are unwanted, rejected, and discarded. The ego of the abandoned child deals with the conscious and unconscious thoughts that they were rejected because they did something wrong or interfered in affairs that were not their concern. These thoughts are rooted in their complex past, and their egos attempt to deal with both the loss and the awareness of rejection or abandonment. Children who have been abandoned exhibit abnormal health conditions when compared to children who have remained with their families within the community setting.

Hunshal and Gaonkar (2008) have reported that children under institutional care exhibit poorer health and higher levels of psychological problems when compared to those living with their families and within the wider community. These children are more likely to have emotional problems, poor social interactions and other indicators of mal-adjustments and poor well-being. This is supported by Fouclre & Delpont (2007) and Zeanah (2005), who also found that children in institutional care were emotionally withdrawn and had greater emotional problems. The type of care provided significantly influences children's growth and development.

Browne (2009) highlights that institutional care is often the only option available for parents who are unable to provide care for their children, particularly in times of economic hardship. However, institutional care needs to be overhauled in terms of its functioning and services to achieve the intended aim for which it was designed. Furthermore, the quality of care given to children in institutionalised homes ranges from being treated indiscriminately as family members to being reduced to maids or servants.

The cognitive development of institutionalised children has been under study, according to Browne (2009), for the past six decades. According to him, recent research shows an increase in cognitive development with a longer stay in the institutional home, as stated by St Petersburg USA Orphanage research team (2008). According to Belsky Van (2007), children in institutional care show delays and mal-adaptation in various domains of development, but not every child is affected in the same way and to the same degree.

Despite modern advancements, most institutions continue to create child upbringing environments that are characterised by structural neglect. However, some children remain resilient even in the most adverse settings. The shared and non-shared features of the

institutional environment, as well as specific genetic, temperamental, and physical characteristics of the individual child, can make a crucial difference in whether or not early institutional upbringing leaves irreversible scars. Therefore, it is important to study the interactions between children and their institutional environment at a micro level, taking into account individual hardiness, vulnerabilities at the genetic or temperamental level, as well as strengths and weaknesses of the specific child upbringing settings. By examining the interactions of resilient children with various facets of the institutional environment, insights can be gained into how to improve institutional life for all or most children involved.

Moving forward, the need for an institutionalised home arose due to child abandonment, usually from either of the biological parents. It may be because the mother had an unplanned pregnancy, and immediately after the child is born; the child may be abandoned. Some abandon their child in restrooms, pathways or even dustbins, which pose much danger to the unsuspecting child. According to Abidogun (2017), there are instances of child abandonment on the roadside and other untidy environments that pose a danger to the unsuspecting child. All the above and more necessitated the researcher to look at children's learning behaviour in institutionalised and biological homes in Lagos, Nigeria.

The economic power of some parents also affects the learning behaviour of children. Some parents may willingly take their children to institutionalised home may be they have a tight schedule or discover that they are too occupied or engaged, or the child may likely be stubborn and too difficult for them to train; all these necessitated the creation of an institutionalised home by government or private individuals.

The global issue of infants and toddlers being scattered around the world in various institutional homes and the problem of orphaned, abandoned, and maltreated children presents challenges for societies worldwide. While it is nearly impossible to determine the exact number of children residing in institutional homes, Browne (2009) estimates that the number ranges from 2,000,000 to more than 8,000,000. Despite working in unattractive conditions and lacking adequate materials, the caregivers at these institutional homes are resourceful and up to the task. Young children, often abandoned at birth or soon after delivery, are left by their mothers due to flimsy excuses or, in some cases, against their biological father's wishes. Historical literature describes examples of families taking in abandoned children (Abidogun, 2012).

Despite a large population of institutionalised children in Nigeria, research on the learning behaviour of these children remains limited. In Lagos, Nigeria, there are a significant number of institutionalised and biological homes for children. While the educational outcomes of children in biological homes have been explored, there is a dearth of research on the comparative analysis of children's learning behaviour in institutionalised and biological homes in Lagos, Nigeria. This study aims to address this research gap by exploring and comparing the factors contributing to children's learning behaviour in institutionalised and biological homes in Lagos, Nigeria. Additionally, the study will investigate how parental presence and the environment affect the learning behaviour of these children.

## Theoretical Review

### Social Learning Theory

The behavioural school of psychology emerged as a significant force in the 20th century, with behaviourists holding that all learning results from direct experience with the environment through the processes of association and reinforcement (Gredler, 2009). While B.F. Skinner's theory is a classic example of behavioral learning theory, Albert Bandura's social learning theory builds on many of the basic concepts of traditional learning theory. Bandura observed that direct reinforcement could not account for all types of learning, as both children and adults often learn things without direct experience but through observing others performing the action in person or on television (Ormrod, 2011). Thus, Bandura proposed that learning could also take place by simply observing the actions of others and that observational learning is used by copying the behavior of others, enabling the observation of a series of behaviors that include learning theories (Ormrod, 2011).

#### *How Does Observational Learning Happen?*

Care has to be taken that not all observed behaviour is actually learned. Several factors were at play; the role model and the learner can play a role in whether social learning is successful. The following steps are involved in modelling and observational.

**Attention** – for meaningful learning to occur, the learner must pay attention. Any distractions can lead to a loss of focus and attention, resulting in negative effects on observational learning. For instance, during an adventure or when reading an interesting novel, one tends to dedicate full attention to it, and attention becomes crucial.

**Retention**- one of the most important parts of the learning process is what we call and refer to as **retentive memory**, that is, the ability to recall past events as fast as possible, which can be affected by several factors, but the ability to recall and pull up information to use is very germane in observational learning.

**Reproduction**- this is another crucial aspect of observational learning. When attention is paid to a particular model, and the information is retained for future use, one can reproduce the behaviour observed when the time comes. The ability to do so is the hallmark of completing the charity of observational learning. With continued practice, the learned behaviour can be improved upon, and skills can be advanced.

**Motivation-** this plays a critical role in the success and usefulness of observational learning. To initiate a behavior that has been modeled, individuals must be motivated. Reinforcement and punishments are important aspects of motivation. For example, if a child is rewarded in class for coming on time or completing a class-work correctly, other classmates may be motivated to replicate the same behaviour or even perform better.

Social learning theory has numerous real-world applications. On the one hand, it can help researchers understand how aggression and violence can be transmitted through observational learning. For instance, studying media violence can provide insights into the factors that might lead children to mimic the aggressive actions they see on television and in movies. On the other hand, social learning theory can also be used to teach people positive behaviours. Researchers can utilize this theory to explore how positive role models can be used to encourage desirable behaviours and facilitate social change. By understanding the ways in which social learning can be harnessed to promote positive change, individuals and communities can work towards a better future.

### **Implications of social learning theory**

In addition to influencing other psychologists, Bandura's social learning theory has had important implications in the field of education. Today, both teachers and parents recognise how important it is to model appropriate behaviours. Other classroom strategies, such as encouraging children and building self-efficacy, are also rooted in social learning theory.

As Bandura observed, life would be incredibly difficult and even dangerous if you had to learn everything you know from personal experience. So much of your life is rooted in your social experiences, so it is no surprise that observing others plays a vital role in acquiring new knowledge and skills. By better understanding how social learning theory works, you can gain a greater appreciation for the powerful role that observation can play in shaping the things we know and the things we do.

### **Research Questions**

1. How do health issues or challenges of children in institutionalised and biological homes affect the learning behaviour of such children?
2. Does the presence or absence of biological parents affect children's learning behaviour?
3. How does the environment contribute to children's learning behaviour in institutionalised and biological homes in Lagos, Nigeria?

### **Research Hypotheses**

**H0:** There is no significant difference between parents' presence on children's learning behaviour in institutionalised and biological homes.

### **Methodology**

Descriptive survey research design was adopted to view children's learning behaviour in institutionalised and biological homes in Lagos state. The study population comprises children in institutionalised and biological homes in Lagos, Nigeria. The study adopted a multistage sampling technique; the study samples the caregivers and pupils under study. The institutionalised homes that researcher used includes Little Angel Orphanage Home, Royal Demand Orphanage Home, Peculiar Saint Orphanage Home, Divine Heritage Home, and Home of God Grace Orphanage all in Lagos. The researcher adopted non-probability sampling techniques in selecting the participants. The instrument used is questionnaire which was developed to extract information on the respondents. The questionnaire was divided into two sections (A & B). Section A consist of the demographic data of the respondents, and Section B is the questions that the researcher has for the respondents. The questionnaire was given to experts in early childhood education units for scrutiny to ensure the face and content validity of the instruments. The reliability of the instrument was established using the test-retest method to ensure the reliability of the instruments. A test-retest reliability coefficient of 0.75 was established for the scale at a 0.05 level of significance. The data collected was analysed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. The raised research questions were analysed using descriptive statistics, and the hypothesis was analysed using inferential statistics.

### **Results**

#### **Research Question 1**

#### **How do health issues or challenges of children in institutionalized and biological homes affect the learning behaviour of children?**

Health issues like Diarrhea, Malaria, Cold, Cough and Catarrh affect children's learning behaviour in institutionalised and biological homes in Lagos, Nigeria. In order to answer research question one, the data collected were summarized into descriptive statistics of frequency count and percentages. The descriptive statistics of frequency count and percentages are displayed in Tables 3a and 3b.

**Table 1a**

#### **Health challenges of children in institutionalised and biological homes**

<b>Accessibility</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Per cent</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
----------------------	------------------	-----------------	----------------------	---------------------------

Accessible	127	86.0	86.0	86.0
Not accessible	23	14.0	14.0	100.0
Total	150	100.0	100.0	

Table 1a reveals that out of the 150 caregivers in the study, 127 of which represents 86%, reported that children in institutionalized homes had access to medical care while only 20 (14%) of them could not have adequate access to health care.

**Table 1b**  
**Health challenges in institutionalised and biological homes in Lagos, Nigeria**

Frequency of accessibility	Frequency	Per cent
None	13	8.8
Once a week	17	11.6
Once in two weeks	34	23.1
Once in three weeks	35	23.8
Once in one month	24	16.3
Once in two months	17	11.6
Occasionally	10	4.8
Total	150	100.0

Table 1b shows that 35 (23.8%) of the caregivers confirmed that the children in institutionalized homes have access to medical care once in three weeks; 34 (23.1%) claimed that medical attention was given once in two weeks; 24 (16.3%) upheld that, children in the homes received medical attention once in one month and 17 (11.6%) of them respectively claimed that children in the homes were attended to medically once a week and occasionally. However, 13 (8.8%) of the caregivers in the study claimed that children in institutionalized homes did not receive medical care.

Examples of institutionalised homes that the researcher samples include Little Angel Orphanage Home, Ojo, Divine Heritage Children Centres, Peculiar Saint Orphanage, and Royal Diamond Orphanage, all in Lagos, Nigeria.

**Research Question 2**

**Does the presence or absence of biological parents affect children's learning behaviour?**

In order to answer this research question, the data collected were summarized into descriptive statistics of frequency count and percentages. The descriptive statistics of frequency count and percentages are displayed in Table 2.

**Table 2**  
**The Attitude of Family Members on the learning behaviour of children**

	Frequency	Per cent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Encouraging	113	76.4	76.4	76.4
Discouraging	37	23.6	23.6	100.0
Total	150	100.0	100.0	

In the study, out of 150 caregivers, 113, representing 76.4%, claimed that family members showed an encouraging attitude towards children's learning behaviour in institutionalized or biological homes, as depicted in Table 2. Meanwhile, only 37 (23.6%) of the caregivers claimed that their family members showed discouraging attitudes towards children's learning behaviour.

**Research Question 3**

**How does the environment contribute to children's learning behaviour in institutionalised and biological homes in Lagos, Nigeria?**

In order to answer this research question, the data collected were summarized into descriptive statistics of frequency count and percentages. The descriptive statistics of frequency count and percentages are displayed in Table 3.

**Table 3**

**Environmental Factors as it affects Children in Institutionalized Homes in Lagos State**

	Frequency	Per cent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Below average (31-50)	40	27.2	27.2	27.2
Average (51-60)	77	52.4	52.4	79.6
Above average (61-80)	33	20.4	20.4	100.0
Total	150	100.0	100.0	

Table 3 shows that the environmental factors of children in institutionalised and biological homes are rated average as rated by 77 (52.4%) caregivers in the homes. However, 40 of the caregivers representing 27.2% and 30 (20.4%) of the caregivers, rated the psychological development of children in institutionalized homes as below average and above average, respectively.

**Research Hypothesis**

**Hypothesis One**

The hypothesis that there will be no significant difference in children's learning behaviour in institutionalized and biological homes was tested using an independent t-test. The result is presented in the table below:

**Table 4: Summary table of independent t-test showing the comparison of learning behaviour of Children in Institutionalized and Biological Homes**

	Upbringing	N	Mean	Std D.	Df	t-value	Sig
<b>Learning Behaviour</b>	Institutionalized	33	28.70	2.27			
	Biological	92	39.31	3.39	124	3.26	<.05

The result in the table showed that there was a significant difference in the learning behaviour of children in institutionalized and biological homes ( $t=3.26$ ;  $df(124)$ ;  $p<.05$ ). It can be observed that children in biological homes learn better than children in institutionalized homes. The stated null hypothesis is thereby rejected.

**Discussion of Findings**

The discussions of the findings based on the research questions and the demographic data of caregivers, as shown in table 1a, it showed that out of 148 caregivers in the study, 62.8% of them represented 93 respondents were female, while 37.2% represented 55 male caregivers.

The research question that asks whether children in institutionalized homes have access to medical attention. Table 1a shows that 86% of the 147 caregivers surveyed believed that the children in these homes had access to medical care, while only 14% disagreed. The frequency of medical attention ranged from once a week to once every two months, with occasional accessibility being the least reported at 4.8%.

In terms of donations, Table 3 reveals that 58.5% of the 147 caregivers reported that institutionalized homes received donations from individuals and NGOs once every three weeks. Additionally, 25.9% reported receiving donations once every two months, while 6.1% claimed that no donations were made. Government agencies provided donations once every three weeks for 35% of respondents, and once every two months for 23.1%, while 43.5% received donations from foreign agencies once every three weeks.

All the sampled caregivers supported the use of institutionalized homes in Lagos, Nigeria, with 25% of them not even aware of the existence of such homes. 80% of the children living in institutionalized homes across Lagos also supported having more homes in the area to cater for abandoned, rejected, and deprived children. This is due to the increasing number of such children on a daily basis and the need to take care of them while alleviating their suffering and rejection by a section of society.

The hypothesis which stated that there is no significant difference between parents' presence on children's learning behaviour in institutionalised and biological homes was tested using descriptive and inferential statistics to show a significant difference in

children's learning behaviour in institutionalized and biological homes. It was further observed that children in biological homes learn better than children in institutionalised homes. So this paves the way for the stated null hypothesis to be rejected.

### Conclusion

The study found that children living in institutionalised homes had parents who were either absent, deceased, or alive but unable to care for them. Despite their circumstances, the children were cooperative and supportive of each other, often providing help when needed. In return, they also contributed to the home that had given them so much. Access to medical care was also adequate, as confirmed by 60% of the children who were interviewed individually.

However, the public perception of institutionalised homes needs to be re-evaluated through education and awareness. Many people view children in these homes as having no potential for success, but Abidogun (2019) has shown that abandonment is not the end for these children. In fact, some have gone on to become successful medical doctors, engineers, teachers, and other respected professionals.

### Recommendations

1. Government should provide support for institutionalised homes both financially and materially so as to complement the efforts of individuals and other philanthropists.
2. Co-operate bodies must live up to expectations by contributing their own quota to give back to the society that has offered them so much.
3. Religious bodies have very big roles to play in guiding against unwanted pregnancies and divorce since children will always be at the receiving end.
4. Parents need to be counselled occasionally to guard against anything that can bring about separation in the family, thereby reducing either partial or total abandonment of children in society.

### References

- Abidogun, B.G. (2017). *Fundamentals of early childhood education form the beginners*. Olu Akin publishers Limited.
- Abidogun, B.G. (2012). *Expert note on early childhood care and education unpublished master thesis*. Olu Akin publishers Limited.
- Akinade, A. A. (2004). Research methods: A pragmatic Approach for social science, *Behavioural Sciences and Education*.
- Bolarin T. A. (2022). Psychology of learning. Olu-Akin publishers.
- Carlson, N.R. (2005). *Foundations of Physiological Psychology* (6<sup>th</sup> ed.). Library of congress cataloguing –in-Publication Data.
- Fouche, C. & Delport, C. (2002). *Introduction to the research process*. In: DE VOS, A. (ed) Research at grass roots: for the social sciences and human service professions. Van Schaik Publishers.
- Ormrod, I.E. (2011). Practical research: planning and design. Memorial Prentice Hall.
- Osanyin, F. (2002). Early Childhood Education in Nigeria. Concept publications limits.
- UNICEF (2014). Early childhood care for survival limits and development: *A Comprehensive Approach to programming for young children*. A paper presented at a meeting in Early childhood care and education, Lagos.