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Parents' Level of Education and Learners' Academic Outcomes in Public Junior Schools in Kisumu Central Sub-County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Schools in Kisumu Central Sub-County, Kenya. Guided by Social Capital Theory, the study used a convergent mixed-methods design. The target population was 3,147 Grade 9 learners, 184 Grade 9 teachers, 29 heads of institutions and 29 Parents' Association representatives in 29 public Junior Schools. Using systematic random, stratified, simple random and convenience sampling, 120 learners, 126 teachers, 12 heads of institutions and 10 Parents' Association representatives were selected. Data were collected through questionnaires (Cronbach's $\alpha = .80$), in-depth interviews and document analysis. Quantitative data were analysed with descriptive statistics and Pearson's product-moment correlation; qualitative data were analysed thematically. Between 69.8% and 85.3% of learners reported that their parents guided them, encouraged them, discussed their progress, checked their assignments and communicated with teachers, while 72.5% to 88.3% of teachers linked higher parental education with stronger academic support, monitoring and learning outcomes. Parents' level of education had a strong, positive and statistically significant relationship with learners' academic outcomes ($r = .641, p < .001$), and the null hypothesis was rejected. Interviews showed that less-educated parents still supported learning through encouragement and contact with teachers, but depended more on the school for academic guidance. The study recommends structured parent-education and engagement programmes and school-based support that compensates for limited home academic assistance.

Keywords: Parental Education, academic outcomes, Competency-Based Curriculum, Junior School, parental involvement, social capital, Kenya

1. Introduction

Parental socio-economic status (SES) is widely regarded as a key determinant of children's educational success because it shapes the material, cognitive and social resources that learners can draw on at home. SES is commonly measured through parents' education, income and occupation (Sirin, 2005). Of these indicators, parental education has attracted particular attention because it is relatively stable over a child's school life and is closely tied to the kinds of support parents give with learning. Parents with more schooling tend to hold higher educational expectations, understand school demands better and are more confident in helping with schoolwork and engaging with teachers (Davis-Kean, 2005; Harding et al., 2015).

International evidence confirms that the association between family background and achievement is persistent and widespread. A large meta-analysis found a medium-to-strong relationship between SES and academic achievement, with parental education among the strongest components (Sirin, 2005). More recent cross-national analyses of large-scale assessment data show that this relationship has remained substantial across countries and over time (Yigiter, 2025). In Canada, parents' education and income have been shown to shape the educational attainment of children of immigrants (Picot et al., 2023), while in Germany, parental SES predicts the successful completion of secondary education even after early

achievement is considered (Bittmann, 2024). Longitudinal work further suggests that parental education affects children's achievement partly through parenting practices and the development of executive functions (Waters et al., 2025).

In Kenya, the transition from the 8-4-4 system to the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC), now implemented as Competency-Based Education (CBE), has given parents a more visible role in learning. The Basic Education Curriculum Framework positions parents as partners who support learners in completing projects, portfolios, practical activities and home-based assignments (Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development [KICD], 2017). The Presidential Working Party on Education Reform (2023) affirmed this partnership, while also noting disparities in parental support and home learning environments across households. Studies in Kakamega and Meru counties have reported that limited parental participation and household resources constrain learners' completion of competency-based tasks (Amagove et al., 2024; Mwereria et al., 2025).

Kisumu Central Sub-County is a largely urban and peri-urban area with wide variation in parents' educational attainment, income and occupations. Teachers and school heads in the area have raised concerns about uneven parental support for CBE activities. Yet there is little empirical evidence on how parental education specifically relates to learners' academic outcomes in the new Junior School tier, whose first cohorts reached Grade 9 recently. Most existing Kenyan studies examined examination performance under the 8-4-4 system or focused on primary and secondary schools. This paper, drawn from a wider study on parental SES and learners' academic outcomes, addresses the first objective of that study.

1.1 Research question and hypothesis

The paper was guided by the research question: *To what extent does parents' level of education influence learners' academic outcomes in public Junior Schools in Kisumu Central Sub-County, Kenya?* The corresponding null hypothesis, tested at the .05 level, was: H_{01} : *There is no statistically significant relationship between parents' level of education and learners' academic outcomes in public Junior Schools in Kisumu Central Sub-County, Kenya.*

2. Theoretical Framework

The study was anchored on Social Capital Theory as developed by Bourdieu (1986), Coleman (1988) and Putnam (2000). Bourdieu (1986) described social capital as the actual and potential resources embedded in networks of relationships that individuals can mobilise to achieve their goals. Coleman (1988) applied

the idea directly to education, arguing that the human capital parents possess, including their education, benefits children only when it is transmitted through relationships within the family, such as time spent together, shared expectations and supervision. Putnam (2000) extended the concept to community networks and trust, which, in schooling, include the relationship between families and schools.

The theory is well suited to the present study for two reasons. First, it explains *why* parental education should matter: educated parents are likely to have more knowledge, confidence and networks to invest in their children's learning, and CBE demands exactly this kind of investment through home-based projects and continuous assessment. Second, it explains *how* the effect is transmitted: through guidance, encouragement, discussion of progress, monitoring of assignments and communication with teachers. These relational mechanisms were therefore used to operationalise the parental education construct in this study. The theory also anticipates that parents with lower educational attainment can still generate social capital through encouragement and connections with teachers, a proposition that the qualitative strand examined. A recognised weakness of the theory is that it can understate structural constraints such as income and time; these were addressed in other objectives of the wider study.

3. Review of Related Literature

Evidence on the link between parental education and learner outcomes is extensive. Sirin's (2005) meta-analysis of 74 samples reported that SES components, including parental education, were meaningfully associated with achievement, with the association varying by school level and location. Davis-Kean (2005) showed that parental education influences children's achievement indirectly through parents' expectations and the stimulation provided at home, rather than only through income. Dubow et al. (2009), following a cohort over 40 years, found that parental education measured when children were eight years old predicted the children's educational and occupational success in middle adulthood. Harding et al. (2015) proposed that maternal education works through several pathways, including parenting practices, material resources, and the ability to navigate institutions such as schools.

Parental involvement is the most commonly cited mechanism linking parental education to outcomes. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) argued that parents' decisions to become involved depend on their sense of role, their confidence in helping, and the invitations they receive from schools; each of these is shaped by education. In a meta-analysis of middle-school studies, Hill and Tyson (2009) found that academic socialisation, which involves communicating expectations, discussing learning strategies and linking schoolwork to future goals, was more strongly associated with achievement than direct homework help. Using European data, Kantová (2024) found that parental involvement was associated with better

educational outcomes, and that parents with higher education tended to be more involved. Nja et al. (2022) reported in Nigeria that parents' socio-economic rank influenced students' academic and cognitive outcomes through physical, psychological and social mediators.

In Kenya, studies of CBE implementation consistently highlight the role of parents. Amagove et al. (2024) found that inadequate parental participation and limited resources affected learners' completion of competency-based assignments in Kakamega County. Mwereria et al. (2025) showed that parental involvement was a significant determinant of CBE implementation in public primary schools in Meru County. These studies, however, examined parental involvement broadly, and did not isolate the contribution of parents' educational attainment.

Three gaps emerge from the literature. Conceptually, most studies measured outcomes through examination scores, literacy and numeracy tests or retention, rather than the broader competencies emphasised in CBE, such as mastery and application of skills, creativity, communication and collaboration. Contextually, the Kenyan evidence comes mainly from the 8-4-4 system or from primary and secondary schools, with little evidence from public Junior Schools. Methodologically, many studies relied on a single quantitative source. The present study addresses these gaps by combining learner, teacher, parent-representative and school-head perspectives on parental education and learners' academic outcomes in public Junior Schools.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research design and study location

The study adopted a convergent mixed-methods design (Creswell & Creswell, 2023), in which quantitative and qualitative data were collected concurrently, analysed separately and merged during interpretation. The quantitative strand used a cross-sectional survey, and the qualitative strand used a phenomenological approach to capture participants' experiences. The study was conducted in Kisumu Central Sub-County, Kisumu County, in western Kenya. The sub-county covers about 37 km² and is predominantly urban with peri-urban pockets. Its households range from those in formal public and private employment to those in small-scale trade, transport, fishing-related work and other informal activities, providing the variation in parental background that the study required.

4.2 Population, sample and sampling procedures

The target population comprised 3,147 Grade 9 learners, 184 Grade 9 teachers, 29 heads of institutions and 29 Parents' Association (PA) representatives in the 29 public Junior Schools in the sub-county. Grade

9 learners were targeted because they were the most advanced cohort in the Junior School tier at the time of the study. The sample size for teachers was determined using Yamane's (1967) formula at a 5% margin of error, yielding 126 teachers, who were then selected by stratified sampling with proportionate allocation across zones. Learners were selected by systematic random sampling with a sampling interval of 26 from the sampling frame. Twelve heads of institutions were selected by simple random sampling, and 10 PA representatives were selected through convenience sampling based on availability and willingness to participate. Table 1 summarises the sample.

Table 1

Target Population and Sample Size

Category	Target population	Sample	Sampling technique
Grade 9 learners	3,147	120	Systematic random
Grade 9 teachers	184	126	Stratified (Yamane formula)
Heads of institutions	29	12	Simple random
PA representatives	29	10	Convenience
Total	3,389	268	

Note. PA = Parents' Association.

4.3 Research instruments

Five instruments were used. The Grade 9 learners' and teachers' questionnaires contained closed-ended items on a five-point scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree), together with a few open-ended items. The parental education section of the learners' questionnaire had five items addressing parental guidance with schoolwork, encouragement to study, discussion of academic progress, checking of assignments and communication with teachers. The teachers' questionnaire had four items on the link between parental education and academic support, learning outcomes, critical thinking and problem-solving, and monitoring of assignments. A separate section measured learners' academic outcomes in terms of mastery of knowledge and skills, application of skills to real-life problems, creativity and innovation, and communication and collaboration. Semi-structured in-depth interview guides were used

with heads of institutions and PA representatives, and a document analysis guide was used to review continuous assessment records, progress reports, assessment rubrics, portfolios, attendance registers and Kenya Junior School Education Assessment (KJSEA) records.

4.4 Validity, reliability and trustworthiness

Face and content validity were established through review by experts in educational research and measurement and evaluation, whose comments were used to refine item wording and coverage. The instruments were piloted in two public Junior Schools outside the main sample. Internal consistency was estimated with Cronbach's alpha, which yielded an overall coefficient of .80, above the conventional .70 threshold (Taber, 2018). For the qualitative instruments, credibility was enhanced through probing and triangulation with questionnaire and document data; dependability through an audit trail of data collection and analysis; confirmability by grounding interpretations in participants' words; and transferability through a detailed description of the setting.

4.5 Data collection and analysis

After obtaining a research permit from the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI) and authorisation from county and sub-county education offices and school heads, the researcher administered questionnaires to learners and teachers, conducted interviews with heads of institutions and PA representatives, and reviewed school records. Quantitative data were analysed with SPSS version 29. Frequencies and percentages were computed for each item; for this paper, item means and standard deviations were also derived from the response frequencies. The relationship between parents' level of education and learners' academic outcomes was tested with the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient at $\alpha = .05$. Interview data were transcribed, coded and analysed thematically following Braun and Clarke (2006), and the two strands were compared for convergence and divergence.

4.6 Ethical considerations

Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from teachers, heads of institutions and PA representatives. For learners, parental or guardian consent and learner assent were obtained. Names and identifying details were excluded from instruments and reports, participants were identified by codes, and data were stored securely and used only for academic purposes.

5. Results

5.1 Response rate and respondents' characteristics

Of the 126 teacher questionnaires and 120 learner questionnaires administered, 120 (95.2%) and 116 (96.7%) respectively were returned complete, giving an overall return rate of 95.9%. This rate was considered adequate for analysis. Among the learners, 59 (50.9%) were female and 57 (49.1%) were male; 62 (53.4%) lived with both parents, 39 (33.6%) with a single parent and 15 (12.9%) with guardians or other relatives. Among the teachers, 88 (73.3%) held a bachelor's degree and 58 (48.3%) had more than 20 years of teaching experience, suggesting that most were well placed to judge the relationship between home background and learning. Most of the heads of institutions interviewed had served in that role for six years or more.

5.2 Learners' views on parental education and academic support

Learners were asked to rate statements on the academic support they receive from their parents or guardians. Their responses are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Grade 9 Learners' Responses on Parents' Level of Education and Academic Support (n = 116)

Statement	SD %	D %	U %	A %	SA %	M	SD
My parent/guardian is able to guide me when I experience difficulties with schoolwork	4.3	6.9	10.3	47.4	31.0	3.94	1.04
My parent/guardian encourages me to study regularly and perform well in school	2.6	5.2	6.9	50.0	35.3	4.10	0.93
My parent/guardian discusses my academic progress with me	3.4	6.0	9.5	48.3	32.8	4.01	0.99
My parent/guardian checks whether I complete my assignments and other schoolwork	2.6	5.2	7.8	51.7	32.8	4.07	0.92
My parent/guardian communicates with teachers to understand my academic progress	6.0	10.3	13.8	41.4	28.4	3.76	1.15

Note. SD = strongly disagree; D = disagree; U = undecided; A = agree; SA = strongly agree. Means and standard deviations were computed from the response frequencies (1 = SD, 5 = SA).

Table 2 shows that most learners experienced active parental support. Encouragement to study was the most widely reported form of support, with 85.3% agreeing or strongly agreeing ($M = 4.10$), followed by checking whether assignments were completed (84.5%, $M = 4.07$) and discussion of academic progress (81.0%, $M = 4.01$). About 78.4% of learners said their parents could guide them when they had difficulties with schoolwork ($M = 3.94$). Communication with teachers was the least common form of

support: 69.8% agreed, while 16.4% disagreed and 13.8% were undecided ($M = 3.76$, $SD = 1.15$). This item also had the largest spread of responses, suggesting that direct contact with the school varies more between households than support given at home.

The pattern is informative. Forms of support that require little specialised knowledge, such as encouragement and checking whether work is done, were almost universal. Forms that depend more on parents' own academic knowledge and confidence, such as explaining difficult content and engaging teachers about progress, were reported by fewer learners. This is consistent with the argument that parental education matters most for the more demanding forms of involvement.

5.3 Teachers' views on parental education and learners' outcomes

Teachers rated statements on how parents' education relates to the support learners receive and to their learning outcomes. Table 3 presents the results.

Table 3

Grade 9 Teachers' Responses on Parents' Level of Education and Learners' Academic Outcomes (n = 120)

Statement	SD %	D %	U %	A %	SA %	M	SD
Parents with higher educational levels are more likely to support learners' academic activities	2.5	5.0	5.8	51.7	35.0	4.12	0.91
Learners whose parents have higher educational attainment demonstrate better learning outcomes	3.3	5.8	10.0	50.0	30.8	3.99	0.97
Parental educational attainment positively influences learners' critical thinking and problem-solving skills	4.2	8.3	15.0	42.5	30.0	3.86	1.07
Educated parents are more likely to monitor learners' assignments and academic progress	1.7	4.2	5.8	53.3	35.0	4.16	0.84

Note. SD = strongly disagree; D = disagree; U = undecided; A = agree; SA = strongly agree. Means and standard deviations were computed from the response frequencies.

Teachers largely confirmed the learners' accounts. The strongest agreement concerned monitoring: 88.3% of teachers agreed that educated parents are more likely to follow up on assignments and academic progress ($M = 4.16$, $SD = 0.84$). Similarly, 86.7% agreed that parents with higher education are more likely to support learners' academic activities ($M = 4.12$), and 80.8% agreed that learners whose parents are more educated show better learning outcomes ($M = 3.99$). Agreement was lower, though still clear, on whether parental education promotes critical thinking and problem-solving (72.5%, $M = 3.86$), where 15.0% of teachers were undecided. Teachers therefore saw parental education as most closely tied to

supervision and support, and somewhat less directly tied to higher-order competencies, which also depend on classroom instruction and learners' own characteristics.

5.4 Test of hypothesis

The null hypothesis (H_{01}) stated that there is no statistically significant relationship between parents' level of education and learners' academic outcomes. It was tested using the Pearson product-moment correlation between the parental education scores and the learners' academic outcomes scores. Table 4 presents the result.

Table 4

Pearson Correlation Between Parents' Level of Education and Learners' Academic Outcomes

Variables	<i>r</i>	<i>r</i> ²	<i>p</i>	Decision
Parents' level of education and learners' academic outcomes	.641	.411	< .001	Reject H_{01}

Note. Two-tailed test, $\alpha = .05$. r^2 = coefficient of determination.

The analysis revealed a strong, positive and statistically significant relationship between parents' level of education and learners' academic outcomes, $r = .641$, $p < .001$. Since the p -value was below .05, the null hypothesis was rejected. By Cohen's (1988) conventions, a coefficient of this size represents a large effect. The coefficient of determination ($r^2 = .411$) indicates that about 41% of the variation in learners' academic outcomes was shared with variation in parents' level of education. Higher parental educational attainment was therefore associated with better academic outcomes among Grade 9 learners, although, as a correlation, the result does not by itself establish causation.

5.5 Qualitative findings

Interviews with PA representatives and heads of institutions yielded three themes that help explain the quantitative results.

Theme 1: Educated parents understand school requirements and engage with the school. Participants described educated parents as better able to interpret what CBE requires and to act on it. One PA representative observed:

“Parents with higher education levels understand school requirements, support homework, communicate with teachers, and attend school meetings, thereby enhancing learners’ participation and academic progress.” (PA Representative 4)

A head of institution linked this involvement directly to learners’ competencies and classroom behaviour:

“Parents with higher education levels support assignments, monitor learners’ progress, attend school meetings, and communicate with teachers, thereby enhancing learners’ confidence, learning skills, and classroom participation.” (Head of Institution 6)

Theme 2: Less-educated parents support learning in other ways. Participants cautioned against equating low parental education with a lack of support. Parents with limited schooling were described as struggling with complex content but compensating through encouragement, providing what materials they could and seeking help from teachers:

“Parents with limited education may face challenges supporting complex schoolwork but often encourage learners, provide available learning materials, and communicate with teachers when guidance is needed.” (PA Representative 11)

Theme 3: The school fills the gap. Heads of institutions noted that learners from less-educated homes can succeed but rely more on teachers for academic guidance:

“Learners whose parents have limited educational backgrounds can succeed, although they may receive less academic support and require additional guidance from teachers.” (Head of Institution 3)

These themes converge with the survey data. Encouragement, which was the most widely reported form of support among learners, was described as available across educational levels, while the more knowledge-dependent forms of help, such as explaining difficult schoolwork and engaging teachers, were associated with more educated parents. The qualitative data also add a nuance that the correlation alone cannot show: parental education appears to shape the *type* of support learners receive rather than whether they receive any support at all.

6. Discussion

This study found that parents’ level of education was strongly and positively related to learners’ academic outcomes in public Junior Schools in Kisumu Central Sub-County ($r = .641$). The size of this association is larger than the average effects reported in international meta-analyses (Sirin, 2005). One possible explanation is that CBE places heavier demands on the home than earlier examination-oriented curricula: projects, portfolios and practical assignments are completed partly at home, and parents are expected to guide and supervise them (KICD, 2017). Where the home is an extension of the classroom, differences in

parents' capacity to help are likely to translate more directly into differences in outcomes. A second explanation is methodological: both variables were measured through perception-based items, which can inflate correlations compared with studies that use administrative records of parents' schooling and standardised tests.

The findings also shed light on the mechanisms involved. Learners and teachers identified monitoring of assignments, academic guidance, discussion of progress and communication with teachers as the channels through which parental education operates. This is consistent with Davis-Kean's (2005) finding that parental education works largely through beliefs and home practices, and with Hill and Tyson's (2009) conclusion that academic socialisation is a powerful form of involvement in the middle-school years. It also supports Coleman's (1988) argument that parents' human capital benefits children only when it is transmitted through relationships and interaction within the family. In this study, parental education was valuable to learners chiefly because it was converted into guidance, supervision and school contact.

Communication with teachers was the least frequently reported form of support. From the perspective of Social Capital Theory, this represents the bridging capital between the family and the school (Putnam, 2000). Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) argue that parents' confidence and the invitations they receive from schools strongly influence whether they engage with teachers. Less-educated parents may feel less confident discussing assessment rubrics or competency reports, which are new and technical under CBE. This interpretation is consistent with Kenyan studies reporting uneven parental participation in CBE implementation (Amagove et al., 2024; Mwereria et al., 2025), and it identifies home-school communication as a practical point for intervention.

The qualitative evidence tempers a purely deterministic reading of the correlation. Parents with limited schooling still encouraged their children, provided available materials and sought help from teachers, and school heads observed that learners from such homes can succeed with additional school support. This echoes Kantová's (2024) finding that involvement itself, which is not limited to educated parents, is associated with better outcomes, and Harding et al.'s (2015) view that parental education operates through multiple, partly substitutable pathways. The practical implication is that the gap associated with parental education is not fixed: it can be narrowed by equipping parents with skills and information, and by schools deliberately providing the academic guidance that some homes cannot.

Finally, teachers were least certain about the link between parental education and critical thinking and problem-solving, which are central CBE competencies. This suggests that while parental education clearly supports task completion and supervision, the development of higher-order competencies depends

substantially on classroom pedagogy. This is consistent with evidence that the SES-achievement link is partly mediated by children's cognitive skills and learning experiences (Waters et al., 2025; Nja et al., 2022).

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study concludes that parents' level of education significantly influences learners' academic outcomes in public Junior Schools in Kisumu Central Sub-County. More educated parents are better placed to guide learners through difficult work, monitor assignments, discuss progress and communicate with teachers, and these practices are associated with better academic outcomes. The influence operates mainly through the quality and type of parental involvement, and less-educated parents remain important sources of encouragement and support. Based on these conclusions, the study recommends that:

- i. The Ministry of Education, through county and sub-county education offices, should strengthen parent-education programmes, including sensitisation forums and school-based workshops that explain CBE requirements, assessment rubrics and practical ways of supporting learners at home.
- ii. Public Junior Schools should develop accessible home-school communication channels, such as simplified progress reports, text-message updates and flexible meeting times, and should actively invite parents with lower educational attainment to engage with teachers.
- iii. Schools should provide structured academic support, such as supervised homework sessions, mentorship and remedial support, for learners whose parents are less able to help with complex schoolwork.
- iv. Boards of Management and Parents' Associations should promote peer-support networks in which parents share strategies for supporting learners, thereby building social capital across families with different educational backgrounds.

7.1 Limitations and suggestions for further research

The study was cross-sectional and correlational, and so it cannot establish that parental education causes differences in outcomes; other SES factors such as income and occupation, which were also significantly related to learners' outcomes in the wider study, may partly account for the association. Parental education and academic outcomes were measured largely through learners' and teachers' perceptions rather than through records of parents' actual schooling and standardised assessment scores. The study covered public Junior Schools in one urban sub-county, which limits generalisation to rural or private schools. Future research should use longitudinal designs and objective achievement data, apply

multivariate models that estimate the unique contribution of parental education while controlling for other SES indicators, and evaluate the effectiveness of parent-education interventions under CBE.

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