

# **Influence of Blended family Structures on Socio-emotional Development of Pre-primary School Learners in Ganze Sub-county, Kilifi County, Kenya**

**Johnson Kazungu Ngumbao**

Mount Kenya University

P.O Box 425-80108 Kilifi, Kenya

Corresponding Authors: Dr. Hannah Kang'ara and Ms. Joyce Kamau

## **Abstract**

*Families provide a conducive environment which necessitate acquisition of self-esteem, self-confidence and self-efficacy amongst learners in pre-primary schools. However, pre-primary school learners have manifested and continue to manifest instances of low self-esteem, low self-confidence and self-efficacy levels. This study sought to assess the influence of contemporary blended family structures on socio-emotional development of pre-primary school learners. The study was guided by the family systems theory. The study adopted mixed methodology and thus applied concurrent triangulation research design. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically along the objectives and presented in narrative forms. Quantitative data were analyzed descriptively using frequencies and percentages and inferentially using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Analysis in Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS 23) and presented using tables. The study established that pre-primary school learners manifest instances of low self-esteem, low self-confidence and low self-efficacy. The study also established that there are different dimensions of blended family structures which influence socio-emotional development, that is, self-esteem, self-confidence and self-efficacy, of pre-primary school learners. Thus, the study recommends that parents who are in blended family structures should adopt mechanism of enhancing the socio-emotional development of their children. Government and other stakeholders should provide necessary support meant to help such families improve the socio-emotional development of their children. Government agencies should create funds and kitties meant to for the upkeep of children who are orphans and vulnerable.*

**Keywords:** Blended family structures, socio-emotional development, pre-primary school learners

## **Introduction**

The blended family is one that has started to become the focus of many more studies in the last couple of decades especially when the family is formed after a divorce. According to Fergusson, Dimond and Horwood (2008), a blended family consists of two adults, the children they have from previous marriages or relationships and the children they may have together. In a study conducted in the Netherlands, Ermisch and Marco (2010) posit that blended families are very common in today's society since approximately 70%

of divorced adults remarry. However, Ermisch and Marco (2010) note that 60% of the blended families that are formed will end up in divorce. These divorces are more likely to happen in the first two years of the marriage because of the tremendous amount of change and stress a new marriage can put on the members of the new family. The study further notes that pre-primary school learners from such family arrangements suffer deleterious consequences. That is, they manifest low self-esteem, low self-confidence and put little effort in their academic studies.

In a study carried out in Kuala Lumpur, Carlson (2011) identified three different types of blended families and four important tasks the family must complete in order to survive. The author established that the three types of blended families are the neotraditional family, the romantic family, and the matriarchal family (Carlson, 2011). The study further indicated that the four tasks a new blended family must take into careful consideration are the formation of the step-parent and step-child roles, being able to separate the new marriage from the first, coping and managing with psychological change, and understanding the roles of the nonresidential parent and former spouses. The study established that when a second family and a second marriage dissolve, the children internalize the lessons that marriage is not permanent, that a home is never stable, and that they cannot trust the people they love. This formation affects their socio-emotional development and is a possible outcome when the children form strong attachments to the new parent and the new family.

In Africa, a blended family structure is a commonplace and has its fair share of challenges. For example, in a study conducted amongst households in Lesotho, Evans, Jonathan and Richard (2013) asserted that at best, blended families go through difficult periods of adjustment, particularly during the first two years of living together. In Kenya, Kitheka (2016) posit that blended families are formed when adults in a new relationship decide to live together. Children of one or both partners may live with the couple full-time or come to visit. In a study conducted in Nairobi, Wachira (2011) reveals that pre-primary school learners from such families find it hard to adjust to the changes. They may be confused about where they belong and worry about things such as moving house or schools, or losing touch with friends (Wachira, 2011). Wachira (2011) suggests that, while new stepparents may want to jump right in and to establish a close relationship with stepchildren, they should consider the child's emotional status and gender first. In Ganze Sub-county, blended families are a common phenomenon and has occasioned most pre-primary school learners to manifest diminished self-esteem, self-confidence, self-efficacy and motivation to work hard (Musyoka & Kimani, 2012). Musyoka and Kimani (2012) assert that when a blended family forms, the struggles for performance increase and become more complicated. While competition among siblings exists in all families, rivalry with non-biological siblings can be especially bitter. There is more frequent fighting, and encourage the children to compete against their own personal best instead of what their siblings may be capable of doing.

Musyoka and Kimani (2012) further note that several aspects of forming a new family can create identity issues for young children. For example, if the mother's name changes to the last name of the new husband while the children of the mother keep their own last name, children may feel suddenly abandoned (Musyoka & Kimani, 2012). Further, pre-primary school learners feel confused about their feelings for a step-parent. However, much still needs to be done since Musyoka and Kimani (2012) have not articulated how different

forms and dimensions of blended families influence socio-emotional development amongst learners in pre-primary schools.

## **Statement of the problem**

Family structures such as contemporary blended family formations play an important role in the socio-emotional development of pre-primary school learners. According to Ayieko (2013), such family structures develop self-esteem and well-adjusted behavior patterns. However, in Ganze Sub-county, the situation is quite different with many pre-primary school learners manifesting instances of low self-esteem, emotional maladjustment and poorly developed self-efficacy skills. Ayieko (2013) reports that 45.8% of pre-primary school learners in Ganze Sub-county either have low self-esteem, lack self-confidence, manifest instances of emotional maladjustment and unacceptable forms of behavior which interfere with their concentration in class. Yet, it was not clear how blended family structures influence socio-emotional development of pre-primary school learners.

## **Theoretical Framework**

This study was guided by the family systems theory which was postulated by Murray Bowen (2004). This theory suggests that individuals cannot be understood in isolation from one another, but rather as a part of their family, as the family is an emotional unit. Families are systems of interconnected and interdependent individuals, none of whom can be understood in isolation from the system. Members of the system are expected to respond to each other in a certain way according to their role, which is determined by relationship agreements. Within the boundaries of the system, patterns develop as children's behavior is caused by and causes other family member's behaviors in predictable ways. Thus, the relevance of this theory in this study is that it underscores the fact that different family systems or structures organize themselves into subsystems to accomplish the tasks and goals of the family.

This study was also guided by socio-emotional theory which was postulated by Maurice (2006) as a process of acquiring core competencies to recognize and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, appreciate the perspectives of others, establish and maintain positive relationships, make responsible decisions, and handle interpersonal situations constructively and ensure that concepts and approaches that have proven to have beneficial effects on the development of socio-emotional skills in children. In this study, intentional teaching combined with adult prompting, positive reinforcement, peer-to-peer monitoring and student monitoring promotes the use of the learned skills throughout the school day and in settings outside of the school community. This instruction, practice and generalization build the foundation for children to become skilled at social problem-solving and responsible decision making. As children master the skills, they are on their way to knowing how to conduct themselves with personal, moral and emotional responsibility.

## **Delimitations of the Study**

This study was carried out among public pre-primary school schools in Ganze Sub-county. This study assessed the influence of blended family structures on socio-emotional development amongst pre-primary school learners. In this study, mixed methodology was applied and thus concurrent triangulation research design was adopted. Questionnaire was used to collect quantitative data from pre-primary school teachers, interviews were used to gather qualitative data from headteachers and parents' representatives whereas observation checklist was used to collect data from pre-primary school learners.

## **Research Methodology**

The study adopted mixed methodology and thus applied concurrent triangulation research design. Target population comprised 137 headteachers, 274 pre-primary school teachers, 137 parents' representatives and 4216 pre-primary school learners totaling to 4764 from which a sample of 369 respondents was determined using Yamane's Formula. Stratified sampling was used to create four strata based on the number of zones in Ganze Sub-county. From each zone, four headteachers, 25 pre-primary school teachers and four parents' representatives were selected using purposive sampling. However, from each zone, 59 pre-primary school learners were selected using simple random sampling. This procedure enabled the researcher to sample 16 headteachers, 100 pre-primary school teachers, 16 parents' representatives and 237 pre-primary school learners. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically along the objectives and presented in narrative forms. Quantitative data were analyzed descriptively using frequencies and percentages and inferentially using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Analysis in Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS 23) and presented using tables.

## **Results and Discussions**

The study sought to:

- i. Assess levels of socio-emotional development among pre-primary school learners in Ganze Sub-county
- ii. Examine the influence of blended family structures on socio-emotional development of pre-primary school learners in Ganze Sub-county.

## **Response Rate**

In this study, 100 questionnaires were administered to pre-primary school teachers out of which 98 questionnaires were filled and returned. At the same time, the researcher also interviewed 13 headteachers, 14 parents' representatives and conducted observation schedules among 200 pre-primary school learners. This yielded response rates shown in Table 1;

**Table 1: Response Rates**

Respondents	Sampled Respondents	Those Who Participated	Achieved Return Rate (%)
Headteachers	16	13	81.3
Pre-primary School Teachers	100	98	98.0
Parents' Representatives	16	14	87.5
Pre-primary School Learners	237	200	84.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>369</b>	<b>325</b>	<b>88.1</b>

**Source: Field Data (2020)**

Table 1 shows that headteachers, pre-primary school teachers, parents' representatives and pre-primary school learners registered a response rate of 88.1%. This confirmed the findings of Creswell (2014) that a response rate above 75.0% is adequate and of suitable levels to allow for generalization of the outcomes to the target population.

### Levels of Socio-Emotional Development among Pre-primary School Learners

The study assessed the levels of socio-emotional development among pre-primary school learners. Collected data are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2: Levels of Socio-Emotional Development among Pre-primary School Learners**

Indicators of Socio-emotional Development	High		Low	
	f	%	f	%
Self-esteem, e.g. not isolated, not hot-tempered, not quiet, not withdrawn and not emotional	30	30.6	68	69.4
Self-confidence, e.g. not talking very little, not fearful, make decisions and feel motivated	36	36.7	63	63.3
Self-efficacy, e.g. not afraid of attempting issues and express themselves	29	29.6	69	70.4

**Source: Field Data (2020)**

Table 2 shows that only 30.6% of the pre-primary school teachers indicated that self-esteem levels of their learners is high whereas majority (69.4%) indicated low. In the same token, only 36.7% of the pre-primary school teachers indicated that the levels of self-confidence of their learners is high whereas majority (63.3%) indicated that their learners manifest low self-confidence levels. On the question of self-efficacy, only 29.6% of the pre-primary school teachers indicated that their learners manifest high levels of self-efficacy whereas majority (70.4%) indicated low. These views were shared by the headteachers and parents' representatives during the interviews. They also indicated that the self-esteem, self-confidence and self-efficacy levels of pre-primary school learners are low. Headteacher, H1, noted;

*In my school, socio-emotional development of pre-primary school learners is low with many learners manifesting instances of low self-esteem, low self-confidence and low self-efficacy levels. Most of these learners are often isolated, hot-tempered, quiet, withdrawn and very emotional"*

The researcher also observed pre-primary school learners manifested low self-esteem, low self-confidence and low self-efficacy levels. These findings lend credence to the observations of Benokraitis (2012) that children from different families manifest negative socio-emotional development such as behavioral adjustment, attachment security, parent-reported academic difficulties, emotional well-being, self-esteem and sociability. In summary, these findings affirm the fact that when one combines the internal struggles that a pre-primary school learner goes through with the physical struggles of mood swings, feelings of inadequacy and general awkwardness, it becomes clear that, although aggravating, why it is that pre-primary school learners have such a strong desire to set themselves apart from their parents and other adults and achieve some type of independence.

**Blended Family Structures and Socio-emotional Development among Pre-primary School Learners**

The study sought to establish how blended family structures influence socio-emotional development among pre-primary school learners. Descriptive data were collected from pre-primary school teachers and results are shown in Table 3:

**Table 3: Views of Pre-primary School Teachers on the Influence of Blended Family Structures on Socio-Emotional Development among Pre-primary School Learners**

Test Items	SA %	A %	U %	D %	SD %
No-kid husband with kid-wife blended family structures lower pre-primary school learners’ self-esteem, self-confidence and self-efficacy	71.1	12.2	1.3	10.1	5.3
No-kid wife with kid-husband blended family structures lower pre-primary school learners’ self-esteem, self-confidence and self-efficacy	66.9	13.2	2.4	12.7	4.8
Kid-husband with kid-wife blended family structures have negative pre-primary school learners’ self-esteem, e.g. isolated, hot-tempered, quiet, withdrawn, emotional	80.5	12.4	1.6	3.3	2.2
Kid-husband with kid-wife blended family structures lower pre-primary school learners’ self-confidence, e.g. talk very little, fearful, inability to make decisions and feel unmotivated	67.4	19.7	3.5	5.3	4.1
Kid-husband with kid-wife blended family structures lower pre-primary school learners’ self-efficacy, e.g. afraid of attempting issues, inability to express themselves, withdrawn, disorganized	69.6	13.8	1.6	10.6	4.4

**Source: Field Data (2020)**

Table 3 shows that 70(71.1%) of the pre-primary school teachers strongly agreed with the view that no-kid husband with kid-wife blended family structures lower pre-primary school learners’ self-esteem, self-confidence and self-efficacy. 12(12.3%) agreed. Only a paltry 1(1.3%) were undecided, 10(10.1%)

disagreed whereas 5(5.3%) strongly disagreed. The study also revealed that 66(66.9%) of the pre-primary school teachers strongly agreed with the view that no-kid wife with kid-husband blended family structures lower pre-primary school learners' self-esteem, self-confidence and self-efficacy as did 13(13.2%) who agreed. 2(2.4%) were undecided, 12(12.7%) disagreed whereas 5(4.8%) strongly disagreed. These findings corroborate the findings of a study carried out in the Netherlands in which Ermisch and Marco (2010) established that pre-primary school learners from such family arrangements suffer deleterious consequences. That is, they manifest low self-esteem, low self-confidence and put little effort in their academic studies.

Thus, these findings are indicative of the fact that blended families have extremely different outcomes, it all depends on the people involved and have detrimental effects on the child. In other words, when a second family and a second marriage dissolve, the children internalize the lessons that marriage is not permanent, that a home is never stable, and that they cannot trust the people they love. This formation affects their socio-emotional development and is a possible outcome when the children form strong attachments to the new parent and the new family. The study revealed that 79(80.5%) of the pre-primary school teachers strongly agreed with the view that kid-husband with kid-wife blended family structures have negative pre-primary school learners' self-esteem, e.g. isolated, hot-tempered, quiet, withdrawn and emotional as did 12(12.4%) who agreed. 2(1.6%) were undecided, 3(3.3%) disagreed whereas 2(2.2%) strongly disagreed. Slightly than two-thirds, 66(67.4%) of the pre-primary school teachers strongly agreed with the view that kid-husband with kid-wife blended family structures lower pre-primary school learners' self-confidence, e.g. talk very little, fearful, inability to make decisions and feel unmotivated. 19(19.7%) agreed. 3(3.5%) were undecided, 5(5.3%) disagreed whereas 4(4.1%) strongly disagreed. These findings lend credence to the findings of a study carried out amongst households in Lesotho in which Evans et al (2013) established that blended families go through difficult periods of adjustment, particularly during the first two years of living together. According to Evans et al (2013), jealousies and rivalries develop over everything from school performance to birthday parties and presents.

These findings imply that, when one of the partners has an only child, there is a perceived loss of attention and love, which, in turn, lead to poor socio-emotional development among school-going children. The study also revealed that 68(69.6%) of the pre-primary school teachers strongly agreed with the view that kid-husband with kid-wife blended family structures lower pre-primary school learners' self-efficacy, e.g. afraid of attempting issues, inability to express themselves, withdrawn and disorganized as did 14(13.8%) who agreed. 2(1.6%) of were undecided, 10(10.6%) disagreed whereas 4(4.4%) strongly disagreed. These findings are consistent with the findings of a study conducted in Nairobi County in which Wachira (2011) established that pre-primary school learners from such families find it hard to adjust to the changes. They may be confused about where they belong and worry about things such as moving house or schools, or losing touch with friends (Wachira, 2011).

Wachira (2011) suggests that, while new step-parents may want to jump right in and to establish a close relationship with stepchildren, they should consider the child's emotional status and gender first. These findings also corroborate the assertions of Musyoka and Kimani (2012) that blended families are a common phenomenon in Ganze Sub-county and has occasioned most pre-primary school learners to manifest diminished self-esteem, self-confidence, self-efficacy and motivation to work hard. Thus, these findings

point to the fact that different forms and dimensions of blended families influence socio-emotional development amongst learners in pre-primary schools.

### **Inferential Findings on the Influence of Blended family Structures on Socio-Emotional Development among Pre-primary School Learners**

To verify the relationship between blended family structures and socio-emotional development among pre-primary school learners, data were collected on the number of learners from blended family structures and those who manifest diminished socio-emotional development such as low self-esteem. The results are shown in Table 4:

**Table 4: Number of Pre-primary School Learners from Blended Family Structures and Number of Pre-primary School Learners with Cases of Low Self-esteem in Public Pre-primary Schools**

<b>Number of Learners from Blended Family Structures</b>	<b>Number of Learners with Cases of Low Self-esteem</b>
3	1
7	3
7	3
7	3
8	5
8	6
9	6
10	6
10	6
11	7
12	7
13	8
15	9

**Source: Field Data (2020)**

Table 4 shows that many pre-primary school learners who come from blended families manifest instances of low self-esteem. These findings further corroborate the assertions of Musyoka and Kimani (2012) that blended families are a common phenomenon in Ganze Sub-county and has occasioned most pre-primary school learners to manifest diminished self-esteem, self-confidence, self-efficacy and motivation to work hard. These results were subjected to Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Analysis and results are shown in Table 5:



**Table 5: Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Analysis Showing Relationship Between Number of Pre-primary School Learners from Blended Families and the Number of Pre-primary School Learners with Cases of Low Self-esteem**

		Number of Pre- primary School Learners from Blended Families	Number of Pre- primary School Learners with Low Self- esteem
Number of Pre-primary School Learners from Blended Families	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	1	.956** .000
	N	13	13
Number of Pre-primary School Learners with Low Self-esteem	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	.956** .000	1
	N	13	13

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

**Source: SPSS Generated (2020)**

Table 5 shows Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation Analysis which was run to determine the relationship between the number of pre-primary school learners from blended families and the number of pre-primary school learners with cases of low self-esteem. The test generated a correlation coefficient of  $r = 0.956$  with corresponding significant level (p-value) of 0.000 which was less than the predetermined level of significance, 0.05, that is,  $p\text{-value} = 0.000 < 0.05$ . These findings further affirm the fact there is significant relationship between blended family structures and socio-emotional development among pre-primary school learners. In summary, these findings are indicative of the fact that blended families are a common phenomenon with negative effects on socio-emotional development among pre-primary school learners. Pre-primary school learners from blended family structures manifest diminished self-esteem, self-confidence, self-efficacy and motivation to work hard.

### **Thematic Analysis of Qualitative Findings on the Influence of Blended Family Structures on Socio-Emotional Development among Pre-primary School Learners**

The researcher also interviewed headteachers and parents' representatives who also responded in favor of the view that there are different forms of blended family structures. Headteacher, H2, noted:

*“Many pre-primary school learners come from different forms of blended structures. These include; no-kid husband with kid-wife blended family structures, no-kid wife with kid-husband blended family structures, kid-husband with kid-wife and kid-husband with kid-wife blended family structures with harmful effects on socio-emotional development among pre-primary school learners”*

These views were supported by the parents' representatives who noted that many families have become blended depending on a multiplicity of factors. Parents' representatives, however, noted such family formations have affected socio-emotional development. These views further affirm the fact that learners from such family arrangements manifest low self-esteem, low self-confidence and put little effort in their academic studies. From these views, when one of the partners has an only child, there is a perceived loss of attention and love, which, in turn, lead to poor socio-emotional development among school-going children. In other words, different forms and dimensions of blended families influence socio-emotional development amongst learners in pre-primary schools.

## **SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

From the study findings, it is evident that there are different forms of blended family structures. These include; no-kid husband with kid-wife blended family structures, no-kid wife with kid-husband blended family structures, kid-husband with kid-wife and kid-husband with kid-wife blended family structures with harmful effects on socio-emotional development among pre-primary school learners. This affirms the fact that learners from such family arrangements manifest low self-esteem, low self-confidence and put little effort in their academic studies.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The study recommends that parents who are in blended family structures should adopt mechanism of enhancing the socio-emotional development of their children.

## **REFERENCES**

- Ayieko, M. A. (2013). *From single parents to child-headed households: The case of children orphaned by AIDS in Kisumu and Siaya districts*. Kenya.
- Benokraitis, N. (2012). *Marriages & Families: Changes, Choices and Constraints*. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall. pp. 121
- Bowen, M. (2004). *Principles of Family Systems Theory*. Mahwah Press
- Carlson, M. (2011). Family structure and children's behavioral and cognitive outcomes" *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 63:779-792.
- Creswell, J. (2009). *Research design: qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approach*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications
- Ermisch, J. & Marco, F. (2010). Family structure and children's achievements" *Journal of Population Economics*, 14:249-270.

Evans, M., Jonathan, K. & Richard, A. (2013). Educational attainment of the children of divorce: Lesotho, 1940-90” *Journal of Sociology*, 37(3):275-297.

Fergusson, D., Dimond, M. & Horwood, L. (2008). Childhood family placement history and behaviour problems in 6-year-old children” *Journal of Child Psychiatry*, 27(2):213.

Maurice, J. (2006). *The Principles of Socio-Emotional Theory*. Corwin Press.

Musyoka, N. & Kimani, K. J. (2012). *The impact of welfare benefits on single motherhood in Kitui*. University Press.

Wachira, R. (2011). *What parents should know?* Pauline Publications Africa, Nairobi.