



INFLUENCE OF PARENTAL SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS ON LEARNER'S ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN ISIOLO SUB-COUNTY, KENYA

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Abstract:

This study investigated the influence of parental socio-economic status on learner's academic performance in public secondary schools in Isiolo Sub-County, Kenya. The objectives were to assess the influence of parental income on learner's academic performance and to investigate the influence of parental education level on learner's academic performance in public secondary schools in Isiolo Sub-County, Kenya. Guided by Social Capital Theory, the study employed a mixed-method approach and convergent parallel design, integrating quantitative and qualitative data from structured questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and school records. The study targeted all 15 public secondary schools in the sub-county, with a stratified and simple random sample of nine schools. Participants included 9 principals, 103 teachers, 307 learners, and 27 representatives from the Parents Association (PA). The reliability of the quantitative data was confirmed using Cronbach's alpha, which yielded coefficients of 0.710 for teachers and 0.811 for learners. Credibility of the qualitative data was ensured through member checking and triangulation. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS version 23, employing numerical descriptive statistics, including frequency counts and percentages. Results were presented through tables, bar graphs, and pie charts. Chi-Square inferential analysis was used to assess the hypotheses and determine relationships between variables. Qualitative data were transcribed, coded, and analyzed thematically in line with the research questions. Thematic results were presented through narratives and

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direct quotations to capture participants' perspectives. Findings revealed that parental income and education have a significant impact on academic performance. Learners from low-income households struggled with school fees and basic materials, often resulting in absenteeism. Parents with higher levels of education were more committed to supporting their children's learning. The study recommends parent empowerment programs for rural and low-literacy communities, supported by low-cost school strategies like orientation guides, community hubs, and SMS updates. Further research should evaluate these approaches and include learners' perspectives to align parental support with their needs.

Keywords: parental socio-economic status, learner's academic performance, parental income, parental education level

1. Introduction

Education is widely recognized as a fundamental human right and an essential driver of national development, social equity, and personal empowerment (UNESCO, 2021; UNICEF, 2020). However, ongoing socio-economic disparities still restrict equitable learning opportunities and outcomes worldwide (World Bank, 2020; OECD, 2022). Key aspects of socio-economic status include parental income and parental education, which directly influence learner's academic performance. Income influences a household's ability to provide essential resources, ensure regular attendance, and alleviate stress related to financial instability. Parental education equips families with the skills, confidence, and cultural capital to engage actively in their children's education. These factors together form a key framework for explaining variations in academic achievement (UNESCO, 2021; UNICEF, 2021).

Research worldwide consistently shows a strong link between parental income and learner's academic outcomes. In countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom, family income plays a critical role in access to quality schools, tutoring, and enrichment opportunities that enhance learning experiences (Vadivel, 2023). Conversely, children from low-income households are more likely to experience chronic absenteeism, lack sufficient learning materials, and suffer the psychological effects of financial stress, all of which impede academic performance (OECD, 2022; UNESCO, 2021). Similarly, parental education is a significant predictor of academic success. Educated parents tend to encourage positive attitudes toward learning, actively engage with teachers, and provide consistent supervision of their children's academic tasks (Sharma & Gaur, 2021; Vadivel, 2023).

In developing countries, the impact of these factors is even more pronounced. For instance, in South Asia, children from low-income households often drop out of school to support family livelihoods, a challenge closely tied to household financial instability (Sharma & Gaur, 2021). Low parental education further exacerbates this issue, as illiterate parents frequently lack the capacity to guide their children's studies or interact effectively

with schools (UNICEF, 2021). Similarly, in sub-Saharan Africa, children from households with educated parents perform better in examinations and have higher retention rates compared to peers from less-educated backgrounds (Jacobs, 2023; Brew *et al.*, 2021). These findings underscore the dual importance of financial stability and parental literacy in promoting academic success.

In Kenya, despite government interventions on Free Primary Education (2003) and Free Day Secondary Education (2008), significant barriers remain. Families continue to bear indirect schooling costs, including uniforms, transportation, and examination fees, which pose challenges for low-income households. Learners from such families often face absenteeism, poor concentration, and lack of basic resources, all of which undermine academic achievement (Njuguna, 2021; Answar & Biutha, 2022). Parental education also plays a vital role in shaping learner outcomes. Parents with secondary or higher education are generally more capable of assisting with homework, engaging with teachers, and setting expectations for their children. Conversely, illiteracy or low literacy among parents, especially in rural and marginalized areas, limits their capacity to provide effective academic support (Wambugu & Gichaga, 2022; Chege & Otieno, 2021).

Isiolo County exemplifies these challenges. As a predominantly rural and pastoralist region, it faces high poverty levels and limited access to stable income sources. Many families rely on livestock and small-scale trade, both of which are extremely vulnerable to drought and economic instability (Isiolo County Education Office, 2019). This fragile financial environment directly affects learners, as parents regularly struggle to cover educational expenses. Absenteeism, delayed fee payments, and inadequate learning materials are common among students from low-income households, contributing to poor academic performance (Answar & Biutha, 2022; Audi, Nketiah, & Koranteng, 2024). Moreover, low literacy levels among parents restrict their ability to support learners at home or engage actively with school programs. Parents with little or no formal education often lack confidence in assisting with homework, monitoring progress, or advocating for their sons and daughters (Muchunku, 2020).

The cumulative effect of these barriers is reflected in the academic performance of learners in Isiolo Sub-County. Reports from the Ministry of Education and county examination results reveal a persistent gap between learners from relatively stable, educated households and those from low-income, less-educated families (Isiolo County Education Office, 2019; MoE, 2021). Students from wealthier, better-educated households are more likely to remain in school, perform well in examinations, and progress to higher education (UNESCO, 2021; OECD, 2022). By contrast, students from less affluent and less-educated households often struggle with irregular attendance, lower grades, and limited progression (Muchunku, 2020; Answar & Biutha, 2022). Although many learners demonstrate resilience and determination, structural barriers linked to poverty and illiteracy continue to constrain their full potential (UNICEF, 2020; Audi *et al.*, 2024).

Considering these realities, this study focused specifically on the influence of parental income and education on learner's academic performance in public secondary schools in Isiolo Sub-County, Kenya. While global and regional research affirms the

importance of these two factors, few studies have been conducted in this marginalized county where economic instability and low literacy prevail. By examining how income and education interact to influence learner outcomes, this study provides evidence to inform policy interventions and school-level strategies aimed at promoting equitable academic achievement in Isiolo and similar contexts.

2. Statement of the Problem

Education is widely recognized as a powerful driver of individual empowerment and societal progress. Yet, persistent socio-economic disparities continue to limit equitable academic achievement, particularly among learners from low socio-economic (SES) households (UNESCO, 2021; UNICEF, 2020). In Isiolo Sub-County, these disparities are particularly pronounced, where many learners face obstacles such as inadequate learning resources, poor nutrition, long distances to school, and unstable home environments. These challenges contribute to irregular attendance, high dropout rates, and low academic performance, thereby perpetuating poverty and social inequality in the region (Answar & Biutha, 2022; Brew *et al.*, 2021).

Although global research has consistently linked parental SES to academic outcomes, a significant contextual gap persists in marginalized and pastoralist regions like Isiolo. Studies from developed contexts, including the United States (UC Berkeley, 2024) and Australia (PISA, 2022), demonstrate how parental education and income influence academic achievement but lack culturally relevant interventions tailored for rural African settings. Likewise, research in the UK (Vadivel, 2023) and Kenya (Njuguna, 2021) emphasizes parental involvement and socio-economic challenges but often overlooks the distinct dynamics of pastoralist livelihoods and fragile educational infrastructure in Isiolo. This knowledge gap limits the development of effective and context-specific strategies that address the dual influence of parental income and parental education on learners' academic performance. Without such insights, disadvantaged learners in Isiolo Sub-County remain at risk of poor educational outcomes, further entrenching cycles of inequality and undermining efforts to achieve inclusive and equitable quality education.

2.1 Research Objectives

- 1) To assess the influence of parental income on learner's academic performance in public secondary schools in Isiolo Sub-County, Kenya.
- 2) To investigate the influence of parental education level on learner's academic performance in public secondary schools in Isiolo Sub-County, Kenya.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in Pierre Bourdieu's Social Capital Theory, as articulated in *The Forms of Capital* (Bourdieu, 1986). Bourdieu argues that educational outcomes are shaped

not only by material resources but also by intangible assets transmitted through families. He identifies three interrelated forms of capital: economic capital, which represents financial and material resources; cultural capital, representing knowledge, skills, values, and educational attainment; and social capital, which is networks and relationships that provide access to resources and opportunities. The unequal distribution of these forms of capital across social classes influences academic performance, often reproducing existing inequalities in education systems (Bourdieu, 1973; 1986).

Within this study, the theory is applied to explain how parental financial capacity and parental education, the two key dimensions of socio-economic status under investigation, affect learner's academic performance. Parental financial capacity reflects economic capital, enabling access to school fees, textbooks, digital tools, and conducive study environments. Learners from households with limited financial means often face irregular attendance, restricted access to resources, and an increased likelihood of dropping out. Parental education, on the other hand, represents **intellectual capital**. Parents with higher levels of education are better able to guide learners academically, communicate with teachers, and foster positive attitudes toward schooling. In contrast, parents with little or no formal schooling may struggle to provide similar support. Together, these two dimensions demonstrate how disparities in access to economic and cultural capital directly shape learners' academic outcomes.

Bourdieu's Social Capital Theory provides a strong framework for understanding the impact of parental income and education on learner's academic performance. It moves beyond viewing resources purely in financial terms by highlighting the importance of cultural capital, such as educational values and parental engagement, which are often overlooked in research. In the Kenyan context, where access to education is shaped by both material resources and the educational background of parents, the theory provides a nuanced explanation of how family circumstances influence learner outcomes.

Despite its strengths, Bourdieu's theory has limitations. It tends to understate individual learner motivation and resilience, factors that can enable success even in low-income or low-education households. Measuring cultural and social capital also presents challenges, as these are less tangible than financial indicators. Additionally, external influences such as school quality, government bursaries, and community support are not explicitly captured in the theory. To mitigate these gaps, the study complemented the theoretical lens with qualitative data from principals and representatives of the Parents' Association (PA) to provide a more holistic understanding of learners' experiences.

The relevance of Bourdieu's Social Capital Theory to this study lies in its ability to explain how economic and cultural capital, represented here by parental income and education, shape educational outcomes. In Isiolo Sub-County, where many households face financial instability and low literacy levels, income determines access to essential learning materials and regular school attendance. Parental education influences the quality of academic guidance and home support learners receive. By applying this theory, the study examines how disparities in income and education contribute to

differences in academic performance among learners in public secondary schools, thereby offering insights into equity-oriented educational interventions.

4. Literature Review

4.1 Parental Income on Learner's Academic Performance

Parental income plays a crucial role in shaping learner's academic achievement, as outlined by Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1964), which views parental investment in education through time, finances, and resources as essential to academic development. Blanden *et al.* (2022) emphasize income as a key factor influencing the quality and breadth of educational opportunities, while Rosenzweig and Zhang (2009) highlight that financial stability supports effective learning environments. Nevertheless, these perspectives often understate other influential factors such as parental education, cultural background, and community support, which are integral to a holistic understanding of academic performance. This current study defines parental income as the financial resources available to families that facilitate access to quality education and enrichment opportunities. It highlights the direct impact of financial capacity on educational support, presenting income as a central factor in creating an environment conducive to academic success.

Empirical evidence strongly supports this framework. Chetty *et al.* (2020) conducted a large-scale study in the United States examining the relationship between parental income, college enrollment, and post-college earnings. Analyzing de-identified tax records of approximately 20 million individuals born between 1980 and 1982, they found a significant correlation between parental income and college placement. Their findings revealed that, despite having comparable academic qualifications, students from low-income families were disproportionately underrepresented in elite institutions. This highlights the persistent impact of socio-economic disparities on access to higher education.

While Chetty *et al.*'s study offers valuable insights into the long-term effects of income on educational outcomes, it concentrated on higher education in a U.S. context. In contrast, the current research examines the secondary school level, where academic foundations are laid, and uses a mixed-methods approach to capture both quantitative trends and qualitative insights. By situating the research within the rural setting of Isiolo Sub-County, Kenya, this study sought to generate localized insights into how parental socio-economic status influences academic performance in public secondary schools, an area that remains underexplored.

Wiborg and Grätz (2022) examine the influence of parental income and wealth on children's academic performance in Norway. The study used national register data and quantile regression models. Their findings revealed that financial resources exerted a disproportionately positive effect on lower-achieving students, underscoring the compensatory role of economic capital in educational attainment. Their study was conducted within a high-income European context and relied on administrative datasets

and advanced statistical techniques. Despite these contextual and methodological differences, the findings contribute to the growing global discourse on the socio-economic determinants of academic success. Building on this foundation, the present study shifted the focus to a lower-income context of public secondary schools in Isiolo Sub-County, Kenya. It investigated how parental income, as a component of broader socio-economic status, shapes learners' academic outcomes. The study employed a cross-sectional design using both surveys and interviews to collect primary data. By doing so, it addressed critical contextual and methodological gaps, offering localized insights into a globally relevant issue.

In their 2022 study in Nongoma, South Africa's Zululand District, Iwaloye et al. examined how poverty traps affect the academic performance of secondary school students. The study used a mixed-methods approach, involving teachers and students from five public high schools. Using purposive sampling, the researchers selected five teachers, one from each school, and fifty students. Data was gathered through both qualitative and quantitative methods. The results showed that poverty traps like financial hardship, low student motivation, and school dropout significantly hinder academic achievement. The study highlighted the need for collaborative efforts among stakeholders to improve infrastructure, redistribute resources, and change students' mindsets. Iwaloye et al.'s (2022) research provides valuable insights into how poverty impacts educational outcomes. Building on this, the current study was carried out in Isiolo Sub-County, Kenya, focusing specifically on parental socio-economic status rather than general poverty-related factors. Although both studies used mixed methods, the present research expanded its scope by including a more diverse sample from public secondary schools in a rural Kenyan context.

Masereka, Tukur, and Abdul-Rahim (2023) conducted a study in the Kitwamba and Rugendabara-Kikongo Town Councils of Kasese District, Uganda. The study was to examine how family income influences the academic performance of secondary school students. Using a cross-sectional survey design, the study targeted students and head teachers in selected secondary schools. Data were collected from 286 students and five head teachers through structured questionnaires. The findings revealed a strong positive correlation between higher family income and improved academic performance. Wealthier students benefited from better access to learning resources, regular attendance, and supportive home environments. In contrast, learners from low-income families faced challenges like irregular attendance and limited educational support, which negatively impacted their academic outcomes. While the previous study provides valuable insights into the impact of family income on academic performance, it focuses primarily on a specific region in Uganda, therefore, offering limited exploration of other socio-economic factors. The present study aimed to bridge this gap by examining the broader influence of parental socio-economic status on academic performance in public secondary schools in Isiolo Sub-County, Kenya. Using a convergent parallel design, the study integrated both quantitative and qualitative data. This approach provided a comprehensive

understanding of how socio-economic factors impact learner's academic success in this context.

Ngangi, Mwanja, and Cheloti (2023) investigated Parental financial capacity and its implications on students' academic performance in public secondary schools in Kangundo Sub-County. Using Epstein's (1995) Framework of Six Types of Parental Involvement, the study applied a descriptive survey design targeting 27 public schools. The study involved 27 school heads, 27 parents' association chairpersons, 339 teachers, and 2,663 Form Three students, with a sample of 498 respondents. Census sampling was used for school heads and chairpersons, while stratified random sampling was used for teachers and students. Data was collected through questionnaires and interviews. Validity was ensured through expert review and piloting, and reliability was tested using the test-retest method. Data analysis using SPSS (version 26.0) showed a moderate positive correlation between parental income and academic performance. This indicated that income has a significant impact on learner outcomes. While the previous study relied on Epstein's framework, this current research adopted Bourdieu's Socio-Economic Theory for a broader analysis of parental influence on academic performance in Isiolo Sub-County. Unlike Epstein's focus on parental involvement, Bourdieu's theory examines structural inequalities, including social, economic, and cultural capital. This allowed for a deeper understanding of how access to resources, parental education, and occupational status shape learning outcomes beyond direct school engagement.

A study conducted in Kenya by Muchunku, Nelson, and Beatrice (2020) investigated the effect of household income on pupil retention in public day primary schools in Isiolo County. Using a correlational research design, they analyzed data from 3,594 Standard Seven pupils and 546 teachers across 91 schools. The study revealed a significant positive relationship between parental income and pupil retention. It indicated that higher household income increases the likelihood of learners remaining in school. While this study provided important insights into the impact of parental income on retention in primary schools, it does not address the broader socio-economic factors that affect academic performance. This is particularly true for secondary schools, where other factors may play a more significant role. The current research sought to bridge this gap by focusing on public secondary schools in Isiolo Sub-County. It examined how broader dimensions of parental socio-economic status, such as education, income, occupation, and access to learning resources, affect academic performance.

4.2 Parental Education Level on Learner's Academic Performance

Parental education level plays a pivotal role in shaping learner's academic experiences and outcomes. It refers not only to the highest level of formal education attained by parents but also to their ability to support their children's learning. This includes informed commitment and the provision of resources. Smith and Mayer (2019) highlight its direct influence on academic performance, including grades, attendance, and student engagement. Similarly, Degree Lamar University (2024) emphasizes the role of educated parents in fostering a learning-centered home environment. However, a purely academic

view may miss important aspects of parental involvement. Hill and Tyson (2009) argue that parental education extends beyond formal credentials to include active participation in activities like reading at home and attending school events. Cheadle (2008) adds that the impact of parental education is shaped by broader socio-economic conditions, particularly income, and access to resources, which influence the quality and consistency of educational support.

Guided by these perspectives, the current study defined parental education level as the highest formal education attained by parents. It also considers their ability to foster academic success through active engagement and resource support within the constraints of their socio-economic context. This definition encompasses both the foundational and practical aspects of parental education, offering a deeper and more nuanced understanding of its impact on learner achievement.

Building on this conceptual framework, Bhandari and Timsina (2024) conducted a study in Nepal's Makawanpur District to examine the impact of parental education on students' academic performance. Using a cross-sectional survey, Bhandari and Timsina (2024) collected data from 386 students in 14 high schools. Linear regression showed a strong positive correlation between parental education and academic performance ($R = 0.711$), accounting for 50.5% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.505$). The results were statistically significant ($f = 97.185$, $p < 0.05$), confirming its critical role in student achievement. Bhandari and Timsina's study, conducted in Nepal, focused solely on parental education using a quantitative approach. In contrast, the current research was undertaken in Isiolo Sub-County, Kenya. It examined a broader range of socio-economic factors, including income, education, occupation, and access to learning resources. It also used a mixed-methods approach and a convergent parallel design to capture statistical trends and lived experiences, addressing methodological and contextual gaps.

Hidayatullah and Csíkos (2024) conducted a study in Surabaya, Indonesia, to explore how students' beliefs, parental education, attitudes, and motivation relate to mathematics achievement. The study employed a quantitative approach using structural equation modeling to analyze data collected from 894 randomly selected fifth- and sixth-grade students across 30 classes in six schools. Structured instruments were used to measure students' beliefs, parental education, attitudes, motivation, and math achievement. Findings showed that beliefs significantly influenced achievement both directly ($\beta = 0.20$, $p < 0.001$) and indirectly through attitude ($\beta = 0.31$, $p < 0.001$) and motivation ($\beta = 0.08$, $p = 0.01$). Parental education was positively associated with students' achievement ($\beta = 0.17$, $p < 0.001$) and motivation ($\beta = 0.07$, $p = 0.04$), although its indirect effect on achievement through motivation was not significant. While Hidayatullah and Csíkos (2024) focused on parental education and student beliefs in mathematics achievement using quantitative analysis, the current study took a broader perspective. It adopted a mixed-methods approach to explore the influence of parental socio-economic status, including income, education, occupation, and provision of learning resources, on general academic performance in Isiolo Sub-County. This ensured a deeper, contextually

relevant analysis beyond statistical associations, addressing conceptual, methodological, and contextual gaps in research on marginalized communities.

A study by Amusan (2022) investigated the influence of parental education on students' academic performance in public senior secondary schools within the Abuja Municipal Area Council (AMAC), Nigeria. The study adopted a descriptive survey design and targeted students from 12 out of the 24 public senior secondary schools in AMAC. Data were collected using a structured instrument titled the "Parental Education Position Questionnaire" (PEPQ). The findings revealed a significant relationship between parental education and academic performance, indicating that higher parental education levels positively influence student achievement. While Amusan (2022) examined parental education in Nigeria using only structured questionnaires, the present study addressed this gap by exploring the influence of parental occupation, an aspect of socio-economic status, on learners' academic performance in public secondary schools in Isiolo Sub-County, Kenya. It adopted a cross-sectional design and employed both surveys and interviews to generate richer, context-specific data.

Namukose and Sendagi (2024) investigated the impact of parental education on pupils' academic performance in primary schools in Pallisa District, Uganda. The study employed a mixed-methods approach, targeting a population of 401 and sampling 196 respondents. The sample consisted of 3 head teachers, 34 teachers, 1 District Education Officer, 56 members from the Parents-Teachers Association (PTA) and School Management Committee, and 102 Primary Seven pupils. Purposive and simple random sampling techniques were used. Data was collected through questionnaires and interviews. The investigation found that parental education has a strong impact on academic performance. This effect is particularly evident through active involvement in homework, assisting with school tasks, responding to school communication, and creating a supportive home learning environment. Namukose and Sendagi's (2024) research sheds light on the role of parental education in primary school performance. In contrast, the current research focused on secondary education. It employed a broader perspective to examine additional socio-economic status (SES) dimensions such as parental income, occupation, and access to learning resources in Isiolo Sub-County.

In a study conducted in Temeke District, Dar es Salaam Region, Tanzania, Masumbuko (2023) explored the influence of parental involvement on pupils' academic performance in public primary schools. Employing a descriptive cross-sectional design, the research utilized both qualitative and quantitative approaches and drew data from head teachers, academic teachers, class teachers, parents, and pupils. Data collection methods included semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, and document reviews. The findings revealed that parental involvement, closely linked to the parents' level of education, had a significant impact on learners' academic outcomes. While the focus was on primary education, the present study extended this line of inquiry to public secondary schools in Isiolo Sub-County, Kenya, specifically examining how parental education, as a key dimension of socio-economic status, affects academic performance.

Chemagosi (2020) carried out a study in Nandi County, Kenya, to investigate how parental education affects the academic performance of pre-primary learners, prompted by concerns over minimal parental involvement in education. The study was guided by Epstein's Parental Involvement Theory and utilized a descriptive survey design. From a target population of 500 head teachers, 1,000 teachers, and 10,000 parents, a sample of 50 head teachers, 100 teachers, and 100 parents was selected using purposive, stratified, and random sampling techniques. Data was gathered using questionnaires, interview guides, and focus group discussions. Validity was ensured through content and face validity, while reliability was tested using the split-half method. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, and qualitative data were analyzed thematically. The findings indicated a strong positive relationship between parental education and learner achievement. Higher parental education levels led to more active involvement and better academic performance among children. While Chemagosi (2020) focused on pre-primary schools in Nandi County using Epstein's framework, the current study examined how parental education influences academic performance in public secondary schools in Isiolo Sub-County. It applied Social Capital Theory to explore the parental socio-economic factors on student achievement within Isiolo's unique socio-economic and cultural context.

Abdinoor (2012) examined socio-economic, socio-cultural, and school-based factors affecting KCSE performance in Isiolo County, Kenya. The intention was to address persistent low academic outcomes. Using a descriptive survey design, the study targeted 527 individuals, sampling 124 respondents, including students, teachers, head teachers, and quality assurance officers. Data was collected through questionnaires, interviews, and observation schedules, guided by the Education Production Function (EPF) theory. The results showed that parental education positively influenced performance, while poverty, cultural practices, and poor school conditions hindered achievement. While Abdinoor's study highlights factors like parental education and socio-economic challenges, it does not explore broader dimensions of parental socio-economic status, such as income, occupation, and access to learning resources. The current study sought to bridge this gap by focusing on these factors as key determinants of academic performance in public secondary schools in Isiolo Sub-County. Guided by Bourdieu's Social Capital Theory and adopting a mixed-methods approach, the research examined how family background and social networks influence learners' outcomes.

5. Research Methodology

The study adopted a mixed-methods research approach with a convergent parallel design. The target population was 15 public secondary schools in Isiolo Sub-County, including 15 principals, 138 teachers, 1,324 Form Three learners, and 45 Parents' Association representatives. From this, a sample of 9 principals, 103 teachers, 307 learners, and 27 representatives of the Parents' Association was drawn using both probability and non-probability sampling techniques. Stratified and simple random

sampling techniques were applied to select teachers and learners, whereas principals and representatives of the Parents' Association were purposively sampled due to their administrative roles. Data were collected using structured questionnaires for teachers and learners, semi-structured interview guides for principals and Parents' Association representatives, and a document analysis guide for reviewing KCSE results, attendance registers, fee payment records, and bursary lists. A pilot study was conducted in one school with similar characteristics to those sampled for the main study to assess the clarity and reliability of the instruments. Expert reviewers from Tangaza University and the Catholic University of Eastern Africa validated the research instruments for content relevance. Reliability was measured using Cronbach's Alpha, with coefficients of 0.710 for teachers' questionnaires and 0.811 for learners' questionnaires. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS version 23, employing descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, and means, and inferential statistics using Chi-square tests. Results were presented in tables, bar graphs, and pie charts. Qualitative data were transcribed, coded, and analyzed thematically, with findings presented in narratives and direct quotations.

6. Research Findings

6.1 Parental Income and Learner's Academic Performance

The first objective of the study was to assess the influence of parental income on learner's academic performance in public secondary schools in Isiolo Sub-County, Kenya. Quantitative data were collected from 90 teachers and 255 learners using a structured 5-point Likert-scale questionnaire, while qualitative data were obtained from representatives of the Parents' Association and school principals through interviews. Table 1 presents the responses, with the following Likert-scale options: NS = Not Sure, SD = Strongly Disagree, D = Disagree, A = Agree, SA = Strongly Agree.

Table 1 indicates a significant consensus among both teachers and learners regarding the influence of parental income on learners' academic performance. Quantitative data indicate that 94% of teachers (21% agreed and 73% strongly agreed) believe that learners from low-income families often struggle to pay school fees, leading to absenteeism or being sent home. Similarly, 86% of learners (39% agreed and 47% strongly agreed) reported missing school because of unpaid fees. This agreement underscores the importance of school fee payments as a significant factor influencing both attendance and academic success, highlighting how household income impacts these outcomes. These findings support Iwaloye *et al.* (2022), who identify poverty as a primary cause of absenteeism in sub-Saharan Africa. These results reaffirm the critical link between socio-economic disparities and educational access, underscoring the urgency of addressing financial barriers to schooling. This pattern was not only evident in the quantitative data but also echoed in the interviews with key informants.

Table 1: Teachers' and Learners' Likert-scale Rating Responses Relating to the Influence of Parental Income on Learners' Academic Performance

Statement										
Teachers (n = 90)	NS		SD		D		A		SA	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	F	%	F	%
Learners from low-income families often struggle to pay school fees.	0	0	2	2	3	3	19	21	66	73
Financial challenges at home contribute to absenteeism.	1	1	2	2	4	4	32	36	51	57
Parental income determines learners' access to academic materials.	2	2	3	3	6	7	41	46	38	42
My school has systems to support financially needy learners.	20	22	23	26	24	27	18	20	5	6
Learners (n = 255)	NS		SD		D		A		SA	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	F	%	F	%
I sometimes miss school due to a lack of school fees.	0	0	18	7	19	7	99	39	119	47
My academic performance is affected when my parents face financial issues.	0	0	17	7	28	11	103	40	107	42
My parents can provide me with enough resources for learning.	7	3	74	29	98	38	44	17	32	13
I receive lunch or transport support due to financial need.	5	2	74	29	109	43	49	19	18	7
I am motivated to succeed regardless of my family's economic situation.	5	2	26	10	55	22	88	35	81	32
My school offers bursaries or scholarships to needy students.	35	14	58	23	53	21	65	25	44	17

For instance, one principal pointed out:

"Many learners are often sent home because their parents cannot pay school fees on time. This issue significantly impacts learner attendance and overall academic performance. Our school relies heavily on contributions from parents; however, most of them are subsistence farmers with limited financial resources. As a result, many students miss important learning opportunities, which harms their academic growth." (Principal 1, 1/7/25)

This highlights that parental income is a key factor in school attendance and continuous learning. When families are unable to cover financial needs, students experience repeated disruptions that hinder steady academic progress and success.

Likewise, Parents' Association representatives reflected on systemic barriers to accessing financial support. They emphasized that although bursaries and government-sponsored programs are theoretically available, many families remain excluded due to a lack of information, bureaucratic complexities, or social stigma associated with seeking assistance. One of the parent Association representatives explained this during the interview:

"Many parents cannot pay school fees on time, which causes some learners to miss school altogether. Although bursaries exist to help, only a few parents know how to apply for them. The rest either fear the process or don't fully understand how it works, so many families miss out on the support they need." (Parent 1, 1/7 2025)

These systemic barriers not only limit the number of learners who can benefit from existing schemes but also exacerbate inequalities between households with better networks and awareness and those who remain marginalized. Such reflections underscore that financial hardship is not solely a matter of parental income but is compounded by institutional inefficiencies and limited accessibility of support mechanisms. This resonates with Lematango and Kathuri's (2021) analysis of institutional barriers exacerbating poverty-related absenteeism.

Principals further elaborated on the link between poverty and school absenteeism. One noted, *"Some learners are sent home frequently because parents cannot afford the school fees"*, while another remarked, *"The school depends heavily on parents' contributions, but many parents are peasants with very low income"*. Complementing these insights, document analysis revealed widespread arrears on fees and inconsistent bursary coverage. These findings corroborate with Masereka *et al.* (2023), illustrating how the school's financial dependence on parental fees perpetuates vulnerability among students from low-income households. Financial constraints severely restrict learners' access to essential academic resources. Survey data indicate that 88% of teachers (46% agreed and 42% strongly agreed) associate parental income with learners' access to educational materials. This high percentage suggests a strong consensus among teachers that financial resources directly determine whether learners can obtain books, stationery, and other key learning tools, which are critical for effective class participation.

From the learners' perspective, 67% disagreed or strongly disagreed that their parents provided adequate learning resources. This perception underscores a gap between what schools expect and what parents can afford, indicating that many students face daily struggles in accessing the very materials needed to complete assignments and follow lessons. Additionally, 72% of learners reported insufficient support for necessities such as meals and transport. These findings highlight that beyond academic tools, many learners contend with unmet basic needs, which compound absenteeism and undermine their concentration in class. In highlighting the heavy toll of poverty on learner attendance, one principal narrated:

"Some learners are sent home frequently because their parents cannot afford the school fees. Even purchasing exercise books or uniforms poses a major obstacle for many families, often forcing children to miss classes or drop out altogether. For most parents in this community, raising money for such expenses is a struggle since they rely on small-scale farming and casual labor, which are unpredictable and provide very little income. As a result, learners are discouraged, their attendance becomes irregular, and some eventually abandon schooling altogether." (Principal 6, 3/7/2025)

Such findings are consistent with Iwaloye *et al.* (2022), who emphasize poverty's broad impact on both attendance and resource access, thereby limiting learning outcomes.

Despite these financial and logistical barriers, learner resilience was a prominent theme. A total of 67% of learners (35% agreed and 32% strongly agreed) expressed strong motivation to succeed regardless of their families' economic status. This shows that while poverty limits access to resources, many learners develop a determined mindset, seeing education as a pathway out of hardship. Their commitment to learning reflects an adaptive coping strategy that counters the disadvantages of a low socio-economic status household. Parent Association members and principals verified this, describing students who strive to excel despite adversity. One parent observed, *"Some learners work extra hard because they know their parents are struggling."* Echoing this, the principal explained:

"Some learners indeed push themselves academically because they are aware of their parents' challenges. They often take advantage of the goodwill of classmates from well-off families by borrowing their textbooks and other learning materials, which helps them keep up with schoolwork. In addition, these learners show determination by attending remedial sessions, sharing notes, and sometimes even walking long distances to school without complaint. Their motivation stems from the desire not to waste the sacrifices their parents are making, no matter how little, to keep them in school." (Principal 2, 2025)

This observation aligns with cultural findings from Masereka *et al.* (2023), which highlight intrinsic determination among students confronting socioeconomic challenges. Their study demonstrated that even in environments of severe poverty, learners often cultivate resilience as a survival strategy, drawing motivation from both personal aspirations and the desire to uplift their families. Such intrinsic determination reflects a broader cultural understanding that education is not only a personal achievement but also a collective investment in the family's future. In this way, resilience becomes both an individual and community resource, enabling learners to persist in their academic journeys despite persistent financial and social barriers.

To examine whether parental income influences learners' academic performance, teachers' and learners' Likert-scale responses were analyzed using a Chi-Square test of independence. The null hypothesis was stated as: H_{01} : There is no statistically significant association between teachers' and learners' ratings of the influence of parental income on learners' academic performance in public secondary schools in Isiolo Sub-County. The Chi-Square test, processed in SPSS, assessed whether the observed frequencies of agreement or disagreement differed significantly from what would be expected by chance. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Chi-Square Test Results for the Influence of
Parental Income on Learner's Academic Performance

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	17.772a	4	.001
N of Valid Cases	345		

Results ($\chi^2 = 17.772$, $df = 4$, $p = 0.001$) indicated a statistically significant association between teachers' and learners' perceptions of parental income and its influence on academic performance. At a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$, the critical chi-square value for 4 degrees of freedom is 9.488. Since the calculated chi-square value (17.772) exceeded the critical value (9.488), and the p-value (0.001) was also below 0.05, the null hypothesis was rejected. This confirms that both groups consistently agree that parental income significantly influences learner's academic performance, thereby reinforcing the reliability of the descriptive results. The inference drawn is that higher parental income enhances academic performance, while limited income constrains it. The findings further affirm Bourdieu's (1986) Social Capital Theory by showing that low parental income restricts school fee payment, access to learning resources, and institutional support, which in turn contributes to absenteeism and poor academic performance patterns consistent with studies in sub-Saharan Africa (Iwaloye *et al.*, 2022; Lematango & Kathuri, 2021; Masereka *et al.*, 2023). Although learners demonstrate resilience, systemic barriers such as limited access to bursaries continue to hinder their potential. The results highlight the profound implications of socio-economic inequality on educational outcomes. This illustrates how structural barriers sustain academic disparities, highlighting the urgent need for policy interventions to close this gap.

7.2 Parental Education Level and Learner's Academic Performance

The second objective of the study was to investigate the influence of parental education level on learners' academic performance in public secondary schools in Isiolo Sub-County, Kenya. Quantitative data were collected from 90 teachers and 255 learners using a structured 5-point Likert-scale questionnaire, while qualitative data were gathered from Parents' Association representatives and school principals through interviews. Table 3 presents the responses, with the following Likert-scale options: NS = Not Sure, SD = Strongly Disagree, D = Disagree, A = Agree, SA = Strongly Agree.

Teachers and learners rated their agreement on the influence of parental education on learners' academic performance using a 5-point Likert scale, with responses from 90 teachers and 255 learners summarized in Table 3. Quantitative data show a striking consensus: over 90% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that parents with higher education actively support their children's learning and regularly attend school meetings to monitor progress. This high proportion suggests that teacher perceptions strongly favor the view that parental education directly shapes learner success through involvement. Similarly, 91% of teachers believed that learners from less-educated backgrounds require additional academic support. However, only 46% felt that schools

provide adequate targeted interventions, indicating a structural gap in addressing the needs of disadvantaged students. These quantitative results were reinforced by interview insights from Parents' Association (PA) representatives.

Table 3: Teachers' and Learners' Likert-scale Rating Responses Relating to the Influence of Parental Educational Level on Learners' Academic Performance

Statement										
Teachers (n = 90)	NS		SD		D		A		SA	
	f	%	F	%	f	%	F	%	F	%
Parents with higher education levels actively support their children's learning.	2	2	1	1	5	6	36	40	46	51
Educated parents attend school meetings and follow up on their children's progress.	0	0	1	1	12	13	51	57	26	29
Students from less educated backgrounds require more academic support.	0	0	2	2	6	7	34	38	48	53
The school provides targeted support to disadvantaged learners.	17	19	8	9	24	27	36	40	5	6
Learners (n = 255)	NS		SD		D		A		SA	
	f	%	F	%	f	%	F	%	F	%
My parents help me with my homework.	1	0	78	31	102	40	62	24	12	5
I perform better because my parents encourage me to study.	3	1	13	5	55	22	104	41	80	31
Learners with less-educated parents receive little academic support at home.	19	7	34	13	43	17	85	33	74	29
Educated parents understand and support their children academically.	12	5	12	5	14	5	101	40	116	45
I get motivated to work hard by seeing the educational achievements of my parents.	2	1	21	8	82	32	92	36	58	23
Teachers and staff at school support students from disadvantaged backgrounds.	23	9	54	21	53	21	92	36	33	13

One parent observed:

"Educated parents understand the value of schooling and consistently try to support it. They attend meetings, monitor assignments, and engage teachers to track progress. By contrast, parents with little or no education often leave the entire responsibility to the school, sometimes without even knowing the subjects their children are studying. This difference contributes to the better performance of learners from educated families."
(Parent 2, 1/7/2025)

This testimony highlights the critical role of parental education in shaping learner outcomes. Educated parents are perceived as actively involved in their children's schooling through practices such as attending meetings, monitoring assignments, and maintaining communication with teachers. This aligns with Bourdieu's Social Capital Theory, which emphasizes that parental education contributes to cultural capital, equipping families with knowledge, attitudes, and practices that enable them to support

and guide their children's schooling more effectively (Bourdieu, 1986). Similarly, Hidayatullah and Csíkos (2024) emphasized that parental education constitutes cultural capital, which enables parents to guide and support their children's academic growth effectively.

Learners' voices further echoed this pattern. About 85% agreed that educated parents support their academic efforts, indicating that most learners recognize the positive role parental education plays in fostering academic commitment. Similarly, 72% acknowledged that parental encouragement boosts performance, showing that motivation from educated parents directly strengthens learner's confidence and achievement. However, only 29% reported receiving regular homework assistance at home, which reveals that while parental education is valued, consistent academic engagement at home remains limited. In addition, 62% pointed out that students from less educated families rarely receive academic support, underscoring the disadvantage faced by learners whose parents lack educational background. Finally, less than 49% acknowledged receiving targeted support from school staff, highlighting a structural gap in institutional mechanisms designed to offset limited parental involvement. From a theoretical perspective, these findings demonstrate how disparities in parental education translate into unequal access to cultural and social capital, thereby shaping learner's academic trajectories (Bourdieu, 1986).

Principals also highlighted this issue during the interview. One principal explained, *"Parents with higher education see the value of school and ensure their children attend regularly."* Another pointed out the challenges faced by less-educated parents, stating:

"Illiterate parents often depend on their children to interpret school communications, such as letters, announcements, or progress reports. This reliance sometimes results in misinterpretation or distortion of information, especially when students know the content directly affects them. Consequently, crucial details may be withheld or altered, creating gaps in understanding that hinder effective parental involvement and weaken the home-school support system." (Principal 3, 2/7/2025)

These findings indicate that parental education greatly impacts a learner's academic performance by influencing motivation and access to support at home. Learners with educated parents receive encouragement, guidance, and active engagement in school. Learners whose parents lack formal education face structural challenges, such as difficulties understanding school communications and limited participation in school events. School records also confirm that parents with less education are less likely to attend meetings or follow up on academic issues, which reduces their involvement in their children's learning.

These results align with earlier studies by Chemagosi (2020), who found that parental education has a strong influence on children's school participation and motivation. It also aligns with Kathuri's (2021) study, which observed that educated parents in Isiolo are more likely to monitor academic progress. The evidence illustrates

that parental education extends beyond literacy, functioning as both cultural and social capital, which collectively enhances learner performance (Bourdieu, 1986). The findings show that parental education plays a pivotal role in shaping academic outcomes. Learners with highly educated parents tend to enjoy stronger support systems and more consistent parental engagement with schools, whereas those from less-educated families often face structural barriers.

To further confirm the descriptive and qualitative findings presented above, inferential analysis was conducted to test the null hypothesis for the second objective of the study: H_{02} : There is no significant relationship between parental educational level and learner's academic performance in public secondary schools in Isiolo Sub-County. A Chi-Square test of independence was carried out using SPSS, and the results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Chi-Square Test Results for the Influence of
 Parental Education Level on Learner's Academic Performance

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	Df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	13.425a	4	.009
N of Valid Cases	345		

The Chi-Square test results in Table 10 show a Pearson Chi-Square statistic of 13.425 with a p-value of 0.009. Since the p-value is less than the significance level ($\alpha = 0.05$), the null hypothesis (H_{02}) is rejected, indicating a statistically significant association between parental educational level and learner's academic performance in public secondary schools in Isiolo Sub-County. This finding is consistent with the descriptive and qualitative results, which show that learners whose parents have higher educational attainment tend to perform better academically due to active parental monitoring, involvement in school activities, and provision of educational support. In contrast, less-educated parents are more likely to leave academic responsibility to teachers and have limited awareness of their children's progress. The finding supports Bourdieu's Social Capital Theory, which suggests that educated parents transfer cultural and educational capital to their children, enhancing learning outcomes. This observation is consistent with Kathuri and Lematango (2021), who found that parental education influences learner attendance, commitment, and achievement in Isiolo County, and with Chege and Otieno (2021), who noted that parental literacy enables families to effectively follow up on learners' progress and engage with teachers.

8. Conclusions and Recommendations

Guided by the research questions and the findings of this study, it is concluded that both parental income and parental education play a vital role in determining learner's academic performance in public secondary schools in Isiolo Sub-County. Adequate and stable income enables parents to provide essential learning resources, support regular

school attendance, and minimize financial stress that often disrupts concentration and achievement. In contrast, families with limited income face persistent challenges such as absenteeism, lack of materials, and emotional strain, which undermine learner's performance despite their resilience. This highlights financial stability as a key enabler of equitable educational achievement.

The study found that parental education strongly influences learner outcomes. Parents with higher levels of education are better equipped to guide their children, monitor progress, and actively participate in school-related activities, thereby enhancing academic commitment and motivation. On the other hand, parents with little or no formal education often struggle with guiding learning tasks, maintaining meaningful interaction with teachers, and having the confidence to assist their children's education. Structural barriers such as illiteracy and language difficulties further limit their involvement, despite their willingness to support. Thus, parental education contributes not only to direct academic support but also to the provision of cultural and social capital that positively shapes learner's success.

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations are proposed to strengthen learner outcomes in relation to parental income and education. At the policy level, the Ministry of Education, in partnership with the county government, should expand bursary and scholarship programs to support learners from low-income households. Such initiatives would reduce absenteeism, enhance access to essential resources, and create a more equitable learning environment. In addition, education stakeholders should integrate parental literacy and empowerment programs into adult education and community development initiatives. This would equip parents with limited education with the skills and confidence to engage more effectively in their children's learning.

At the practice level, schools should adopt simplified and accessible communication strategies, such as Short Message Service (SMS) updates in local languages, to engage parents across different literacy levels. Furthermore, schools and communities should collaborate to establish learning support hubs or homework clubs that provide resources, guidance, and a conducive study environment for learners from disadvantaged households. These initiatives would help to bridge gaps created by limited income and low parental education while fostering a stronger culture of learning.

For future research, it is recommended that studies examine the interaction between parental income and education, with a focus on how these factors jointly influence learner performance. Longitudinal studies should also be undertaken to assess how improvements in parental literacy and financial stability translate into sustained academic achievement. Such research would provide valuable insights to inform targeted interventions for promoting equity and success in education.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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