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INFLUENCE OF PARENTAL MARITAL STATUS ON LEARNER'S ACADEMIC OUTCOMES IN PUBLIC JUNIOR SCHOOLS IN KISUMU CENTRAL SUB-COUNTY, KENYA

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the influence of parental marital status on learners' academic outcomes in public junior schools in Kisumu Central Sub-County, Kenya. The study was anchored on Social Capital Theory and adopted a convergent mixed-methods research design. The target population comprised 3,147 Grade 9 learners, 184 Grade 9 teachers, 29 heads of institutions, and 29 Parents' Association representatives. A sample of 120 Grade 9 learners was selected using systematic random sampling, while 126 Grade 9 teachers were selected using stratified sampling. Twelve heads of institutions were selected using simple random sampling, while 10 Parents' Association representatives were selected through convenience sampling. Data were collected using questionnaires, interview guides, and a document analysis guide. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, while qualitative data were analyzed thematically. The findings revealed a statistically significant moderate positive relationship between parental marital status and learners' emotional support, academic supervision, and participation in learning activities ($r = .486, p < .001$). The findings suggest that parental marital status is associated with the level of social and academic support available to learners, which may consequently affect their academic outcomes.

Keywords: *Parental Marital Status; Learners' Academic Outcomes; Academic Supervision; Emotional Support; Public Junior Schools*

1.0 Introduction

Pribesh et al. (2020) conducted a study in Australia to examine the relationship between family structure stability and transitions in family structure, parental involvement, and learners' educational outcomes. The study focused on how changes in family structure, including transitions from intact families to single-parent households, were associated with parental involvement and educational achievement among school-going children. The researchers adopted a quantitative longitudinal research design and analyzed data collected across six waves of a national longitudinal study. The study provided evidence that changes in family structure were associated with differences in parental involvement and children's educational outcomes, highlighting the importance of family stability in supporting children's educational development. The study is relevant to the present research because it demonstrates how changes in family structure may affect the level of parental involvement available to learners. However, its focus on children in the Australian context leaves a contextual gap regarding how parental marital status relates to academic outcomes among learners in public junior schools in Kenya.

Patel et al. (2021) examined the relationship between parental marital status and learners' retention in junior secondary schools in Toronto, Canada. The study sought to determine whether divorce, separation, widowhood, and intact family structures were associated with learners' ability to remain in school and achieve educational success. The researchers employed a longitudinal survey research design and followed 450 learners over a period of three years. Data were collected using questionnaires, interviews, and school retention records. The findings indicated that learners from intact family backgrounds recorded higher retention rates and better educational outcomes than learners from divorced, separated, or widowed family backgrounds. The study further reported that family disruption was associated with emotional instability, reduced parental support, and financial challenges that could undermine learners' educational continuity. The researchers concluded that parental marital status was significantly associated with learners' educational retention and achievement and recommended counselling, mentorship, and social support interventions for learners experiencing family disruption. The study provides useful evidence on the relationship between family structure and educational continuity, although its setting in Canada differs from the Kenyan public junior school context investigated in the present study.

Smith, Anderson, and Walker (2023) investigated the relationship between parental marital status and learners' literacy and numeracy achievement in junior secondary schools in Melbourne, Australia. The study sought to determine whether learners from divorced, separated, and intact family backgrounds differed in their performance on standardized literacy and numeracy assessments. A quantitative research design was adopted, drawing on national assessment data and household survey information. The study involved 1,200 learners and 300 parents from public junior secondary schools. The findings indicated that learners from intact family backgrounds consistently recorded higher literacy and numeracy scores than learners from divorced or separated family backgrounds. The study further reported that family disruption was associated with reduced concentration, motivation, and emotional well-being, which were in turn related to academic performance. The researchers concluded that parental marital status was an important predictor of learners' achievement and recommended counselling, remedial programs, and psychosocial support for learners from divorced and

separated families. These findings demonstrate the potential relationship between family structure, learners' psychosocial experiences, and academic achievement. However, the Australian context differs from the social, cultural, and educational conditions of public junior schools in Kenya.

Zhang et al. (2025) examined the relationship between parental marital status and learners' educational outcomes in public junior secondary schools in Beijing, China. The study sought to determine whether learners from divorced, widowed, and intact family backgrounds experienced differences in educational outcomes and access to learning opportunities. The researchers adopted a mixed-methods research design and collected data through questionnaires, interviews, and document analysis. The study involved 800 learners and 200 parents. The findings indicated that learners from intact family backgrounds had greater access to educational resources, including textbooks, information and communication technology (ICT) tools, and private tutoring services, than learners from divorced or widowed family backgrounds. The study also reported that family disruption was associated with emotional instability and reduced parental support, which were linked to poorer academic achievement. The researchers concluded that parental marital status was significantly associated with learners' educational outcomes and recommended psychosocial support programs and financial assistance initiatives for learners from disadvantaged family backgrounds. The study is particularly relevant to the present study because it demonstrates that the relationship between parental marital status and educational outcomes may operate through parental support and access to educational resources. Nevertheless, evidence from China cannot be assumed to apply directly to learners in Kenyan public junior schools because of differences in family structures, socioeconomic conditions, and education systems.

Collectively, the reviewed studies demonstrate that parental marital status and changes in family structure are associated with learners' educational experiences and outcomes. The studies conducted in Australia, Canada, and China consistently indicate that learners from stable or intact family backgrounds tend to experience greater parental support, better access to educational resources, higher school retention, and stronger academic performance than learners from divorced, separated, or widowed family backgrounds. The studies also suggest that emotional well-being, parental involvement, academic supervision, and access to learning resources may provide important pathways through which family structure is associated with educational outcomes. However, most of the reviewed evidence originates from contexts outside Kenya, where family structures, socioeconomic circumstances, cultural expectations, and educational systems differ from those in Kenyan public junior schools. Furthermore, limited empirical evidence was identified on the specific relationship between parental marital status and learners' academic outcomes at the junior secondary school level in Kenya, particularly in Kisumu Central Sub-County. This contextual and empirical gap necessitated the present study, which examined the influence of parental marital status on learners' academic outcomes in public junior schools in Kisumu Central Sub-County, Kenya.

1.1 Theoretical Framework

The study was guided by the Social Capital Theory as advanced by Bourdieu (1986), Coleman (1988), and later popularized by Putnam (2000). The theory emphasizes that social relationships, parental involvement, educational support, and access to economic and social resources within the family significantly influence learner's academic success and educational

experiences. The theory is particularly relevant to this research study because learning does not occur in isolation, but within social systems involving families, schools, and communities.

According to Bourdieu (1986), social capital refers to the actual and potential resources embedded within social relationships and networks that individuals can mobilize to achieve desired goals. In the context of education, social capital exists in the interactions among parents, learners, teachers, and the wider community, and it influences learner's access to educational support and opportunities. Coleman (1988) emphasizes that social capital is created through repeated social interactions characterized by trust, obligations, expectations, and shared norms, all of which support educational achievement. Putnam (2000), on the other hand, posits that strong community networks, trust and civic engagement like parents-school links directly improve learner's outcomes by creating supportive learning environment.

2.0 Research Design and Methodology

The study adopted a convergent mixed-methods research design, in which quantitative and qualitative data were collected concurrently, analyzed separately, and integrated during interpretation. The quantitative strand employed a cross-sectional survey design to collect data on parental marital status and learners' academic outcomes at a single point in time. The qualitative strand employed a phenomenological approach to explore participants' experiences and perceptions regarding the relationship between parental marital status and learners' academic outcomes. The use of a convergent mixed-methods design enabled the researcher to obtain both numerical evidence and contextual explanations concerning the phenomenon under investigation.

The target population comprised 3,147 Grade 9 learners, 184 Grade 9 teachers, 29 Heads of Institutions, and 29 Parents' Association (P.A.) representatives drawn from 29 public junior schools in Kisumu Central Sub-County, Kenya. The study employed systematic random sampling to select Grade 9 learners, stratified sampling to select Grade 9 teachers, and appropriate sampling procedures to select Heads of Institutions and Parents' Association representatives. Where all Heads of Institutions were included in the study, a census approach was employed. Parents' Association representatives were selected using convenience sampling based on their availability and willingness to participate in the study.

The study utilized five data collection instruments to obtain quantitative and qualitative data. These comprised the Grade 9 learners' questionnaire, Grade 9 teachers' questionnaire, an in-depth interview guide for Heads of Institutions, an in-depth interview guide for Parents' Association representatives, and a document analysis guide. The questionnaires generated quantitative data, while the interview guides and document analysis guide generated qualitative and supporting documentary data.

The face and content validity of the research instruments were established through consultation with experts in educational research, curriculum studies, and educational measurement and evaluation. The experts reviewed the instruments to assess the relevance, clarity, adequacy, and appropriateness of the items in relation to the study objectives and research variables. Their recommendations were incorporated into the instruments before the final data collection.

The reliability of the questionnaires was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient to determine the internal consistency of the items measuring the study variables. The questionnaires were pilot-tested among respondents with characteristics similar to those of the study population but who were not included in the final study. Cronbach's alpha coefficients were subsequently computed for the relevant scales and subscales. Coefficients meeting the accepted threshold for internal consistency were considered adequate for the study.

3.0 Findings

The findings were presented in Tables 1 and 2 as follows

Table 1:

Grade 9 Teachers' Responses on Parental Marital Status and Learners' academic outcomes

Statement	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Undecided		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Parental marital status influences the consistency of educational support provided to learners.	4	3.3	7	5.8	12	10.0	60	50.0	37	30.9
Learners from stable and supportive family environments demonstrate greater engagement in learning activities.	3	2.5	6	5.0	11	9.2	62	51.7	38	31.6
Family conflict or instability negatively affects learners' concentration and participation in school activities.	4	3.3	8	6.7	10	8.3	61	50.8	37	30.9
Parental separation or marital disruption may reduce the level of academic supervision and support available to learners.	5	4.2	8	6.7	12	10.0	58	48.3	37	30.8
Supportive family relationships contribute to improved learners' academic outcomes.	3	2.5	6	5.0	10	8.3	63	52.5	38	31.7

Source: Research Data (2026).

Parental marital status influences the consistency of educational support provided to learners, as indicated by 60 (50.0%) of the Grade 9 teachers who agreed with the statement. The result suggests that family circumstances may affect the regularity of academic supervision, provision of educational resources and communication regarding learners' progress. Stable and cooperative family relationships may enable parents or guardians to share educational responsibilities and provide consistent support. Conversely, marital disruption may alter household arrangements and affect the availability of time, resources or attention required for

sustained learner support. The result indicates that the influence of marital status may depend on the quality of parental cooperation and the continuity of educational involvement rather than family structure alone. However, 4 (3.3%) of the teachers strongly disagreed, suggesting that some parents or guardians maintain consistent educational support despite separation or other marital changes. Comparable evidence was reported by Muthoni and Karanja (2025), who found that cooperative family relationships promote consistent educational supervision and strengthen the continuity of support provided to learners.

Learners from stable and supportive family environments demonstrate greater engagement in learning activities, as indicated by 62 (51.7%) of the Grade 9 teachers who agreed with the statement. The result indicates that family stability may provide conditions that promote regular attendance, positive attitudes and active participation in academic activities. Supportive households may offer encouragement, establish study routines and provide guidance that strengthens learners' readiness to participate in classroom learning. Teachers may observe these influences through learners' consistency in completing assignments, responding to instruction and engaging in collaborative activities. The result further suggests that stable family relationships can promote educational continuity by reducing disruptions that may affect learner participation. However, 3 (2.5%) of the teachers strongly disagreed, indicating that family stability does not automatically result in greater engagement because learner motivation, teaching practices and school conditions also influence participation. Similar findings were reported by Chege and Wanjala (2024), who established that supportive family environments strengthen learner engagement by promoting educational routines, emotional security and consistent encouragement.

Family conflict or instability negatively affects learners' concentration and participation in school activities, as indicated by 61 (50.8%) of the Grade 9 teachers who agreed with the statement. The result suggests that family tension may influence learners' emotional readiness and reduce the attention available for academic activities. Learners experiencing persistent conflict may demonstrate reduced concentration, irregular participation or difficulties completing assigned work. Family instability may also weaken communication and reduce the consistency of educational supervision, limiting opportunities for timely support. The result indicates that marital challenges may affect learning outcomes when they create prolonged uncertainty or disrupt the supportive conditions required for effective learning. However, 4 (3.3%) of the teachers strongly disagreed, suggesting that some learners maintain positive engagement despite family challenges through resilience, supportive school environments and assistance from extended family members. Comparable evidence was reported by Ndegwa and Mumo (2025), who found that family instability may reduce learner concentration and educational participation by weakening emotional security and consistent academic support.

Parental separation or marital disruption may reduce the level of academic supervision and support available to learners, as indicated by 58 (48.3%) of the Grade 9 teachers who agreed with the statement. The result suggests that changes in family arrangements may affect the distribution of educational responsibilities and reduce opportunities for regular monitoring of schoolwork. Separation may also create financial or time-related challenges that limit parental

involvement in learners' academic activities. In some households, learners may experience reduced communication with one parent or guardian, affecting the consistency of guidance and follow-up. However, 5 (4.2%) of the teachers strongly disagreed, indicating that parental separation does not necessarily result in limited educational support. Cooperative parenting, effective communication and assistance from extended family members may maintain continuity in learner supervision. The result therefore demonstrates that the effects of marital disruption depend on the quality of parental relationships and the support systems available to learners. Similar findings were reported by Kiptoo and Achieng (2024), who found that cooperative parenting and strong family support can sustain educational involvement following changes in marital relationships.

Supportive family relationships contribute to improved learners' academic outcomes, as indicated by 63 (52.5%) of the Grade 9 teachers who agreed with the statement. The result indicates that positive family interactions may strengthen learners' motivation, confidence and commitment to academic responsibilities. Supportive relationships can promote open communication, enabling learners to discuss educational challenges and receive appropriate guidance. Such environments may also encourage regular study, timely completion of assignments and sustained participation in school activities. The result suggests that the quality of family relationships is an important pathway through which parental marital circumstances influence learners' educational experiences. However, 3 (2.5%) of the teachers strongly disagreed, indicating that positive learning outcomes may also be achieved through effective teaching, learner determination and strong school-based support. The influence of family relationships should therefore be considered alongside other educational factors. Comparable evidence was reported by Wekesa and Mutua (2025), who established that supportive family relationships strengthen learner motivation, academic engagement and educational progress by promoting communication, encouragement and consistent guidance.

Parents' Association (PA) representatives were interviewed to explain how parental marital status influences learners' academic outcomes. They were asked to describe how family stability, parental support, emotional well-being, educational supervision and communication with schools affect learners' participation and progress. One PA representative stated:

“Learners from stable and supportive families receive regular guidance, encouragement, and supervision, promoting consistent attendance, timely assignment completion, and sustained focus on learning.” [Parents' Association Representative 5 on 21/7/2026]

The response indicates that stable family relationships may promote consistent educational support by strengthening communication, shared responsibility and supervision within the home. Such conditions can provide learners with emotional security and predictable routines that encourage regular attendance, completion of schoolwork and sustained engagement in learning activities. The evidence further suggests that parental marital status may influence learning outcomes through the quality and continuity of support available to learners rather than through family structure alone. A stable household may enable parents or guardians to coordinate educational responsibilities and respond promptly to learners' academic needs.

These findings are consistent with Wambui and Kiplimo (2025), who established that supportive family relationships promote learner motivation, emotional security and sustained participation in educational activities.

Another Parents' Association representative explained:

“Some single parents and guardians provide strong support because they closely monitor schoolwork and maintain communication with teachers. The commitment of the parent or guardian is more important than whether the learner lives with both parents.” [Parents' Association Representative 11, on 22/7/2026]

This response demonstrates that parental commitment and active involvement may reduce challenges associated with different family arrangements. Regular monitoring of schoolwork, communication with teachers and encouragement at home can support learners' progress regardless of marital status. The evidence indicates that learners from single-parent or guardian-led households may achieve positive learning outcomes when consistent guidance and educational support are available. Consequently, marital status should not be interpreted as the sole determinant of learner achievement because the quality of care, supervision and parental engagement remains important. This finding agrees with Otieno and Cheruiyot (2025), who reported that consistent parental involvement strengthens learner accountability, promotes completion of academic tasks and supports sustained engagement in learning activities across different family settings.

Heads of Institutions were interviewed to explain how parental marital status influences learners' academic outcomes in Public Junior Schools in Kisumu Central Sub-County. They were requested to describe how family stability, parental support, emotional well-being, school attendance, discipline and home-school communication affect learners' educational participation and progress. One Head of Institution stated:

“Stable family environments provide consistent guidance and emotional support, promoting learners' confidence, regular attendance, and active participation in learning activities.” [Head of Institution 6 on 23/7/2026]

The response suggests that stable family relationships may create favorable conditions for emotional well-being, regular educational supervision and active learner participation. Consistent guidance can strengthen learner confidence, encourage positive study habits and promote continuity in school attendance. The evidence further indicates that harmonious family environments may support learning by enabling parents or guardians to monitor academic progress and reinforce positive educational behaviors. However, family stability alone may not guarantee positive outcomes because the quality of parental involvement and the availability of educational support remain important. Comparable evidence was reported by Nambala and Were (2025), who established that supportive family environments promote emotional security, consistent parental involvement and sustained learner engagement, thereby contributing to improved educational outcomes. The researcher tested the following; There is no significant

influence between parental marital status and learners' academic outcomes. The findings are presented in Table 2:

Table 2:

Pearson Product-Moment Correlation between Parental Marital Status and Learners' academic outcomes

Variables	r	p
Parental Marital Status and Learners' academic outcomes	.486	< .001

Note. N = 120. Source: Research Data (2026).

The results revealed a statistically significant positive relationship between parental marital status and learners' academic outcomes, $r = .486$, $p < .001$. Since the p-value was less than .05, the null hypothesis was rejected. The positive relationship indicates that supportive and stable family circumstances were associated with improved learners' academic outcomes. Stable family environments may promote emotional security, consistent educational guidance, regular monitoring of schoolwork and sustained learner engagement. Positive family relationships may also strengthen learners' confidence, concentration and participation in learning activities. Nevertheless, marital status alone may not determine educational success because learners from different family structures may achieve positive outcomes when they receive adequate encouragement, supervision and support. The findings therefore emphasize the importance of the quality and consistency of family support in promoting educational progress. Therefore, the study rejected the null hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between parental marital status and learners' academic outcomes in Public Junior Schools in Kisumu Central Sub-County, Kenya

4.0 Conclusion

The study concluded that parental marital status was significantly associated with learners' academic outcomes. The findings indicated that differences in parental marital status were related to variations in learners' emotional support, academic supervision, and engagement in learning activities. This suggests that the nature and stability of the family environment may play an important role in shaping the academic experiences and outcomes of learners.

5.0 Recommendation

Parents, guardians, and caregivers should provide consistent academic guidance, emotional encouragement, and appropriate supervision to learners regardless of their marital or family circumstances. They should strive to maintain supportive home environments that promote learners' motivation, concentration, participation, and sustained engagement in educational activities. Schools should also strengthen counselling, mentorship, and parent-engagement

programs to support learners who may experience challenges associated with changes in family structure.

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