

# Influence of Parental Marital Status on Academic Achievement of Preschool Children in Embakasi, Nairobi, Kenya

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**Abstract:** The purpose of the study was to find out whether parental marital status play a role influencing learner achievement of Unity preschool children in Embakasi District Nairobi County. The study utilized a descriptive survey research design. The target population of the study involved children, teachers and parents of Unity preschool in Embakasi district. The sample size comprised of 27 parents, 27 children and 5 teachers in Unity preschool. The findings of the study suggested that the type of family affects the learner achievement of children. This was followed by the findings that the children from single parent homes and polygamous families are socio-economically disadvantaged due to lack of resources therefore affecting the learner achievement.

**Keywords:** Children, Marital status, Parent, Learner achievement, Family.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Education is a basic tool used by society for transmission of its societal values. It has become an area of prime importance not only for government or voluntary agencies but also for individuals, families, governments and communities (Ebong, 2015). Parents play an integral role in the upbringing of a child. Parents are the main care givers expected to provide guidance, protection and motivation to their children so as to be able to live a better life. For the achievement of quality education a partnership of parents and teachers in injecting valuable skills, conduct, and knowledge to the learners is necessary (Deutscher & Ibe, 2003). It is well established that parents matter greatly for their children's development and success both in and out of school. Yet there are no certain strategies for raising confident, caring, happy, and successful children. Teachers, also, work industriously to nurture their learners' academic accomplishment and emotional and social development (Van Voorhis, Maier, Epstein, Lloyd, 2013). Consequently, parent involvement is encouraged by teachers, childcare providers, policy makers, and researchers (Duch, 2005; Sheldon & Epstein, 2005).

The type of family also has an impact on the home school relationships and responsibility for learning outcomes (Connell and Prinz, 2002). Structurally, a family is either broken or intact. A broken family in this context is one that is not structurally intact for various reasons; such as death of a parent, divorce, separation, desertion and illegitimacy in which case, the family was never completed (Egbochuku and Oliha, 2014). According to Foster and Kalil (2007) and Acs (2007), the effects of family structure transitions on children's development, both with and without statistical controls for child, parent, and family characteristics that may confound estimated effects of parental marriage on children's development.

Parent involvement typically involves parents' behaviors in home and school settings meant to support their children's educational development. Qualifiers of parent involvement commonly include the frequency of communication with teachers as well as participation in school functions and activities (Dearing, Kreider, Simpkins, & Weiss, 2006). the evidence that growing up with a single parent per se is harmful remains to be established. Diaz, (2004) found that the level of family cohesion and family relationships (Buote, 2001) proved themselves capable of predicting achievement.

Collins, (2007) identifies that a home as a place where children live with their parents and it is the dwelling in which they are groomed. It is a place where the pupils begin to learn the norms and values of the society in which they find themselves. The family is a social unit in any society and it is the source of early stimulation and experience in children.

Wendy Sigle-Rushton and Sara McLanahan (2004) offer the most up to date review, which indicates that those who grow up in fatherless families do worse on measures of scholastic achievement, educational attainment, psychological health, behavioral problems, delinquency, stable family formation, early sexual debut, partner satisfaction, economic success, and even physical health. The family, being a powerful influence on the child and its importance as a primary agent of socialization could in no doubt enhance or hinder the learner achievement of the child depending on the social climate in the family. Variance in psycho-social emotional fortification in the family background could be an indicator to high or low learner achievement of students, bearing in mind the intervening effect of high and low socio-economic status and emotional stability of students which is a pre-requisite to learner achievement (Adebule, 2004).

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This study was based on family deficit model. The family Deficit theory dates back to the 1970s views the nuclear or two-parent family (otherwise known as intact family) as the ideal family structure. According to the theory, single-parent families have a negative impact on children simply because they do not have a nuclear family structure Marsh (1990).

Academically successful children tend to come from families that are clearly organized, and in which role relationships of family members are appropriate and well defined. Parents assume an active leadership role in forging a strong caregiver alliance within the family, in developing cooperative relationships with and between their children, and in developing a strong social support network with extended family and community members (Conger & Conger, 2002). Salami & Alawode (2000) pointed out that both parents have roles to in child education. The father is to provide the necessary tools for the educational advancement while the mother is supposed to supplement the father's efforts in this regard.

In this study, the influence of parental marital status on pupil's learner achievement, the home environment that is tensed due to divorce or unhealthy atmosphere of quarrelling; fighting due to large family size and polygamy cannot favor learning, as the mind of the pupils will not be settled in order to give room for creativity. Ogbemudia and Aiasa (2013) maintained that physical and psychological conditions of the home environment affect the children academically. Ekanem (2004) stated that harmonious home create emotional stability in the child at home and subsequently throughout his school life. Hence the researcher was also concerned with the careful study of the influence of single parenthood due to broken home, death, widowhood and intact home on the learner achievement of students.

According to Cumming (2010), family units take various forms, mostly of which individuals live under the same roof or within the same homestead. There are various combinations of family structure in which children live with such as biological parents, step parents and also with relatives or foster parents.

Global studies on family structure have revealed that children from single parent homes may be losing in the battle for academic success in a variety of ways (Weitof, Hjern, and Rosen, 2004). The reason given for this occurrence are that single parents are : the primary and frequently sole source of financial support for the family, have less time to help children with homework, are less likely to use consistent discipline, and have less parental control, and all of these conditions may lead to lower learner achievement. For many cultures, the morally correct way to raise a child is through a nuclear family structure. This is a family comprised of two biological parents (or adoptive parents from birth), one male and one female, cohabitating in a marital relationship (Selimian, 2010).

The type of family has also an impact including the home school relationship and responsibility for learning outcome. Home-school relationship are formal and informal connections between the family and the educational setting. Responsibility for learning is an aspect of parenting that places emphasis on activities in the home and community that promises learning skills in the young child (Connell and Prinz, 2002). According to Cumming (2010), a cohesive family, in which members cope well, increase the likelihood of children doing well in school. On the contrary children from enmeshed families, characterized by over involvement, hostility and only moderately warmth, enter school with no more problems than their cohesive family peers, but suffer more anxiety and feelings of alienation later, Cummings explains young children benefit most from their school years and they enter kindergarten having received enough psychological preparation from the family. Research by Wilcox (2009) based on the United States and other developed countries

suggests that children in intact, two-parent households typically have better educational achievement than children in step-family and single-parent households. However, living with two biological parents does not have a consistently beneficial effect on children's secondary school enrollments across developing countries.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

The research designs adopted for this study was a descriptive survey design. This is because the design guided the research in collecting data of varied magnitude from the stakeholders at Unity Primary school. This research sought to collect information concerning the influence of parental marital status on learner achievement of Unity preschool. The study used Unity primary in Embakasi east district. The target population consists of Children, teachers and parents from Unity primary school. The target population comprised of 90 preschool pupils, 90 parents and 5 preschool teachers. The study utilized random sampling procedure to carry out a study.

The instrument used to collect data for this study was a researcher designed questionnaire and a documentary analysis. The questionnaire was used to extract in-depth information on the parental marital status in relation to the pupil's achievement at unity primary school. On the other hand a documentary analysis was used to gather information concerning the learner achievement of preschool pupils. The documentary analysis form allowed the researcher to obtain the children's progress records, in Science Activities, Number Works, Language, Creative Arts, Physical Education, Social Studies and Music.

### 4. RESULTS

The study result showed that the pupils are brought up in different family types. These means that the families that were involved in the study were not only nuclear families or single parent families.

The result of the analysis is shown in table 1.

**Table 1: type of family**

Type of family	Frequency	Percentage	Learner achievement
Nuclear	3	11%	452
Extended	4	15%	366
Polygamous	7	25%	348
Single family	10	37%	335
Foster family	3	12%	356
Total	27	100%	371

Table 1 shows that majority of the respondents 37% (n=10) came from single parent families and their average score out of 700 was 335marks. They are followed by those from polygamous families whose average mark was 348. Children from nuclear families are the best academic performers. This is probably because nuclear families are the most preferred type of family in raising a child since the parents are involved in the children's development.

**Table 2: presents the number of children in the family and its effect on the preschool children academic performance**

Number of Children	Frequency	Percentage
1-2	1	3%
3-4	4	15%
5-6	19	70%
7 and above	3	12%
Total	27	100

Table 2 shows that majority of the respondents 70% (n=19) had more than 5 children indicating that most parents had more children than they could afford to educate comfortably leading to poor performance. From these findings most of the parents who had more than 5 children came from polygamous families. The learner achievement of these preschool children is poor since majority had an average of 348 marks out of 700, an indication that the performance is unsatisfactory.

**Table 3: gender difference of the single parents**

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Female	7	70%
Male	3	30%
<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>100</b>

The findings in table 3 show the gender difference of the single parents in unity primary. Majority of the single parents are female with 70% (n=7) while the fathers covered 30% (n=3). The gender difference was noted significant due to the difference in performance among father led home and mother lead homes.

## 5. DISCUSSION

The findings on the influence of parental marital status on the learner achievement of preschool learners in Unity primary showed that children from nuclear families performed better than those from single parent, foster, extended and polygamous families. These findings are supported by a study by Uchena (2013) in Nigeria who found that the learner achievement of children raised in single parent home and those raised in intact home varied. He reported that children from nuclear families performed better than those in single parent homes. He added that the home environment that is tensed due to divorce or unhealthy atmosphere of by the family due to large family size and members are not favorable for learning, as pupils will not be settled in order to give room for creativity. Showing that the psychological state of the children is often affected by parent's constant absenteeism as well as conflict. The impact of parents' marriage on their children's learner achievement is, however, likely to depend on a child's characteristics and behavior, a family's resources and characteristics prior to marriage, and a family's characteristics and dynamics after the marital union. Parental marital transitions are likely to be beneficial to children's development in some child and family contexts, to have no effect in others, and to be detrimental to children's development in yet others (Wagmiller, Gershoff, Veliz, and Clements, 2010.)

Home environment is the physical and psychological conditions that affect children in their home surrounding (Ogbemudia & Aiasa, 2013). Furthermore, in pupil's home environment, some factors that may influence their academic performances include: parents' educational background, occupation, economic status, marital status, home location, family size and peer group. Thus, the home is the basic institution that socializes and lays the educational foundation for the child upon which the other agents of socialization are built (Egunsola, 2014). The education received by a child from parents and others at home has high potential of affecting the behaviors of the child later in life. What the child learns at home and how his/her family motivates him/her towards education contributes to the child's success or failure at school.

The findings were also supported by Egunsola (2014), Children from nuclear families are likely to get better attention in terms of swift provision of school learning materials than those from polygamous homes where large family sizes are common. Therefore, the monogamous family favors learning by creating a more conducive learning environment, conflicts are easier to solve in the monogamous families than in the polygamous family; students from polygamous families are more likely to experience more psychological disturbances and problems than their counterparts from the monogamous families.

According to Frazer (2001), learner achievement of children is often affected by the psychological home conditions that mainly arise from illegitimacy of children, the label of adopted child, broken home, divorce and parental deprivation. Such abnormal conditions of the home, are likely to have a detrimental effect on school achievement of the child he asserts.

Although different scholars seem to agree that nuclear families tend have a positive effect on the children, the single parents home have contradicting findings. This findings are contradictory because they consider single parent homes from different perspectives. They observe the single parent homes as mother led or father lead homes. A study by Uchuna (2013) indicates that that children in father led homes did better academically since fathers had better economic status and had the ability to enroll their children in better schools and provide more educational materials. Other researchers argued that the learner achievement of children from mother led homes and father led homes did not differ dramatically.

However, it should be noted that this situation might not be true all the time since there are some children in single parent family structures who still attend school regularly, perform academically better than children from two-parent family structure (Aijlia and Olutola, 2007). Ham (2004) discovered that students from non-intact family structures were absent

from school at a rate of 78% higher than those from intact home. This situation may however be attributed to other factors inherent in the personality of the child.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The conclusion drawn from this study is that parental marital status affects and its effect on learner achievement of unity preschool learners in Embakasi district. The findings also showed that learners from nuclear families performed better than other family types. On the other hand children from single parent families performed lower than all other family types with an average of 335 out of 700 marks. Achievement of extended families was at 366, followed by foster families that averaged at 356, and polygamous families at 348 marks. Although this study does not end the debate on the influence of parental marital status on learner achievement of their children, it positively add to the body of knowledge. Additionally, it helps identify the multiple subtypes of nontraditional families (single-mother, single-father, blended, extended relative only, and others), not just one subtype. The failure to investigate nontraditional family subtypes in relation to learner achievement of preschool children was one of the research gaps of the current literature. For teachers, though, the results of this study imply that educational resources should be focused on helping the learners overcome disadvantages they may face within the home environment separating the educational needs from home to school. The school is the main projector of education and can therefore find ways to mitigate the negative impacts parental marital status may have on the children.

Therefore it is the conclusion that the type of family affects the achievement of unity preschool children.

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