

Influence of Blended Family Structure on Academic Performance of Adolescent Students in Selected Secondary Schools in Baringo North Sub-County, Kenya

 Chebungei Kipchilat, Oseko Agnes and  Muyaka Jafred

School of Education, University of Eldoret, P.O. Box 1125, Eldoret, Kenya

Abstract

Families provide a conducive environment which necessitates acquisition of self-concept, self-confidence and self-efficacy amongst adolescent students in secondary schools in Kenya. However, the increase in non-marital childbearing, cohabitation, divorce and remarriage have ushered in a host of changes to the traditional construct of the family. This has led to the emergence of non- traditional family forms such as the blended family systems. These family changes adversely impact the academic performance outcome of adolescent students in secondary schools in Kenya. This study examines the influence of blended family structure on academic performance in selected secondary schools in Baringo North Sub County. The study was guided by John Bowlby's Attachment Theory (2009). Concurrent mixed method research design was employed in the study and the study targeted 370 respondents; 350 adolescent students and 20 teachers. Stratified random sampling was applied to capture proportional representation of students from blended and intact family households across different school categories. Quantitative data were collected through structured questionnaires and academic records, while qualitative data were obtained through focus group discussions and key informant interviews with teachers and guidance counselors. Quantitative data were coded into SPSS version 26 and analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics while qualitative data were thematically analyzed. The findings revealed a significant positive correlation between both intact family structure ($r=0.417$, $p<0.01$) and blended family structure ($r=0.356$, $p<0.05$) with academic performance, suggesting that family background is a strong predictor of student success. Students from intact families reported the highest, most consistent levels of academic support from both parents, fostering a highly positive academic environment. However, students from blended families reported facing complexities, significantly inconsistent or lower support from stepparents, but demonstrated resilience. Their academic outlook remained positive due to strong motivation from their biological parent, high support from siblings, and a significant compensatory role played by teacher concern. The study concludes

that while the intact family structure provides the most seamless academic support, the ultimate success of adolescents in blended families relies heavily on a supportive network involving the biological parent, siblings and dedicated educators. The findings emphasize the need for targeted interventions in schools, including specialized teacher training and counselling, to effectively support students navigating complex family transitions.

Keywords: Adolescent, blended family structure, intact family, academic performance, students

Journal ISSN: 2960-2602

Journal DOI: <https://doi.org/10.69897/joret.v3i3>

Correspondence: chebungeikipchilat@gmail.com

Copyright © 2025 Chebungei et al. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY).

Funding: The author received no financial support for the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

Data Availability Statement: The authors confirm that the data supporting the findings of this study are available within the article [and/or] its supplementary materials.

Competing interests: The authors declare no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

Introduction

Contemporary global society has undergone profound shifts in family organization, moving beyond the dominance of the traditional nuclear family to embrace a variety of diverse household arrangements (George & Fernandez, 2014). Among these increasingly common non-traditional forms are single-parent households, child-headed families, and the focus of this study: blended families. The term blended family, often used interchangeably with stepfamily, describes a household where a biological parent lives with a partner who is not the child's biological parent, typically following divorce, separation, or widowhood (O'Brien, Nixon, & Hadfield, 2023). The global rise in divorce and remarriage rates has significantly fueled

the proliferation of these structures, leading to complex new dynamics within domestic life (Ermisch and Francesconi, 2001; Pew Research Center, 2015).

A blended family is formed when one or both partners introduce children from a previous relationship into the new union. This configuration introduces complexity by reshaping established caregiving roles, household rules, and the distribution of socio-economic resources in ways that are distinct from first-marriage families. Because of these structural and relational changes, scholars have long argued that family composition can significantly affect the academic performance and psychosocial well-being of adolescents (Adjiwanou & LeGrand, 2021).

Empirical evidence from North America and Europe generally supports

this, consistently demonstrating that adolescents in blended families particularly those residing with a stepparent experience lower levels of academic achievement when compared to peers in intact, two-biological-parent families (Amato & Keith, 1991; Ginther & Pollak, 2004; Jeynes, 2010). This academic gap, often observed in lower GPAs and educational attainment, is largely attributed to the stress and emotional disruption accompanying parental separation and re-partnering, as well as the dilution of parental resources, including time, attention, and financial investment from stepparents (Sundstrom, 2013). Nevertheless, the literature also identifies that the quality of the relationship between the adolescent and the custodial parent, and a positive, involved connection with the stepparent, can function as critical mitigating factors that foster belonging and improve student outcomes (Beckmeyer & Russell, 2018; King et al., 2014).

In sub-Saharan Africa, the blended family structure is exceptionally prevalent, driven by factors such as high rates of divorce and remarriage, labor migration, and historically high rates of parental mortality. Adjiwanou and LeGrand (2021) observed that, while children in stepfather households in some countries received fewer schooling investments compared to nuclear families, these effects often varied significantly by country and the child's gender. Similarly, studies have noted higher risks of grade repetition and school dropout in non-traditional households, but these effects are often strongly mediated by socioeconomic status and parental education, which are sometimes more influential than the structure itself (Bengesai, 2020; Iheaka, 2022). This highlights the difficulty in isolating the effect of family structure from broader socio-economic and cultural conditions.

In Kenya, Njoroge and Kirori (2016) found that adolescents from blended families in Kabete Sub-County tended to perform worse academically, citing weak parental supervision and role conflicts as contributing factors. Nato (2016) reported that students from nuclear families in Bungoma East Sub-County outperformed those from blended and single-parent households, though parental education and income significantly shaped these differences. Wachira (2011), in a study of Ganze Sub-County, noted that children from blended households experienced socio-emotional adjustment challenges, which reduced participation and readiness for learning. These findings suggest that blended family dynamics intersect with both emotional and material aspects of education. Lanyasunya (2024) argued that guardian education and the quality of the home learning environment are more direct predictors of Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) performance than family structure alone. However, family composition was found to influence these conditions indirectly, underscoring its relevance in shaping educational pathways.

Despite the increasing prevalence of blended families globally and nationally, this family structure remains underexplored in many localized Kenyan contexts. Much of the existing research in Kenya has focused on urban or peri-urban areas, leading to a significant limited focus on rural regions like Baringo North Sub-County. Given the unique realities of this specific rural area, characterized by local marital instability, high rates of migration, and constrained resources, adolescents in blended households may encounter distinct academic challenges that have yet to be systematically documented. This study therefore seeks to examine how blended family structures influence the academic performance of adolescent students in selected secondary schools in

Baringo North Sub-County, taking into account mediating factors such as poverty, guardian education and school quality.

Theoretical Review

The key theoretical framework underpinning this study is Attachment Theory, developed by the British psychiatrist and psychoanalyst John Bowlby (Bowlby, 2009). This theory, one of the most studied aspects of developmental psychology, posits that a strong emotional and physical attachment to at least one primary caregiver is absolutely critical to personal development (Bowlby, 1969). Bowlby established the precedent that healthy childhood development depends heavily upon a child's ability to form a strong, reliable relationship with an attachment figure. This perspective fundamentally broke from the traditional psychoanalytic view, which held that attachment arose merely as a secondary result of the caregiver providing nourishment. Instead, Bowlby argued that attachment behaviors such as crying, clinging, and proximity-seeking are innate, adaptive mechanisms that evolved to keep the vulnerable infant physically close to a protective figure, thereby ensuring survival (Bowlby, 1988).

The primary caregiver's role is dual: they serve as a "secure base" from which the child can safely explore the world, and as a "safe haven" to which the child can retreat for comfort and regulation in times of fear or distress (Ainsworth, 1982). Bowlby closely observed that separated infants would go to extraordinary lengths, frantically crying and clinging, to prevent separation or re-establish proximity to a missing parent (Bowlby, 1973). He believed that the disruption of these early bonds could cause profound despair and depression, with internalized feelings potentially surfacing as psychological problems in

adulthood (Cherry, 2023). A secure attachment is therefore considered the best possible foundation for healthy physical, emotional, intellectual, and social development, enabling a securely attached child to be curious, outgoing, and freely explorative of their environment.

The formal articulation of Attachment Theory was a multi-decade process, beginning with Bowlby's clinical observations and culminating in his comprehensive trilogy. His initial work in the 1940s and 1950s concentrated on the severe negative effects of institutionalization and separation from the mother. This research gained prominence with his 1951 monograph for the World Health Organization, *Maternal Care and Mental Health*, which detailed the adverse impacts of prolonged early separation (Bowlby, 1951). This foundational work led him to seek a more robust theoretical explanation, drawing significantly on ethology (the study of animal behavior) and control systems theory, which shaped the final evolutionary-based theory. The conceptual framework was first formally presented in academic papers, notably "The Nature of the Child's Tie to his Mother" in 1958 (Bowlby, 2018). The theory reached its full, synthesized form with the publication of the three-volume opus, *Attachment and Loss*. The first volume, *Attachment*, was published in 1969, introducing the concept of the attachment behavioral system. The subsequent volumes, *Separation: Anxiety and Anger* (1973) and *Loss: Sadness and Depression* (1980), expanded the theory to cover the emotional responses to loss and separation. This theoretical work was empirically validated and expanded by his colleague, Mary Ainsworth, who developed the Strange Situation procedure in the 1960s and 1970s, classifying the distinct patterns of attachment (Ainsworth et al., 2015).

A key concept within the theory is the Internal Working Model (IWM) (Baldwin, 1992; Bowlby, 1969). The IWM is a cognitive and affective template that informs the individual's expectations about relationships from childhood throughout the entire lifespan. Specifically, Bowlby (1969) explained that a child who experiences reliable and responsive care from their primary caregiver develops an IWM that suggests: (1) the caregiver is emotionally available and sensitive to their needs, and (2) the child is worthy of such care, loved, and valued. A child with this type of IWM will exhibit secure attachment. Conversely, an insecurely attached child will not develop the expectation that their caregiver will consistently be available and responsive. Therefore, Bowlby (1969) argued that internal working models directly influence how individuals see and understand themselves and others within the context of interpersonal relationships, with early, significant interpersonal exchanges serving as a template through which all subsequent interactions are interpreted.

The principles of Attachment Theory are highly relevant for explaining how changes in the family setup can influence the holistic development of children and adolescents. The theory assumes that the patterns established in adult friendships or romantic relationships develop from the quality of the individual's relationships with parents or early caregivers (Carranza et al., 2009). Consequently, parental separation or family breakdown can disrupt the child's attachment security, potentially changing their attachment style and creating feelings of anger, resentment, and confusion, which may lead to relationship issues later in life. In a blended family structure, adolescents and young adults may face unique challenges in building new relationships due to low trust in stepparents and difficulties with low satisfaction and interpersonal skills

(Carranza et al., 2009). From an attachment theory perspective, the strong, secure attachments children develop with single-parents may be threatened or diminished when that parent remarries, potentially leading to a decline in overall well-being and academic achievement for the students involved. This highlights how family structure changes necessitate emotional and relational adjustments that impact a child's sense of security and stability.

Methodology

This study adopted a concurrent mixed methods research design that combined both quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of the influence of blended family structures on adolescent academic performance.

The study was carried out in Baringo North Sub County, an area in the North Rift region of Kenya with a total of 34 public secondary schools and one private school. The location was chosen because of the rising social challenges linked to family instability, poverty, and cultural practices that directly affect adolescents' educational experiences.

The target population consisted of students in Forms 1 to 4 drawn from selected secondary schools in the Sub County. Adolescents were specifically chosen because they are in a critical stage of identity formation, where family dynamics play a central role in shaping self-concept and educational outcomes. Teachers in charge of Guidance and Counseling as well as Directors of Studies were also included to provide professional perspectives on how blended family structures influence students' self-concept and academic achievement. According to the Ministry of Education records, the accessible student population was 10,200 with 30 teachers in charge of counseling.

The study examined one independent variable, blended family structure, and two dependent variables, namely self-concept and academic performance. To generate representative data, both probability and non-probability sampling techniques were applied. Stratified sampling was used to categorize schools into public and private, followed by probability sampling to select schools from each category, while purposive sampling was applied to include the one private school and specific respondents such as students from blended families and teachers handling counseling and academics. Using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sample size determination formula, a sample of 370 students was selected proportionately from the target schools.

Data collection instruments included questionnaires, interview schedules, and focus group discussions. Questionnaires administered to students included sections on demographic details, type of family structure, perceptions of blended families, self-concept, and academic performance. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale was adapted to measure students' self-concept through positively and negatively worded statements rated on a five-point Likert scale. Semi-structured interview schedules were used with teachers in charge of Guidance and Counseling and Directors of Studies to gather deeper insights into the academic and psychosocial outcomes of adolescents from blended families. Focus group discussions were conducted with groups of students to collect interactive responses that complemented data from the questionnaires.

The instruments underwent piloting in two schools from a neighboring Sub County with similar characteristics. The pilot study helped refine ambiguous questions and test the reliability and validity of instruments. Content and construct validity were ensured through

expert review, methodological triangulation, and adaptation of standardized measures. Reliability was tested using the test-retest method and Cronbach's Alpha, where an alpha coefficient above 0.7 was considered acceptable.

Quantitative data was analyzed using SPSS version 26 to generate descriptive statistics such as frequencies, means, and standard deviations. Inferential statistics including Pearson's Product Moment Correlation and one-way ANOVA were used to test relationships and differences between family structure, self-concept, and academic performance. Qualitative data from interviews and focus group discussions was thematically analyzed, with responses grouped according to emerging themes to complement the statistical findings.

Results and Discussion

Response Rate

The study administered a total of 370 questionnaires to students in selected secondary schools in Baringo North Sub County, complemented by six questionnaires distributed to teachers - two from each of the three sampled schools. The response rate was evaluated based on the number of questionnaires returned as detailed in Table 1.

According to Table 1, 289 of the 370 questionnaire that were given to students were returned, representing a 78.1% response rate. According to Cooper and Schindler (2014), research projects can move forward successfully when the response rate exceeds 60% because it typically indicates a sufficient degree of participation for thorough data analysis. Additional qualitative information obtained from the twenty teachers, complemented data from the questionnaire.

Table 1: Response rate

Questionnaires	Total	Percentage
Distributed questionnaire	370	100%
Returned Questionnaires	289	78.1 %

Demographic information

Table 2 presents the demographic characteristics of the students, their parents or guardians, and their teachers. The demographic findings show that out of 289 students, males were the majority at 57.1% compared to females at 42.9%. Most students (60.9%) were aged

between 16–18 years, while 28% were 13–15 years, with only a small proportion above 19 years. Distribution across class levels was fairly balanced, with Form 2 students forming the largest group (28%), followed by Form 4 (26%), Form 3 (24.2%), and Form 1 (21.8%).

Table 2: Demographic Information of Students, Parents/Guardians and Blended Family Structures

Respondents	Variable	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
Students	Gender	Male – 165	57.1
		Female – 124	42.9
	Age Bracket	13–15 yrs – 81	28.0
		16–18 yrs – 176	60.9
		19–21 yrs – 31	10.7
		22–24 yrs – 1	0.3
	Class Level	Form 1 – 63	21.8
		Form 2 – 81	28.0
		Form 3 – 70	24.2
		Form 4 – 75	26.0
	Type of School	Public – 216	74.7
		Private – 73	25.3
Residential Status	Mixed Day/Boarding – 42	14.5	
Parents' Education	Mother	Boys' School – 174	60.2
		Girls' School – 73	25.3
		Primary – 77	26.6
		Secondary – 119	41.2
	Father	Tertiary – 70	24.1
		Primary – 48	16.6
		Secondary – 121	41.9
		Tertiary – 89	30.8
Guardians' Education	Primary – 13	4.5	
	Secondary – 25	8.7	
	Tertiary – 26	9.0	
Parents' Occupation	Mother	Professional – 51	17.5
		Farming – 80	27.7
		Business – 84	28.8
	Father	Professional – 102	34.7
		Farming – 75	25.9
		Business – 43	14.7

	Guardian	Professional – 12	4.0
		Farming – 11	3.8
		Business – 9	3.1
Blended Family Familiarity	Familiar – 120	41.5	
	Not Familiar – 169	58.5	
Type of Blended Family	Step-father – 30	10.4	
	Step-mother – 86	29.8	
	Both step-parents – 4	1.4	
Siblings	Full siblings – 165	57.1	
	Step siblings – 49	17.0	
	Half siblings – 75	26.0	
Interaction with Stepparents	Stepmother (Often) – 44	15.2	
	Stepfather (Often) – 11	3.8	
	Both (Often) – 3	1.0	
Attachment with Stepparents	Stepmother (Very Close) – 31	10.7	
	Stepfather (Very Close) – 6	2.1	
	Both (Very Close) – 2	0.7	

A large majority (74.7%) attended public schools, with 25.3% in private schools, while most were in boys' schools (60.2%), followed by girls' schools (25.3%) and mixed day/boarding schools (14.5%). Regarding parental education, 41.2% of mothers and 41.9% of fathers had secondary-level education, while fewer had tertiary education (24.1% of mothers and 30.8% of fathers). Guardians, who accounted for 22.1% of respondents, had relatively low education, with only 9% attaining tertiary level. In terms of occupation, fathers were mostly professionals (34.7%), while mothers were mainly in business (28.8%) and farming (27.7%); guardians were engaged in small-scale business (3.1%) and farming (3.8%), with only 4% in professional work. On family structure, 41.5% of students were familiar with blended families, with stepmother families being most common (29.8%), followed by stepfather families

(10.4%) and both step-parents (1.4%). Over half of the students (57.1%) lived with full siblings, while 26% lived with half-siblings and 17% with step-siblings. Interaction with stepparents was higher with stepmothers (15.2%) than with stepfathers (3.8%) or both (1%), and emotional attachment also leaned more towards stepmothers, with 10.7% of students reporting being very close compared to 2.1% for stepfathers and 0.7% for both.

Descriptive results

The objective of the study focused on examining the influence of blended family structure on the academic performance of adolescent students in selected secondary schools in Baringo North Sub County.

Intact Families

Table 3 presents data on the academic performance of adolescent students from intact families, assessing

various aspects of their academic attitudes and support system.

Table 3: Academic performance of adolescent students' from intact families

		SD	D	N	A	SA	Me an	Std. Dev
I would rate my academic performance as good	%	9.2	21. 2	12. 5	31. 5	25. 5	3.4 3	1.32
My academic performance is fair	%	14. 7	21. 7	6	33. 7	23. 4	3.3 0	1.42
My academic performance is poor	%	34. 2	46. 7	4.3	11. 4	3.3	2.0 3	1.07
My family motivates me to study	%	2.7	1.6	3.8	25	66. 8	4.5 2	0.87
Both my parents support my academic work	%	1.6	3.8	2.7	23. 9	59. 2	4.4 8	0.88
My siblings motivate me in my academic work	%	4.3	3.8	4.3	33. 7	49. 5	4.2 6	1.04
My teacher is concerned about my academic performance	%	3.3	3.8	8.2	37	45. 1	4.2 0	0.99
My parents feel that this school will lead to my success	%	1.6	0.5	2.2	22. 8	70. 1	4.6 4	0.72
Academic performance							3.8 0	0.44

A significant majority of students from intact families reported that their families actively motivate them to study, with a mean score of 4.52 (SD = 0.87). Similarly, parental support for academic work was highly rated, with 59.2% of students indicating strong agreement (Mean = 4.48, SD = 0.88). The belief that their school will lead to success also received strong parental endorsement, with 70.1% of students strongly agreeing (Mean = 4.64, SD = 0.72). These findings suggest that family involvement plays a crucial role in fostering a positive academic environment for students from intact families.

Beyond parental support, other influential factors emerged, including teacher concern and sibling motivation. Nearly half of the students (45.1%) strongly agreed that their teachers are concerned about their academic performance (Mean

= 4.20, SD = 0.99), while 49.5% strongly agreed that their siblings motivate them (Mean = 4.26, SD = 1.04). These results indicate that both family members and educators contribute to academic encouragement, reinforcing a network of support that may enhance student confidence and performance.

Conversely, certain items recorded lower mean scores, suggesting areas where students did not perceive strong academic struggles. The perception of poor academic performance had the lowest mean (Mean = 2.03, SD = 1.07), with only 3.3% of students strongly agreeing that their performance was poor, while the highest percentage (46.7%) somewhat disagreed. This suggests that most students from intact families do not view their academic performance negatively. Additionally, when asked whether their performance was fair,

responses were more varied, with a mean of 3.30 (SD = 1.42), indicating that a notable portion of students felt their performance was average rather than excellent.

A comparison between students from intact and blended families reveals differences in perceptions of academic performance and support. Among students from intact families, 25.5% strongly agreed and 31.5% agreed that their academic performance was good, with a mean of 3.43 (SD = 1.32). Additionally, 23.4% agreed and 33.7% somewhat agreed that their academic performance was fair, reflecting a mix of confidence and moderate self-

assessment. In contrast, students from blended families may experience variations in the level of academic encouragement and motivation they receive, potentially influencing their academic self-perceptions differently. Further statistical comparisons between the two groups could provide deeper insights into these patterns.

Blended Families

Table 4 presents data on the academic performance of adolescent students from blended families, focusing on various aspects such as their perception of academic performance, family support and teacher involvement.

Table 4: Academic performance of adolescent students blended families

		SD	D	N	A	SA	Me an	Std. Dev
I would rate my academic performance as good	%	2.9	17.1	9.5	30.5	40	3.88	1.20
My academic performance is fair	%	11.4	13.3	11.4	32.4	30.5	3.5	1.36
My academic performance is poor	%	38.1	34.3	1	16.2	10.5	2.2	1.39
My family motivates me to study	%	3.8	1	16.2	21	56.2	4.2	1.03
My stepfather supports my academic work	%	8.6	4.8	7.6	15.2	14.3	3.4	1.43
My stepmother supports my academic work	%	10.5	10.5	5.7	22.9	24.8	3.5	1.44
Both my parents support my academic work	%	10.5	9.5	23.8	21.9	15.2	3.2	1.27
My siblings motivate me in my academic work	%	1.9	7.6	12.4	37.1	39	4.0	1.01
My teacher is concerned about my academic performance	%	5.7	10.5	7.6	27.6	48.6	4.0	1.23
My parents feel that this school will lead to my success	%	2.9	2.9	1	25.7	66.7	4.5	0.89
Academic performance							3.71	0.55

The findings reveal that students from blended families tend to rate their academic performance more positively, with 40% strongly agreeing that they rate

their academic performance as good (Mean = 3.88, SD = 1.20), compared to 31.5% from intact families (Mean = 3.43, SD = 1.32). This suggests that blended

family students, despite facing family complexities, may perceive their academic performance more favorably. However, a significant portion of the students from blended families (38.1%) still disagreed with the idea of their performance being poor, with 10.5% strongly agreeing that their academic performance was poor (Mean = 2.27, SD = 1.39). This highlights that while these students tend to view their academic performance in a generally positive light, their perspectives might be shaped by a mix of family dynamics.

One teacher shared:

“Students from blended families often come across as more withdrawn or disengaged in class, particularly when there's tension at home. It's evident they sometimes lack the sense of belonging that their peers in intact families enjoy” (*Interview Teacher 15, July, 2024*)

Another teacher remarked:

“However, some of them are surprisingly resilient, and when they feel supported by their teachers, they perform better than you'd expect given their home situations.” (*Interview Teacher 18, July, 2024*)

This aligns with the studies by Halpem-Meekin and Tech (2008), which suggest that family complexity negatively impacts psychological well-being, affecting academic outcomes. The emotional difficulties faced by children in blended families may contribute to challenges in their academic work, especially when stepparents are less supportive. The data in this study reflects that, although family motivation remains high (56.2% strongly agreed that their family motivates them to study, Mean = 4.27, SD = 1.03), stepparents' involvement was relatively less supportive, with only 14.3% strongly agreeing that their stepfather supported their academic work (Mean = 3.43, SD = 1.43). The role of family support is crucial,

as indicated by FGD participants. One student from a blended family shared:

“My stepmom is okay, but I don't feel the same support from her as I do from my mom. Sometimes, I feel like I'm just another kid in the house, not her responsibility” (*FGD participant 6, August, 2024*)

This reflects the findings from Pasley et al. (2017) and Papernow (2018), who note the challenges stepparents face in forming positive relationships with their stepchildren. Stepparents may struggle to establish authority or warmth, which can lead to inconsistent emotional support for the children. One teacher explained:

“It's like the students are torn between loyalty to their biological parents and adjusting to the dynamics of a new family. This often makes it difficult for them to fully engage academically” (*FGD participant 13, August, 2024*)

Sibling support, however, appears to be a positive factor in the academic performance of students from blended families, with 39% strongly agreeing that their siblings motivate them (Mean = 4.06, SD = 1.01). This is comparable to students from intact families, where 49.5% strongly agreed (Mean = 4.26). This support system may provide some degree of stability amidst family transitions. A student in the FGD noted:

“My older brother always helps me with my homework. Even when things are tough at home, he makes sure I'm on track with my schoolwork” (*FGD participant 11, August, 2024*)

Teachers also play a significant role in shaping academic outcomes for blended family students, with 48.6% strongly agreeing that their teachers are concerned about their academic performance (Mean = 4.03, SD = 1.23). A teacher remarked:

“I notice that when I give extra attention or encouragement to

students from blended families, they really shine. It's like they just need to know someone cares about their academic journey" (*Interview Teacher 21, July, 2024*)

This mirrors the findings in the literature review, which highlight the importance of teacher support in fostering positive academic outcomes (Brown et al., 2015; Willis & Limb, 2017).

Despite these positive indicators, the support from stepparents in blended families remains a critical challenge. Only 15.2% of students felt both parents supported their academic work (Mean = 3.27, SD = 1.27), which is lower than the support reported by students from intact families (Mean = 4.48, SD = 0.88). FGD participants pointed out the lack of consistent support from their stepparents, with one student stating:

"I feel like my stepdad doesn't understand my school needs. Sometimes he's too strict, other times, he's not involved at all. It's confusing" (*FGD participant 17, August, 2024*)

This aligns with the studies by Pasley et al. (2017), which highlight the emotional challenges faced by children in blended families, particularly when stepparents struggle to form consistent, supportive roles.

When comparing these results to students from intact families, students in blended families report lower but still substantial motivation from their biological families (56.2% in blended families vs. 66.8% in intact families). Students in intact families also generally report more consistent support from both biological parents (Mean = 4.48, SD = 0.88), which may explain their more positive academic outcomes (31.5% strongly agree that they rate their academic performance as good vs. 40% in blended families). The differences in family support structures may contribute

to the variations in perceived academic success. One teacher noted:

"It's easier to work with students from intact families because their home environment is more stable. The consistency in parental support helps them stay focused on their studies" (*Interview Teacher 21, July, 2024*)

This observation mirrors findings by Tillman (2008) and Zilimes and Lee (1991), who found that students from blended families, particularly females, face unique academic challenges due to the complexities of their family structure.

Thus, students from blended families demonstrate a complex but positive academic outlook, supported by significant family and teacher involvement, though the support from stepparents remains inconsistent. While academic performance in blended families may be slightly lower than in intact families, sibling support and teacher concern play key roles in fostering success. The emotional and relational complexities of blended families, as highlighted in the literature, often create challenges for academic achievement, especially when stepparents struggle to form positive relationships with their stepchildren. Despite these challenges, students from blended families demonstrate resilience, particularly when supported by their siblings and teachers.

Relationship between Family Structure and Academic Performance of Adolescent Students

To determine the relationship between family structure and academic performance of adolescent students in secondary schools in Baringo North Sub-County, a Pearson correlation analysis was conducted. The analysis examined the associations between academic performance, blended family structure, and intact family structure. The results 5 provide insights into how different family

backgrounds relate to students' academic performance.

Table 5: Pearson Correlation

		Academic performance	Blended family	Intact family
Academic performance	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	1		
Blended family	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	.356* 0.000	1	
Intact family	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	.417** 0.000	0.114* 0.019	1

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The Pearson correlation results in Table 5 show that academic performance had a significant positive correlation with both blended family structure ($r = .356$, $p < 0.05$) and intact family structure ($r = .417$, $p < 0.01$). This suggests that students from both blended and intact families experience measurable influence on their academic performance, though intact families exhibit a stronger positive relationship. The correlation between intact and blended families was also significant ($r = .114$, $p < 0.05$), indicating some level of overlap in their influence. These findings align with Kenyan studies that show family background as a key determinant of academic achievement. Njoroge and Kirori (2016) found that adolescents from blended families in Kabete Sub-County tended to perform worse academically, citing weak supervision and role conflicts. Nato (2016) reported that students from nuclear families in Bungoma East outperformed peers in blended and single-parent households, though differences were strongly shaped by parental education and

income. Wachira (2011) noted socio-emotional adjustment challenges among students in blended households in Ganze Sub-County, which reduced classroom participation and learning readiness. More recently, Lanyasunya (2024) emphasized that guardian education and home learning environments are stronger predictors of KCSE outcomes, though family composition indirectly influences these conditions. These findings suggest that while intact families often provide more consistent support for academic success, the influence of blended family structures on adolescent performance cannot be disentangled from wider socio-economic and emotional factors.

Conclusion

The study successfully examined the influence of family structure on the academic performance of adolescent students, revealing a nuanced relationship between the two. Students from intact families generally benefit from a stronger and more consistent support system, which translates to a more positive academic environment and a higher, more

potent positive correlation with academic success. A significant majority of these students reported high levels of family motivation, parental support from both parents, and a shared belief in the school's potential for success. Conversely, students from blended families face greater relational complexities, particularly concerning inconsistent support from stepparents, which resulted in a weaker, though still significant, positive correlation. Despite these challenges, students in blended families demonstrate resilience, largely maintained by strong motivation from their biological parent, active support from siblings, and a crucial compensatory role played by high levels of teacher concern. Ultimately, the presence of a strong, consistent support network whether intact or creatively built through a blend of family and teacher involvement is the primary driver of a student's positive academic outlook and performance.

Recommendations

To the Ministry of Education and Policy Makers

The Ministry of Education should recognize the vital and complex role that family structure plays in academic outcomes and must therefore mandate specialized professional development for all secondary school staff. This training must focus on the psychological and academic adjustment challenges faced by students from diverse family configurations, particularly blended families. The goal is to equip teachers to act as informed, consistent, and empathetic support figures who can compensate for potential instability at home. Furthermore, the Ministry must ensure that all schools are equipped with adequate guidance and counselling resources that can provide students with tools to navigate loyalty conflicts, emotional difficulties, and relationship adjustments inherent in family transitions,

thereby safeguarding their psychological well-being and academic focus.

To School Management and Administrators

School administrators should prioritize the creation of institutional structures that leverage existing positive support systems. This includes establishing formalized mentorship programs, such as peer or "academic sibling" mentorship schemes, to capitalize on the strong positive influence that siblings have on academic motivation. Furthermore, school management must implement a systematic method for enhancing and tracking teacher-student relationships.

To Parents and Family Support Organizations

Family support organizations and schools should collaborate to provide targeted intervention and training for stepparents. These workshops must educate stepparents on the unique challenges of forming bonds in a blended family and emphasize the critical necessity of consistent, positive academic involvement, setting clear boundaries, and offering support without overstepping the role of the biological parent. For all parents, the recommendation is to recognize the strong evidence that active family motivation is the most significant predictor of academic success. Thus, both biological and stepparents should strive to maintain clear communication, express a shared, optimistic belief in the student's potential, and continuously encourage a pro-academic atmosphere at home, regardless of the household's structural composition.

Future Research

Future research should focus on explaining the causal mechanisms behind the relationship between family structure

and academic performance, moving beyond the current correlational findings. The most urgent area is to conduct in-depth qualitative studies to understand why stepparental support is inconsistent. Research must pinpoint the specific challenges in blended families, such as loyalty conflicts, role ambiguity, and inconsistent discipline, by interviewing all family members.

References

- Adjiwanou, V., & LeGrand, T. (2021). *Stepfather families and children's schooling in sub-Saharan Africa: A cross-national study*. Demographic Research. <https://www.demographic-research.org/volumes/vol44/27/44-27.pdf>.
- Ainsworth, M. D. S. (1982). Attachment: Retrospect and prospect. In C. M. Parkes & J. Stevenson-Hinde (Eds.), *The place of attachment in human behavior* (pp. 9–30). Basic Books.
- Ainsworth, M. D. S., Blehar, M. C., Waters, E., & Wall, S. N. (2015). *Patterns of attachment: A psychological study of the strange situation*. Psychology press. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203758045>
- Amato, P. R., & Keith, B. (1991). Parental divorce and the well-being of children: a meta-analysis. *Psychological bulletin*, 110(1), 26. <https://psycnet.apa.org/fulltext/1991-32830-001.html>
- Bean, R. C., Ledermann, T., Higginbotham, B. J., & Galliher, R. V. (2020). Associations between relationship maintenance behaviors and marital stability in remarriages. *Journal of divorce & remarriage*, 61(1), 62-82. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10502556.2019.1619385>
- Bengesai, A. V., & others. (2020). *The association between family structure changes and schooling outcomes*. Social Sciences. <https://www.mdpi.com/2076-0760/9/8/133>.
- Bowlby, J. (1951). *Maternal care and mental health*. World Health Organization. <https://pages.uoregon.edu/eherman/teaching/texts/Bowlby%20Maternal%20Care%20and%20Mental%20Health.pdf>
- Bowlby, J. (1969). *Attachment and loss: Vol. 1. Attachment*. Basic Books.

- Bowlby, J. (1969). *Attachment and Loss: Vol.1. Attachment*. New York: Basic Books.
- Bowlby, J. (1973). *Attachment and loss: Vol. 2. Separation: Anxiety and anger*. Basic Books.
- Bowlby, J. (1980). *Attachment and loss: Vol. 3. Loss: Sadness and depression*. Basic Books.
- Bowlby, J. (1988). *A secure base: Clinical applications of attachment theory*. Routledge.
- Bowlby, J. (2018). The nature of the child's tie to his mother 1. In *Influential Papers from the 1950s* (pp. 222-273). Routledge. <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9780429475931-15/nature-child-tie-mother-1-john-bowlby>
- Carranza, L. V., Kilmann, P. R., & Vendemia, J. (2009). Links between parent characteristics and attachment variables for college students of parental divorce. *Adolescence*, 44(174).
- Cherry, K. (2023). What is attachment theory? The importance of early emotional bonds. *Very Well Mind*, 22.
- Ermisch, J. F., & Francesconi, M. (2001). Family structure and children's achievements. *Journal of population economics*, 14(2), 249-270. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s001480000028>
- George, C. M., & Fernandez, M. S. (2014). A case study of a stepfamily's relationship experiences before and after the death of a custodial biological parent. *The Family Journal*, 22(2), 258-264. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1066480713513556>
- Gilbreath, V. (2018). *Family structure and academic achievement in blended households*. Liberty University Digital Commons. <https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2770&context=doctoral>.
- Ginther, D., & Pollak, R. A. (2004). Family structure and children's educational outcomes: Blended families, stylized facts, and descriptive regressions. *Demography*, 41(4), 671–689. <https://doi.org/10.1353/dem.2004.0031>
- Iheaka, J. E. (2022). *Influence of family structure on students' academic achievement*. Nnadiabube Journal of Education in Africa. <https://acjol.org/index.php/njea/article/download/3070/3020>.
- Jeynes, W. (2010). *Parental involvement and academic success*. Routledge.
- Lanyasunya, R. (2024). *Family-related influences on KCSE performance in selected schools*.

- Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences.
<https://www.journals.editiononline.com/index.php/jhss/article/view/674>.
- Nato, (2016). *Analysis of family structure influence on academic performance among secondary school students in Bungoma East Sub-County, Kenya*. ResearchGate.
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/304339277_Analysis_of_Family_Structure_Influence_on_Academic_Performance_Among_Secondary_School_Students_in_Bungoma_East_Sub-County_Kenya.
- Ngumbao, J. K, Kang'ara, H & Kamau, J. (2020). *Influence of Blended Family Structures on Socio-emotional Development of Pre-Primary School Learners in Ganze Sub-County, Kilifi County, Kenya*. International Journal for Innovation Education and Research. Vol.8 No 04 2020. 503-513
- Njoroge, M., & Kirori, P. (Year). *Blended family dynamics and academic performance: A case of Kabete Sub-County, Kenya*. CORE.
<https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/234691334.pdf>.
- O'Brien, F., Nixon, E., & Hadfield, K. (2023). Effects of preterm birth and parent-child relationships on socioemotional difficulties, verbal ability, and numerical ability among older children and young adolescents. *Developmental Psychology*, 59(4), 745.
<https://psycnet.apa.org/fulltext/2023-10464-001.html>
- Ohazulike, G. A. (2023). Nature, Changes, and Dynamics of Family Structures and Parenting in Nigeria: Its Implications on Children's Socialization and Marriage. *Zik Journal of Multidisciplinary Research*, 6(1).
- Sundstrom, M. (2013). *The Complexity of Stepfamily Relationships using a large Swedish data set*. Retrieved from
<https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/234691334.pdf>
- Wachira, (2011). *Adjustments of pre-primary learners from blended families in Nairobi*. (Thesis/Report). Scholars Journal / Nairobi studies.
<https://scholarsjournal.net/index.php/ijier/article/download/2302/1645/7021>.