Scientific
Research
Publishing

The Relationship between Attitude towards School and Academic Performance of Students in Congolese Higher Education: The Moderating Role of Marital Status

Lopez Tumana Maseka[1,2], Jianzhong Hong[1], Chunzhen Wang[1]

[1]School of Psychology, Central China Normal University, Wuhan, China
[2]School of Psychology and Educational Sciences, University of Kwango, Kenge, Democratic Republic of the Congo
Email: lope.tumana@yahoo.fr

Abstract

Many studies in Congolese educational sector, have examined the experiences of undergraduate students with regard to attitude towards school and academic performance. However, much remains to be learned about the moderating role of marital status in the relationship between attitude towards school and student's academic performance. This particular situation needs to be studied. This mixed research methods study includes collection and exploitation of two types of data (quantitative and qualitative). Data for quantitative analysis were collected by survey with 362 participants (including married and unmarried students) from the University of Kinshasa, whereas data for qualitative analysis were gathered from married (three males and three females) and unmarried (three males and three females) students using interviews and focus group discussion. The statistical analyses were made using mainly multiple regressions, the statistical testing of the generated hypothesis via t-test statistics and Pearson product-moment correlation, multivariate analysis of variance, and simple slope analyses. In light of Bandura's social cognitive theory, the results of the study revealed that there is a significant correlation between attitude towards school and academic performance, and marital status moderated the relationship between attitudes towards school and academic performance. Unmarried students' academic performance was higher than their married students' counterpart in significant way. While I do not dispute this, I argue that the element of fulfillment, which the married and unmarried students in this study identified as being important to them, can be used to expand Bandura's social cognitive theory.

1. Introduction

In recent years, discussions over undergraduate student performance have gained importance in Congolese educational sector due to the problem of student's attitude towards school.

Indeed, as highlighted by Unger and Meiran (2020), the pivotal role of student attitudes in the learning process has stimulated many researchers and practitioners worldwide to study the consequences of students' positive and negative attitudes in different learning environments.

Most previous studies have focused on the relationship between students' attitudes and their academic performance; however, it's necessary to note that few cases of these studies and academic reports that establish the moderating role of marital status on the relationship between students' attitudes and academic performance of student at the University were directed in Congolese educational sector.

An effort should be emphases in this direction to enrich the existence of theories on the contingency approach of the moderating role of marital status on the relationship between attitude towards school and academic performance of the students and make a difference of these variables between married and unmarried students at the university.

1.1. Problem Statement

One of the most pressing issues is the improvement of overwhelming presence of married seemingly unmotivated students, which can be proved with many of the behavioral and social problems, less time to be at school and participating in school activities, financial problems, the burden of a family the child custody, and family health preservation. Quite often the married students will become discouraged with the role they must assume as married students.

Thus, the student's attitude towards school should be taken seriously, firstly by the students themselves and secondly by the management in the impact on student motivation and academic performance.

Teachers need to seek to know the role of moderating effects of marital status on the students' attitude towards school to help them recognize the costs of the choices they make and achieve their academic performance.

1.2. Research Question and Hypothesis

This mixed study answers the following questions: Does attitude towards school have a joint correlation with the academic performance of students? Whether

marital status would moderate the relationship between attitude towards school and academic performance? What are the differences between the married and unmarried students' academic performance in this university selected according to their status?

This study verifies the following hypothesis:

- There is a relationship between attitude towards school and academic performance of students.
- The student's marital status moderates the predictor effect of the relationship between attitude towards school and academic performance.
- The unmarried students perform better academically than the married student's counterparts.

1.3. Significance of the Study

The significance of the study is that the research findings can provide insight towards the understanding of the moderating role of marital status on the relationship between students' attitude towards school and academic performance. Indeed, this research provides students in general and married students in particular to understand better that academic performance can be classified as an educational achievement. However, to achieve it, students should associate the important psycho-social factor that have a significant positive effect on it, in this case, attitude towards school.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Theoretical Framework

Attitude towards school and academic performance are guided by different theories. So as to establish a theoretical framework and connection between variables, the basements are theories.

According to Zakayo (2017), theories are framed to guide the researcher by explaining, predicting, and understanding the phenomena and lead the researcher on how to study and what to search for in certain situation. This study attempted to develop Bandura's social cognitive theory, which addresses how students develop social, emotional, cognitive, and behavioral capabilities; and how people regulate their own lives; and what motivates them.

While I do not dispute this, I argue that the element of fulfillment, which the married and unmarried students in this study identified as being important to them, be used to expand Bandura's social cognitive theory.

2.2. Attitude towards School and Academic Performance

Attitude could be defined as a consistent tendency to react in a particular way often positively or negatively—towards any matter. Attitude possesses both cognitive and emotional components (Adediwura & Tayo, 2007).

According to Sejčová (2006), an important factor contributing to good results for students in individual subjects is their attitude towards them. Pavelková and

Procházdzková (in Sejčová, 2006) indicate that an attitude towards a subject reflects a measure of popularity that, in turn, reflects a tendency to undertake actions required by the subject and the satisfaction gained from these actions.

The attitude has a particular importance in the achievement of the students' academic process, to the extent that it constitutes one of the success factors in the learning process of students. Attitude plays a vital role in influencing student academic performance as either positively or negatively in the academic community because attitude is an expression of like or dislikes against a particular thing, place, event or person (Garba Kolo et al., 2017).

Kubiatko (2013) said that if attitudes towards a subject and school are positive, also the achievement of students gets better. Fazio and Roskes (1994) have proved that "attitudes are important to educational psychology because they strongly influence social thought; the way an individual thinks about and process social information". According to Jegede (2001), there is a positive relationship between students' attitude and their performance in academics.

It should be noted that there is no generally accepted procedure for measuring student performance, and individual researchers tend to conduct and explain it in their own way. So many factors have been known to influence the academic achievement of students in their various school endeavors. These factors can be either being personal (poor self-concept, motive, readiness, emotion, attitude, maturational level of the student) or environmental (Otekunrin, 2014).

Regarding the academic performance of married and unmarried students in higher education, a number of authors in the recent past have discussed that issues in higher education, we can listed some of them. One study demonstrated a positive influence of marriage on the academic performance of community college students (Yess, 1981). Beard (2018), when highlighting about examining marital status and academic performance, the result showed that marriage only affects the academic grade of students. Their personal relationship did not change by marriage.

Price (2006) found married men had better student outcomes than single men, but married women did not do worse than single women in terms of student outcomes. Noori and Orfan (2021) argued that female married students were able to attain the same grades as their male spouses, and in some circumstances, they even outperformed their male colleagues. Petrol (2010) reported that marital status is a good predictor of the academic achievement of NCE students. Park and Kerr (1990) found that there was correlation between marital status and test scores. A sample of 149 international students attending five Universities in the USA participated in the study, correlation and multiple regression analysis revealed that married international students performed better than unmarried students. Yara's (2009) result revealed that marital status was an important predictor of achievement among Community College graduating students. Similarly, Robert, Wooster, and Chen (2009) investigated the effect of marital status of College students on their academic performance in the USA. Data based on a sample of 374 students indicated that married students had higher

grades than unmarried students.

In contradiction, Stein (2006) examined the influence of marital status on academic performance; he reported a non-significant influence and concluded that marital status has no significant influence on academic performance.

Meehan and Negy (2003) found that some married college students face more day-to-day difficulties than non-married students, which could potentially hinder their academic performance. That result corroborate with Beard (2018), when he stated that academic performance negatively linked with marital status and GPA.

3. Method

This research includes two studies. Study One employed a descriptive survey design. We conducted our research on one University of Kinshasa in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and we have constituted our working sample with 362 subjects including 177 male subjects and 185 female subjects; have been occasionally delivered to different departments of this University. In this work, the occasional sample was used because in this last method, the criteria are the accessibility of the subjects.

About quantitative data, for the attitude, we used the instrument developed by Şeker (2011); the format of the questionnaire (School Attitude Questionnaire (SAQ) items) is in the five-point Likert Scale (I strongly agree, I agree, I partially agree, I disagree, and I strongly disagree). For the academic performance instrument, we used quantitative research instruments developed by Sansgiry et al. (2006). The format of the questionnaires was in the five-point Likert Scale.

Study Two used a semi-structured interview. The points included the related effect of students' marital status in term of motivation to attitude towards school and academic performance, the reason that married student choose to study in higher education institution and identify what support do they get from their partner (husband or wife) that is related in terms of school issues, in particular, attitude towards school and academic performance, and students' responses towards the significant difference in term of academic performance between married and unmarried student' at the university.

In addition to student pre-and post-interviews, voluntary samples of twelve students (male and female) aged from 19 to 40 from the University of Kinshasa participated in the final group interviews. All were assigned pseudonyms for purposes of analysis. Qualitative data from the interviews were transcribed. The responses of the participants were translated from French (Congolese official language) to English language by the researcher.

Each interview was transcribed and introduced as a file document in the NVivo 11 computer software program. Each file was explored deeply.

4. Results

4.1. Results of Study One

Table 1 presents the correlation of the variables. Its shows that academic per-

formance with ($M = 1.98$) correlates negatively with students status ($r = -0.078$, $p < 0.01$). In addition, positive significant correlation is found between academic performance with Attitude towards school ($r = 0.785$, $p < 0.05$). We conclude that attitude towards school was positively correlated with academic performance, and the academic performance is better when the student is unmarried; the research hypothesis was approved by results.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and correlations.

	Mean	SD	1	2	3
ATT	1.90	1.018	1		
STAT	0.36	0.629	−0.668***	1	
AP	1.98	0.993	0.785**	−0.078***	1

Note: **$p < 0.05$, ***$p < 0.01$.

Multiple regressions were conducted to test the mediated moderation model, and the results are shown in Table 2. A mediated moderation model is a conditional model to test the moderation and mediation effects simultaneously. This model can test the interaction effect of the independent variable and moderator on the dependent variable through the mediator.

Table 2. Multiple regression analyses.

Predictors	Equation (1) (Criterion = Academic Performance)		Equation (2) (Criterion = Academic Performance)	
	B	SE	B	SE
ATT	0.592***	0.047	0.542**	0.045
STAT	0.276***	0.107	0.367***	0.121
ATT*STAT	0.050***	0.041		
R2	0.004		0.001	
F	1.461***		0.289***	

Note: **$p < 0.01$, ***$p < 0.001$.

We first examine the moderating effect of marital status on attitudes towards school and academic performance. As shown in Equation (1) in Table 2, we found that there was significantly positive (B = 0.05, $p < 0.001$) interaction between marital status and attitudes towards school on academic performance. The results showed that marital status moderated the relationship between attitudes towards school and academic performance.

Moderating effect of marital status

The present study used a mediated moderation model to test the relations among attitude towards school and academic performance. Results revealed that marital status moderated the predicted effect of attitude towards school on academic performance.
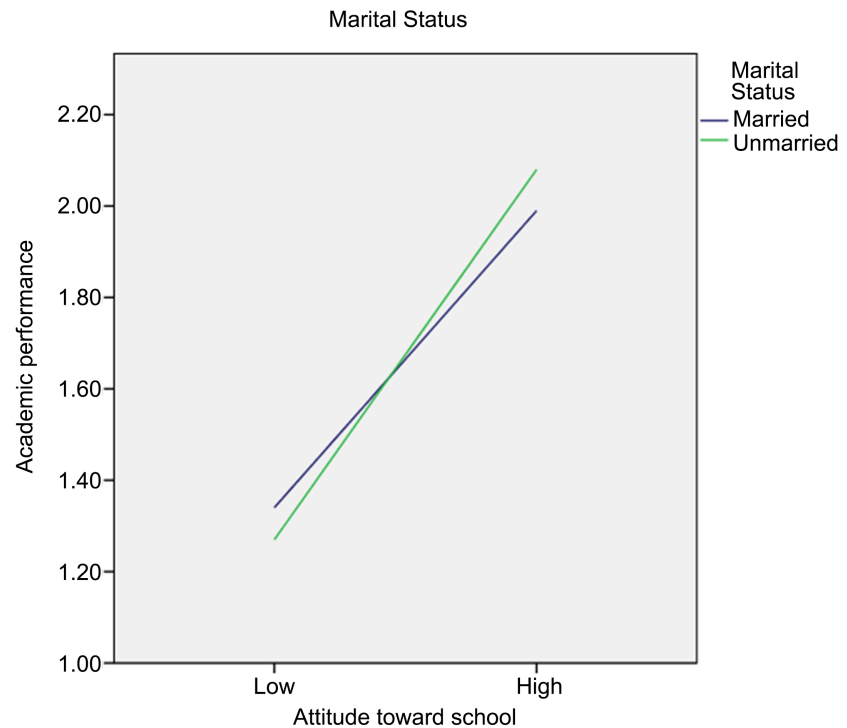
Marital Status

Figure 1. Moderation effects of marital status on attitude towards school and academic performance.

As depicted in **Figure 1**, to further understand this relationship, we plotted the link between attitude towards school and academic performance at high (+1 SD) and low (−1 SD) values of students marital status. The plotted interaction showed that for students of different marital status, the more positive the attitude towards school, the better the academic performance. Specifically, there was a stronger positive correlation between attitude towards school and academic performance when the students' marital status was unmarried ($B = 0.59$, $p < 0.001$) compared to married students ($B = 0.54$, $p < 0.001$).

4.2. Results of Study Two

Twelve participants took part in the interview. Six participants (three female and three male) reported they are married and six participants (three female and three male) claimed they are single.

Four married students (two male and two female) mentioned that marital status has an effect on attitude towards school, but two married students (one male and one female) mentioned that marital status does not have an effect on attitude towards school.

Two male and three female married students affirmed that **the marital status affect negatively their academic performance** for example, married couples may not only have to focus on their own daily schedules but their spouses' schedule as well. Married couples also have to navigate marital roles, which may be difficult while also in college. For example, deciding who completes which

house chores or who pays the bills may distract from academic performance. This finding concurs with Stein's (2006) results when he examined the influence of marital status on academic performance; he reported a non-significant influence and concluded that marital status has no significant influence on academic performance.

About their reasons to choose the higher education, **married and unmarried students in higher education need higher education for different reasons**. These reasons are individualized because they completed the interview protocol individually. Though, their reasons vary but the reasons for higher education according to the married and unmarried students (sampled participants) are peculiar and common to the following. **For common reasons**, firstly, they need higher education to become better mothers and fathers. They are of the opinion that higher education will broaden their knowledge on how to manage their homes and perhaps affect their children and neighbors positively.

Secondly, some married and unmarried students need or chose to study at higher education for the singular purpose of higher education qualification. These qualifications are needed at their place of work for promotion and continuous relevancy at their place of work.

This opinion of theirs could be linked to the general believe that promotion at place work comes with additional remuneration via increase in salaries and fringe benefits. **For particular reasons**, we note that some married female students need higher education to avoid to be considered as an illiterate as their husband have always painted her.

For challenges, according to the sampled participants include financial problem, educational background of husband or parents; psychosocial factors (attitude and student-teacher interaction problem); problem of combining motherhood and education, combining school and work, distance of their home to university, time to do school activities, etc.

5. Discussion

Academic performance at the university is greatly affected by the attitudes of students. This result is in tandem with the expectation of the researcher that positive student's attitude would relatively lead to good student academic achievement. The attitudes that emerge during the learning process are essential in guiding student behavior (Haynes et al., 2023).

Marriage is not a differentiating factor of academic performance since both married male and married female respondent highlighted that having positive attitudes towards school could be beneficial to them to perform better academically. This finding is in contradiction with (Darwish, Alkhars, & Murtadha, 2021) when they concluded that marriage does not affect academic performance.

Finally, discussion was made about the differences in the academic performance between married and unmarried students at the university. The finding indicates that single students perform better than their married counterpart. The

results revealed that the academic performance of the married students is at low level because of the burden they have in their family and because they encounter difficulties in balancing school work and their family obligation.

This finding concurs with Yess (1981) also argued that, married students may not have as much time and energy as single students, so some say marriage is detrimental to success.

6. Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that: there was a stronger positive correlation between attitude towards school and academic performance. And when the students were unmarried, they had higher academic performance compared to married students.

The following recommendations were made: Adequate attention should be given by lecturers/teachers to address marital status differences in academic performance in terms of giving assignments, group work, responsibilities and any other academic activities in the colleges.

In order to help married and single students achieve effective academic results, teachers and educational counselors must know the role that attitude and the student-teacher relationship play in order to integrate them into their teaching process, so that the various study skills of the class are taken care of properly and this will allow students to have the opportunity to perform maximally.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

References

Adediwura, A. A., & Tayo, B. (2007). Perception of Teachers' Knowledge, Attitude and Teaching Skills as Predictor of Academic Performance in Nigerian Secondary Schools. *Educational Research and Reviews, 7,* 165-171.

Beard, S. (2018). Saying "I Do" in College: Examining Marital Status and Academic Performance. *Undergraduate Research Journal, 22,* Article 2.

Darwish, E., Alkhars, A., & Murtadha, A. F. (2021). Effects of Marriage on the Academic Performance of Undergraduate Male Students at the King Faisal University. *International Journal of Medicine in Developing Countries, 5,* 1-5.

Fazio, R., & Roskes, D. (1994). Acting as We Feel: When and How Attitudes Guide Behaviour. In S. Shavitt, & T. C. Brck (Eds.), *Persuasion* (pp. 71-147). Allyn & Bacon.

Garba Kolo, A. et al. (2017). Influence of Psychosocial Factors on Student's Academic Performance in One of Nigerian Colleges of Education. *Malaysian Journal of Social Sciences and HUMANITIES (MJ-SSH), 2,* 1-10.

Haynes, M., Brown, A., Nichols, K., & Parveen Musofer, R. (2023). Measurement of Student Attitudes to Science and Association with Inquiry-Based Learning in Regional Schools. *International Journal of Science Education, 45,* 593-612. https://doi.org/10.1080/09500693.2023.2168138

Jegede, O. (2001). *Evaluation of Nigerian Integrated Science Project.* Ph.D. Thesis, Univer-

sity of Wales.

Kubiatko, M. (2013). The Comparison of Different Age Groups on the Attitudes toward and the Use of ICT. *Educational Sciences Theory & Practice, 13,* 1263-1272.

Meehan, D., & Negy, C. (2003) Undergraduate Students' Adaptation to College: Does Being Married Make a Difference? *Journal of College Student Development, 44,* 670-690. https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2003.0055

Noori, A. Q., & Orfan, S. N. (2021). The Challenges of Undergraduate Married Female Students in Higher Education: A Case Study of Takhar University. *Journal of World Englishes and Educational Practices, 3,* 9-18. https://doi.org/10.32996/jweep.2021.3.6.2

Otekunrin, O. (2014). *Students' Attitude and Academic Performance in Agricultural Science: A Case Study of Public Secondary Schools in Ibadan North Local Government Area of Oyo State.* Postgraduate Thesis in Education, National Teachers' Institute.

Park, K. H., & Kerr, P. M. (1990). Determinants of Academic Performance: A Multinomial Logit Approach. *The Journal of Economic Education, 21,* 101-111. https://doi.org/10.1080/00220485.1990.10844659

Petrol, M. B. (2010). Characteristics of Married Female NCE Students in Kashim Ibrahim College of Education. *Outreach Journal of Research Issues and Ideas, 9,* 93-105.

Price, J. (2006). Does a Spouse Slow You Down? Marriage and Graduate Student Outcomes. *SSRN Electronic Journal.*

Robert, A., Wooster, M. A., & Chen, L. (2009). Marital Status and Academic Performance in College. *College Students' Journal, 13,* 106-111.

Sansgiry, S. S., Bhosle, M., & Sail, K. (2006). Factors That Affect Academic Performance among Pharmacy Students. *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education, 70,* Article 104. https://doi.org/10.1016/s0002-9459(24)07761-1

Sejčová, Ľ. (2006). *Pohľad na kvalitu života dospievajúcich.* Album.

Şeker, H. (2011). Developing a Questionnaire on Attitude towards School. *Learning Environments Research, 14,* 241-261. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10984-011-9096-9

Stein, C. K. (2006). Effect of Marital Status on Public Perception. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 10,* 77-96.

Unger, S., & Meiran, W. (2020). Student Attitudes towards Online Education during the COVID-19 Viral Outbreak of 2020: Distance Learning in a Time of Social Distance. *International Journal of Technology in Education and Science, 4,* 256-266. https://doi.org/10.46328/ijtes.v4i4.107

Yara, P. (2009). Relationship between Teachers' Attitude and Students' Academic Achievement in Mathematics in Some Selected Senior Secondary Schools in South-Western Nigeria. *European Journal of Social Sciences, 11,* 364-369.

Yess, J. P. (1981). The Influence of Marriage on Community College Student Achievement in Specific Programs of Study. *Research in Higher Education, 14,* 103-118. https://doi.org/10.1007/bf00976288

Zakayo, J. M. (2017). *Assessment of the Challenges Facing Small and Medium Sized Hotel Operators in Unguja, Zanzibar.* Master's Thesis, University of Tanzania.