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The Influence of Family Social Status on Students' Academic Performance in National Secondary Examinations in Hospital Ward, Kiminini Sub-County, Kenya

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Abstract: This research investigated the influence of family social status on student performance in national secondary examinations within the Hospital Ward, Kiminini sub-county, Trans-Nzoia County, Kenya. Grounded in behavioral and social learning theories. The study employed a cross-sectional descriptive design. Respondents were sampled through a combination of random and clustered sampling techniques, with data primarily gathered via structured questionnaires administered to students, parents, and educators. The findings reveal that while parents' education and income levels do affect students' access to academic resources, their correlation with performance was weak ($p = 0.09$). This suggests that other mitigating factors, such as student resilience or institutional support, may play a role. A significant majority of parents (78.3%) and teachers (84.1%) acknowledge that students from well-off backgrounds generally perform better, highlighting a perceived disparity. The study also found significant absenteeism linked to financial constraints, with 13.9% of students missing over two months annually and 24.8% missing over two weeks due to lack of fees, profoundly impacting performance. These insights underscore the need for targeted policies and strategies to address educational disparities stemming from family social status, aiming to promote more consistent educational achievement.

Keywords: Family, Social factors, Students' Academic Performance, National Examinations

1.1 Background of the Study

Education plays a significant role in shaping individuals, providing professional and social values that support participation in community development. Educational systems worldwide seek to equip students with necessary competencies, and in many countries, including Kenya, national examinations affect students' future opportunities. Despite the broad importance of education, disparities in academic performance remain, often associated with various social factors such as family social status. Research indicates that parental education and income are influential social factors in academic outcomes. For example, a longitudinal study in the United States by Benner et al. (2016) found that greater parental involvement was linked to improved student performance. Parents with post-secondary qualifications tended to participate more in their children's academic activities. Waters et al. (2021) described a correlation between social status and proficiency in language and mathematics, connecting these

differences to resource availability. Their findings suggest that educational inequalities are reflected in academic achievements across different social statuses.

Similar patterns have been observed globally. Sakar (2021) reported that poverty is a major factor affecting educational attainment in the U.S., with financial barriers contributing to chronic absenteeism among high school students. Liu et al. (2019) found in China that students from higher-income backgrounds generally performed better due to access to learning resources. Gomes et al. (2020) observed in Brazil that lower-income students encountered more distractions, while higher-income peers benefited from additional educational materials. Suna et al. (2020) in Turkey noted that economic advantage was associated with higher student performance, with parental education, income, occupation, and available neighborhood resources influencing educational opportunities. In Nigeria, Olufemi et al. (2018) identified parental education and family finances as key factors, finding that parents with higher educational attainment and stable finances were more likely to provide academic support. Eshetu (2015) in Ethiopia reported that students from higher social classes and stable economic backgrounds had more academic opportunities due to increased support systems, whereas those from low-income areas attended schools with fewer resources.

In Kenya, Rong'uno (2017) studied how resource allocation affects primary school student performance, identifying fewer resources in public schools compared to private schools. This led to variations in student experiences and achievement. Differences in teacher-to-pupil ratios between urban and rural regions also highlighted socio-economic impacts on academic outcomes. Overall, available evidence suggests that resources and social status are associated with differences in academic performance.

1.2 Problem Statement

Social factors intricately influence the learning process, often leading to student outcomes that fall short of minimum competency expectations. Research consistently indicates that learners from higher social status families frequently exhibit stronger academic competencies compared to those from lower social status backgrounds. For instance, evaluations in the United States regarding transitions to high school have shown that students from schools predominantly serving high social status populations display literacy competencies approximately five years ahead of their counterparts from lower social class environments. Furthermore, data highlights a stark disparity in consistency and persistence, with high school dropout rates being significantly higher among students from lower social classes (11.5%) compared to those from higher social status families (2.8%). This pervasive evidence underscores the critical importance of understanding the social factors that affect academic outcomes to effectively address disparities within the education sector. Existing inequalities not only impede learning outcomes for students from lower social classes but may also perpetuate socioeconomic disparities across communities. In Hospital Ward schools, as well as generally in urban areas, which are typically more economically advantaged, academic results tend to be higher than in schools situated in socially disadvantaged environments. A striking example from the KCSE 2023 examinations shows that all high schools achieving a mean score above 9.0 were in urban areas with superior access and resources. Both national and county governments, including the Trans-Nzoia county government, have implemented measures to address challenges associated with low social class and its impact on learning outcomes, such as providing resources like books, classrooms, and bursaries. However, despite these concerted initiatives, a significant gap between learners from low and high social classes persists. Investigating the specific social factors influencing national examination outcomes in this context can provide crucial

insights, informing the development of targeted policies and strategies aimed at promoting more consistent educational achievement nationwide.

1.3 Research Objective

The objective of this study was to determine how family social class affects the performance of students in national examinations in Hospital Ward, Kiminini Sub-County, Kenya.

1.4 Literature Review

1.4.1 Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in behavioral and social learning theories.

Behavioral Learning Theory: B.F. Skinner's behavioral learning theory (1938) asserts that behavior is shaped by environmental factors. In education, this means students' academic performance can be affected by external distractions, especially for those from low-income backgrounds who may face social challenges over academic priorities. While the theory highlights how social factors contribute to educational inequality, it mainly focuses on imitation and often neglects wider social context and mental processes like thoughts and emotions.

Social Learning Theory: Proposed by Albert Bandura in 1977, social learning theory builds on behavioral learning theory by highlighting that individuals learn through observing and imitating others, and that both physical and social environments contribute to learning outcomes. Bandura found that social factors and cognitive processes can interact to influence how students learn. This theory is used to examine the impact of environmental factors, such as family social status, on learning outcomes and offers a framework for understanding the role of the environment in shaping learning.

1.4.2 Empirical Literature Review

This literature review analyzes existing articles and research regarding the relationship between family social class and students' academic performance in national examinations.

The influence of family social class on academic performance

Social factors can affect differences in academic achievement by introducing barriers and challenges that may impact students' success. These factors, associated with family social status, include poverty, family income, and parents' level of education. A meta-analysis by Liu, Peng, & Luo (2020) in Mainland China, involving 215,649 primary education students, found that family social status is significantly related to academic performance. Students from higher-income families generally achieved higher grades, particularly in art and languages. However, the correlation between academic performance and parents' social status was moderate, indicating that other factors may also play a substantial role in academic outcomes.

Pinquart & Ebeling (2020) used a quantitative survey in the U.S. to examine the effect of parents' education levels on academic expectations and student performance. Results showed that students whose parents did not hold a 4-year degree tended to have lower grades than those with at least one parent holding such a qualification. These students faced more challenges and encountered additional barriers throughout their education, often leading to lower grades. Similarly, Wen et al. (2020) reported from India that students with more highly educated parents performed better, which they attributed to increased academic support and the ability to identify educational opportunities. Higher expectations from parents with advanced education were also linked to improved academic outcomes.

Augustine (2021) studied the relationship between parental income and academic performance among higher education students in Bauchi State, Nigeria. The findings suggested that parental income influenced student attitudes rather than directly affecting results. Lower social class was associated with increased distraction, reduced attendance, and home-related stressors, while higher social class was linked to access to supportive academic resources. Access to schools offering broader curricula, sporting facilities, and tuition services—often available to students from higher-income families—was noted as having an influence on academic outcomes. In Kenya, Juma (2016) identified parental social status as a significant factor in student performance in Tana River County, observing that family income and involvement were important considerations in shaping academic achievement.

The existing literature primarily focuses on identifying various social factors that influence students' academic performance and how these factors contribute to inequalities within the academic environment. While this body of work effectively examines how specific social factors affect a student's potential in national examinations, there remains a critical gap in understanding how these factors manifest and their precise correlation in specific local contexts such as Hospital Ward. This research aims to contribute by providing an empirical examination of how family social status, encompassing parental education and household income, specifically influences academic outcomes in this particular Kenyan sub-county, offering detailed descriptive data to complement existing correlational findings.

1.5 Research Methodology

Research Design: The research design applied for this study was the cross-sectional descriptive research design, appropriate for describing the characteristics of a population at a specific point in time. For this study, it was chosen to examine the characteristics of students and the social factors associated with their academic performance in high school, particularly concerning family social status.

Study Population: This research had a population of 275 which included three distinct groups in its study population: students, parents, and educators from various schools within the Hospital Ward. The sample population was divided into these three groups using a 2:1:1 proportion criterion, respectively. Students comprised the largest group (50%), with parents/guardians (25%) providing insights into family background, and educators (25%) offering professional viewpoints on classroom dynamics influenced by social factors.

Sample and Sampling Techniques

Sample size determination: The Kish and Leslie formula was used to calculate the sample size (N) of required participants. Based on the approximate number of KCSE candidates in Hospital Ward in 2023 (965 students), the required sample size was calculated to be 275 participants. This sample size was then divided according to the 2:1:1 proportion for students, parents, and teachers.

Sampling technique: Stratified Random Sampling was employed to ensure representation from the diverse social backgrounds of participants in Hospital Ward. This technique was used to select participants for the mixed questionnaire, involving stages of selecting locations, schools, and then randomly selecting students, parents, and teachers to reflect diversity and ensure statistical power.

Data Collection Tools: This study utilized an open-ended questionnaire, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative data collection approaches to obtain comprehensive information from students, parents, and educators regarding family social status and academic performance. Structured mixed questionnaires (open and closed-ended) were administered to gather quantitative data on social factors (e.g., household income, parental education) and academic performance (e.g., exam scores), alongside qualitative data for open-ended responses. Surveys were administered both in person and online.

Data Analysis and Procedures: Thematic analysis was used for qualitative data derived from open-ended questions, identifying recurring themes and patterns regarding participants' perspectives on social factors and educational inequality. Descriptive statistics (mean, median, mode, percentages, standard deviation) were employed for quantitative data from closed-ended questions, analyzed using Google Excel spreadsheets. Spearman correlation analysis was specifically used to examine the relationship between parental income/education and student performance. Data visualization methods, including tables, were used for presentation.

Ethical Considerations: Throughout the research process, confidentiality was maintained by anonymizing identifiable information. Informed consent forms, outlining the study's purpose and procedures, were provided to all participants, and their participation was entirely voluntary. Data was stored securely with access restricted to authorized personnel to protect participants' privacy.

1.6 Results and Discussion

This section presents the results and analysis of data collected from 275 participants in Hospital Ward, Kiminini Constituency, Transzoia County, specifically focusing on the influence of family social status on academic performance. A 100% response rate was achieved, enhancing data reliability and validity.

Influence of Family Social Status on Academic Performance

The questionnaire examined how family social status impacts student performance by measuring income, parents' education, access to learning resources, absenteeism from lack of fees, social background's effect on grade expectations, and current/future grade expectations.

Level of Education of the Parents: Student responses indicated that 42.3% of their parents had a high school certificate as their highest qualification, while 24.8% had only primary education. A smaller percentage, 22.6%, of students had parents with at least a bachelor's degree. This highlights that a significant portion of students come from academically less advanced households. Existing literature supports that higher parental education is associated with better academic mentorship and the setting of high academic standards, contributing to improved academic outcomes. For parents and teachers, the data revealed that the majority of parents (29%) had primary education, and 8.7% had no formal education.

Table 1: Level of Education of Parents (Student Responses)

Education Level	Number of Students	Percentage (%)
No formal education	12	8.80%
Primary education	34	24.80%
High school diploma	58	42.30%
Bachelor's degree	27	19.70%
Master's degree	3	2.20%
Doctorate	1	0.70%
Total	137	100%

Source: Field data, 2025

Table 2: Level of Education of Parents and Teachers

Education Level	Teachers (n = 69) %	Parents (n = 69) %
No formal education	0%	8.70%
Primary education	0%	29%
High school diploma	14.50%	26.10%
Bachelor's degree	43.50%	11.60%
Master's degree	29.00%	13.00%
Doctorate	13.00%	11.60%

Source: Field data, 2025

Household Income: Student perceptions of household income showed that the majority (59.9%) of parents earned between KES 10,000-50,000 per month, while only 4.4% earned above KES 50,000. This indicates significant socioeconomic disadvantage among most parents. Parent responses largely corroborated this, with 55.1% earning KES 10,000-50,000 and only 4.3% earning above KES 50,000.

Table 3: Household Income (Student's responses)

Monthly Income (KES)	Number of Students	Percentage (%)
Below 10,000	49	35.8 %
10,000 – 50,000	82	59.9 %
50,000 – 100,000	4	2.9 %
Above 100,000	2	1.5 %
Total	137	100 %

Source: Field data, 2025

Table 4: Monthly Income of Parents

Monthly Income (KES)	Number of Parents	Percentage (%)
Below 10,000	28	40.6 %
10,000 – 50,000	38	55.1 %
50,000 – 100,000	2	2.9 %
Above 100,000	1	1.4 %
Total	69	100 %

Source: Field data, 2025

Access to Library and Learning Materials: 60.60% of students reported having access to a library, while 39.40% did not. Access to a library is considered an important determinant of academic resources. Among parents, 40.6% stated their children lacked library access, and 23.2% were unsure. A majority of teacher respondents (56.5%) indicated that their students lacked library access. For learning materials, 74.5% of students reported having access, while 25.50% did not. However, parents indicated 34.80% of their children did not have access, and teachers reported that 50.7% of their students lacked access to learning materials. These findings suggest disparities in resource availability despite a majority of students reporting some access.

Table 5: Access to Library (Student Responses)

Response	Number of Students	Percentage (%)
Yes	83	60.60%
No	54	39.40%
Total	137	100%

Source: Field data, 2025

Table 6: Access to a Library (Parents and Teachers Responses)

Response	Parents %	Teachers %
Yes	36.20%	43.50%
No	40.60%	56.5%
I don't know	23.20%	0%

Source: Field data, 2025

Table 7: Access to Learning Materials (Parents and Teachers Responses)

Response	Parents %	Teachers %
Yes	40.60%	49.30%
No	34.80%	50.7%
I don't know	24.60%	0%

Source: Field data, 2025

Table 8: Access to Learning Materials (Student Responses)

Response	Number of Students	Percentage (%)
Yes	102	74.50%
No	35	25.50%
Total	137	100%

Source: Field data, 2025

Frequency of School Absenteeism due to Lack of School Fees: Student responses revealed that 41.6% had missed school once or twice, while 19.7% had never missed school. Alarming, 13.90% had missed school for more than 2 months per year, and 24.8% for more than 2 weeks per year, often due to lack of fees. Missing school for extended periods can severely impact academic performance. Parents' responses indicated that only 15.90% of their children never missed school, while 26.1% missed frequently. Teachers believed that 26.1% of students missed occasionally and 21.7% frequently, both confirming concerns regarding missed school days and their effect on academic performance due to financial constraints.

Table 9: Frequency of School Absenteeism (Student Responses)

Frequency of Absenteeism	Number of Students	Percentage (%)
Frequently, more than 2 months per year	19	13.90%
Occasionally, more than 2 weeks per year	34	24.80%
I have missed school once or twice	57	41.60%
I have never missed school	27	19.70%
Total	137	100%

Source: Field data, 2025

Table 10: Parents and Teachers Perspective on Student Absenteeism

Frequency	Parents %	Teachers %
Frequently	26.10%	21.70%
Occasionally	24.60%	26.10%
Once or twice	20.30%	18.80%
Never missed	15.90%	24.60%
I don't know	13.00%	8.70%

Source: Field data, 2025

Influence of Background on Performance: A strong majority of teachers (84.1%) and parents (78.3%) believed that students from well-off backgrounds generally perform better than those from disadvantaged backgrounds, illustrating a clear disparity perception in the academic sector.

Table 11: Influence of Background on Performance (Parents and Teachers Responses)

Response	Parents %	Teachers %
Yes	78.30%	84.10%
No	21.70%	15.90%

Source: Field data, 2025

Correlation Analysis (Family Social Status): The Spearman correlation analysis revealed a **weak and statistically insignificant relationship between parental income/education and student performance ($p = 0.09$)**. While socioeconomic status contributes to access to resources, this does not necessarily translate directly to improved academic performance. These results align with the observed descriptive data, where most students reported access to some academic resources despite modest parental education levels and income, suggesting possible resilience or compensating institutional support. Despite the weak correlation, the study noted a negative impact on academic performance due to disparities caused by income and social class, particularly evidenced by absenteeism due to financial constraints.

1.7 Conclusion

The study concludes that various socio-economic factors related to family social status influence academic performance with varying degrees of impact. While family socioeconomic status impacted access to academic resources and the school library, it did not show a direct strong statistical correlation with performance. However, it did reveal significant barriers to consistent school attendance, contributing to academic disparities. These social interventions are critical for enhancing academic equity and justice, ensuring all learners have a fair learning platform and equal academic opportunities.

1.8 Recommendations

Based on the findings regarding family social status, the study puts forth the following recommendations:
Parental Sensitization Programs: Schools should actively undertake programs for parental sensitization on the importance of parental involvement in academic activities, which can help mitigate the effects of lower social status by fostering a culture of support and engagement regardless of income or education level.

Community-Based Academic Programs: Governments and the private sector should support and implement community-based academic programs to improve the community's role in enhancing students' academic performance, especially targeting students from low socioeconomic backgrounds to bridge resource gaps and support consistent attendance. These programs can help address the disparities in resource access and reduce absenteeism linked to financial constraints.

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