

Perceived Social Support and Academic Life Satisfaction among Adolescent Secondary School Students in Kenya: The Role of Teachers, Peers, and Guardians

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ABSTRACT

Background: Supportive relationships may shape how adolescents evaluate their academic experiences, yet the associations of different sources of social support with academic life satisfaction remain insufficiently understood in Kenyan secondary-school contexts. This study examined associations between perceived teacher, peer, and guardian support and academic life satisfaction among secondary school students in Migori Sub-County, Kenya.

Methods: A cross-sectional correlational study was conducted among 392 Form Three students from 15 public secondary schools. Perceived teacher, peer, and guardian support and academic life satisfaction were assessed using self-report measures. Pearson correlations examined bivariate associations, followed by hierarchical multiple linear regression to examine independent associations, with age and gender included in an adjusted model.

Results: Teacher ($r = .29, p < .001$), peer ($r = .25, p < .001$), and guardian support ($r = .19, p < .001$) were positively associated with academic life satisfaction at the bivariate level. When entered simultaneously, the three support sources explained 9.8% of the variance in academic life satisfaction ($R^2 = .10, p < .001$), with only teacher support demonstrating a statistically significant independent association ($\beta = .099, 95\% \text{ CI } [.037, .161], p < .01$). After adjustment for age and gender, teacher support remained independently associated with academic life satisfaction ($\beta = .094, 95\% \text{ CI } [.032, .156], p < .01$). The adjusted model explained 11.1% of the variance ($R^2 = .11, p < .001$). Older age was associated with lower academic life satisfaction ($\beta = -.79, p < .05$), whereas gender was not significantly associated.

Conclusions: Teacher, peer, and guardian support were positively associated with academic life satisfaction at the bivariate level; however, only teacher support demonstrated a statistically significant independent association. These findings highlight supportive teacher–student relationships as a potentially important relational component of adolescents' positive academic experiences. Longitudinal research is needed to clarify the direction of these associations.

Keywords: Adolescents; academic life satisfaction; perceived social support; teacher support; Kenya

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a developmental period during which young people undergo substantial psychological, social, and educational changes while spending a considerable proportion of their daily lives within the school environment. Consequently, understanding adolescent well-being requires attention not only to

psychological difficulties but also to how young people positively evaluate important domains of their lives. Life satisfaction, a cognitive component of subjective well-being, reflects an individual's evaluation of the quality of their life (Diener, 1984). However, such evaluations may also be considered within specific life domains, including the school context (Huebner, 1991; Wu & Becker, 2023). Academic life satisfaction therefore reflects students' subjective evaluation of their experiences within their academic lives and provides a positive indicator through which adolescents' experiences of schooling can be understood.

The social environment in which adolescents navigate their academic lives may be particularly important to these evaluations. Adolescents are embedded within multiple interpersonal relationships, with teachers, peers, and family members or guardians representing important sources of support (Bi et al., 2021; Rautanen et al., 2021). Perceived social support reflects an individual's perception that supportive resources are available from people within their social environment when needed (Bi et al., 2021). During adolescence, such support may include emotional reassurance, practical assistance, information, encouragement, and a sense of being valued and cared for (Bi et al., 2021; Rautanen, 2021). Existing evidence has linked greater perceived social support with more favourable indicators of adolescent well-being, including greater life satisfaction (Bi et al., 2021; Brisson et al., 2024). However, social support is not a single, uniform resource; different individuals within an adolescent's social environment may provide distinct forms of support and may therefore have different associations with well-being (Bi et al., 2021; Brisson et al., 2024).

The distinction between sources of support may be particularly relevant within the academic context. Teachers occupy a proximal position within students' daily educational experiences and may provide academic guidance, informational and instrumental support, encouragement, empathy, and care. Peers share many of the everyday demands of schooling and may provide support around learning activities, while guardians may support students' schoolwork from the home environment (Rautanen, 2021). Thus, although these sources form part of adolescents' broader support networks, their roles within students' academic lives are not necessarily interchangeable. Studies examining different sources of school-related support have demonstrated that teacher, peer, and family support can show distinct associations with adolescents' life satisfaction and school satisfaction (Jiang et al., 2013; Siddall et al., 2013). Evidence from an African setting has similarly linked perceived academic support from teachers, family, and peers with school engagement and satisfaction with school (Gutierrez et al., 2017).

Much of the existing literature has examined global life satisfaction, school satisfaction, or broader indicators of adolescent well-being rather than satisfaction with academic life specifically (Gutierrez et al., 2017; Jiang et al., 2013; Kihia, 2024; Lyons & Jiang, 2022; Siddall et al., 2013; Wu & Becker, 2023). Research across several settings has linked teacher, peer, and family support with adolescent life satisfaction, school satisfaction, and related indicators of well-being (Bi et al., 2021; Brisson et al., 2024; Gutierrez et al., 2017; Jiang et al., 2013; Lyons & Jiang; Siddall et al., 2013). Importantly, the associations of different sources of support are not necessarily equivalent. Longitudinal evidence suggests that teacher, peer, and family support may show different patterns of association with adolescents' school satisfaction over time (Jiang et al., 2013), while large cross-national studies have demonstrated that the magnitude of associations between family, friend, classmate, and teacher support and adolescent life satisfaction varies according to the source of support and across countries and regions (Bi et al., 2021; Brisson et al., 2024). Within Kenya, perceived teacher support has been positively associated with school life satisfaction among Form Three students in Murang'a County (Kihia, 2024). However, evidence remains limited regarding how perceived support from teachers, peers, and guardians relates specifically to academic life satisfaction among Kenyan secondary school students, particularly when these distinct sources of support are examined simultaneously.

In Kenya, secondary school students navigate academic demands within relational environments that include teachers, peers, and adults within their homes. Examining these sources separately may provide greater insight than considering social support only as an overall construct because support from teachers, peers, and guardians may overlap while also relating differently to students' academic experiences. Understanding these associations may contribute to a more contextually grounded understanding of the social environments associated with positive academic experiences among adolescents.

Against this background, the present study examined the associations between perceived social support from teachers, peers, and guardians and academic life satisfaction among form three students in Migori Sub-County, Kenya. Specifically, the study examined the bivariate associations between each source of social support and academic life satisfaction and subsequently assessed their independent associations when considered simultaneously. A further adjusted analysis examined whether these associations remained after accounting for students' age and gender.

METHODS

Ethics Statement

Ethical approval was obtained from the Kenyatta University Ethics Review Committee before commencement of the study (Approval No. PKU/3163/13086; 17 March 2025). Research authorization was subsequently granted by the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI; License No. NACOSTI/P/25/417374). Additional administrative permission was obtained from the County Director of Education, Migori County, and principals of the participating schools.

The ethics committee granted a waiver of parental consent for participants younger than 18 years. Parents were notified of the study, and these participants provided written informed assent. Participants aged 18 years or older provided informed consent before questionnaire administration. All participants received information about the study's purpose, the voluntary nature of participation, confidentiality, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. No personally identifying information was collected. Completed questionnaires were securely stored, with access restricted to the research team.

Participants

A cross-sectional correlational study was conducted among Form Three students attending public secondary schools in Migori Sub-County, Kenya. Data were collected between 2 April and 30 May 2025. Migori Sub-County is located within Migori County in southwestern Kenya. Form Three students were selected because they had generally had sufficient time to adjust to the secondary school environment but had not yet entered the final year associated with preparation for national secondary school examinations. Participants were recruited from 15 public secondary schools.

Sample Size Determination

The sample size was estimated using Yamane's finite-population formula (Yamane, 1967). A target population of 3,569 Form Three students and a margin-of-error parameter of 5% yielded a minimum sample of approximately 360 students. The recruitment target was increased to 400 to accommodate potential non-response and unusable questionnaires. Following data screening, the final analytical sample comprised 392 students. Sample size was planned for the overall survey rather than specifically for the regression models.

Sampling Procedure

A two-stage stratified sampling procedure was used. In the first stage, the 33 public secondary schools in Migori Sub-County were stratified according to school type (boys', girls', and mixed schools). Schools were selected proportionately according to the distribution of school types within the target population and then randomly sampled within each stratum. Fifteen schools were ultimately included: one boys' school, two girls' schools, and twelve mixed schools.

In the second stage, Form Three student lists obtained from each participating school served as the sampling frames. The number of students selected from each school was allocated proportionately according to its Form Three enrolment. Simple random sampling was subsequently used within each school to select students until the allocated sample was attained.

MEASURES

Perceived Social Support

Perceived social support was assessed using the Social Support Scale developed by Rautanen et al. (2021), which measures support from teachers, peers, and guardians. The instrument comprises 27 items across three dimensions. Teacher support is assessed using 11 items capturing informational and instrumental support, empathy, respect, and care relevant to students' academic goals. Peer support comprises nine items assessing informational, instrumental, and emotional support related to learning activities, including support received, provided, enacted, and available for schoolwork. Guardian support is assessed using seven items covering informational, emotional, and appraisal support for schoolwork. In the present study, guardians were defined as adults within the students' homes who provided such support.

Teacher and peer support items were rated on 7-point Likert scales, whereas guardian support items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale. The original subscales demonstrated high internal consistency, with Cronbach's α values of .95 for teacher support, .93 for peer support, and .85 for guardian support (Rautanen, et al., 2021). In the present sample, internal consistency was $\alpha = .80$ for teacher support, $\alpha = .71$ for peer support, and $\alpha = .70$ for guardian support. Permission to use the instrument was obtained from the scale developer.

Academic Life Satisfaction

Academic life satisfaction was assessed using an adaptation of Huebner's (1991) Students' Life Satisfaction Scale (SLSS). References to "life" were replaced with "academic life" to reflect students' academic experiences. The adapted instrument underwent expert review within the Department of Educational Psychology and was pilot-tested among 56 Form Three students from a non-participating school with characteristics similar to those of the sampled schools to assess clarity, comprehension, and contextual suitability.

The instrument comprised seven items rated on a six-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). Following main-sample reliability analysis, seven items were summed to calculate the score used in the reported analyses. Higher scores indicated greater academic life satisfaction. The seven item measure demonstrated good internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .83$). Confirmatory factor analysis provided evidence supporting a unidimensional structure ($\chi^2/df = 3.03$, CFI = .99, TLI = .97, SRMR = .03, RMSEA = .07).

Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected between 2 April and 30 May 2025 through the in-person administration of self-administered paper-and-pencil questionnaires in regular classroom settings across the participating schools. Before data collection, participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, the confidentiality of their responses, and their right to withdraw at any stage without penalty. Written informed assent was obtained from participants younger than 18 years, while participants aged 18 years or older provided informed consent.

Data collection was conducted during scheduled afternoon sessions to minimize disruption to normal academic activities. To reduce the potential for response bias, teachers, principals, and other school staff were not present during questionnaire administration. Standardized instructions were provided to all participants, and participants were given an opportunity to seek clarification before completing the questionnaires.

Members of the research team supervised questionnaire administration to ensure standardized implementation but did not influence participants' responses or interpret questionnaire items. Upon completion, questionnaires were deposited into a sealed collection box to preserve anonymity. Completed questionnaires were transported securely and stored in locked cabinets accessible only to the research team.

Statistical Analysis

Statistical analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics version 25. Before analysis, data were screened for completeness, missing values, and outliers. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were computed to summarize participants' demographic characteristics and study variables. Two-tailed Pearson correlations were calculated to examine the bivariate associations between perceived teacher, peer, and guardian support and academic life satisfaction. Correlations among the three social support dimensions were also examined.

Hierarchical multiple linear regression was conducted to examine the associations between perceived teacher, peer, and guardian support and academic life satisfaction. In Model 1, the three support variables were entered simultaneously using the enter method to examine their associations with academic life satisfaction when considered together. In Model 2, age and gender were added to assess whether these associations changed after demographic adjustment. Age was entered as a continuous variable, and gender was coded as 0 = male and 1 = female. Model fit was summarized using R^2 and adjusted R^2 . The additional variance explained by Model 2 was evaluated using the change in R^2 (ΔR^2) and the corresponding F-change statistic. Unstandardized regression coefficients (B), standard errors, standardized coefficients (β), 95% confidence intervals, and p-values were reported.

Regression assumptions were assessed before interpreting the models. Linearity and homoscedasticity were examined using a plot of standardized residuals against standardized predicted values. Residual normality was assessed using a histogram and normal P–P plot. Multicollinearity was evaluated using tolerance and variance inflation factor (VIF) statistics, while potentially influential observations were examined using Cook's distance. Statistical significance was assessed using two-tailed tests with an alpha level of .05.

RESULTS

Participant Characteristics

The final analytical sample comprised 392 Form Three students with a mean age of 17.18 years ($SD = 0.92$). Most participants (70.4%, $n = 276$) were aged 15–17 years, followed by 29.1% ($n = 114$) aged 18–20 years and 0.5% ($n = 2$) aged 21 years or older. Female participants constituted 55.1% ($n = 216$) of the sample, while 44.9% ($n = 176$) were male. Most participants attended coeducational schools (63.5%, $n = 249$), followed by girls' schools (26.3%, $n = 103$) and boys' schools (10.2%, $n = 40$).

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics and internal consistency estimates for the study variables are presented in Table 1. The mean academic life satisfaction score was 17.88 ($SD = 5.99$). The mean perceived social support scores were 57.60 ($SD = 11.53$) for teacher support, 49.13 ($SD = 7.81$) for peer support, and 24.21 ($SD = 5.55$) for guardian support.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and internal consistency of the study variables

Variable	M	SD	Observed range	α
Academic life satisfaction	17.88	5.99	5-30	0.83
Teacher support	57.60	11.53	19-77	0.80
Peer support	49.13	7.81	26-63	0.71
Guardian support	24.21	5.55	7-35	0.70

Note. $N = 392$. M = mean; SD = standard deviation; α = Cronbach's alpha.

Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the bivariate associations between perceived social support from teachers, peers, and guardians and academic life satisfaction (Table 2). Teacher support was positively and significantly correlated with academic life satisfaction ($r = .29, p < .001$), as were peer support ($r = .25, p < .001$) and guardian support ($r = .19, p < .001$).

The three sources of perceived social support were also positively and significantly correlated with one another. Teacher support was correlated with peer support ($r = .58, p < .001$) and guardian support ($r = .38, p < .001$), while peer support was correlated with guardian support ($r = .31, p < .001$).

Table 2. Pearson correlations among academic life satisfaction and perceived social support (N = 392)

Variable	Academic life satisfaction	Teacher support	Peer support	Guardian support
Academic life satisfaction	—			
Teacher support	.29***	—		
Peer support	.25***	.58***	—	
Guardian support	.19***	.38***	.31***	—

Note. Values are Pearson correlation coefficients. *** $p < .001$ (two-tailed).

Regression Analyses

Hierarchical multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to examine the independent associations between perceived social support from teachers, peers, and guardians and academic life satisfaction (Table 3). In Model 1, teacher, peer, and guardian support were entered simultaneously. The overall model was statistically significant, $F(3, 388) = 13.98, p < .001$, accounting for 9.8% of the variance in academic life satisfaction ($R^2 = .098$; adjusted $R^2 = .091$). Teacher support demonstrated a statistically significant positive independent association with academic life satisfaction ($\beta = .19, 95\% \text{ CI } [.037, .161], p < .01$). Peer support ($\beta = .11, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.004, .175], p > .05$) and guardian support ($\beta = .08, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.023, .200], p > .05$) did not show statistically significant adjusted associations with academic life satisfaction.

In Model 2, age and gender were added to the three social support variables. The full model was statistically significant, $F(5, 386) = 9.65, p < .001$, and accounted for 11.1% of the variance in academic life satisfaction ($R^2 = .11$; adjusted $R^2 = .10$). The addition of age and gender accounted for an additional 1.4% of the variance; however, this increase was not statistically significant ($\Delta R^2 = .01, \Delta F(2, 386) = 2.94, p > .05$).

After accounting for age and gender, teacher support remained positively and independently associated with academic life satisfaction ($\beta = .18, 95\% \text{ CI } [.032, .156], p < .01$). Peer support ($\beta = .12, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.002, .177], p > .05$) and guardian support ($\beta = .09, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.013, .211], p > .05$) were not statistically significant independent correlates. Age was negatively associated with academic life satisfaction ($\beta = -.12, 95\% \text{ CI } [-1.436, -.143], p < .05$), whereas gender was not significantly associated with academic life satisfaction ($\beta = -.054, 95\% \text{ CI } [-1.868, .560], p > .05$).

Regression diagnostics indicated no problematic multicollinearity. Tolerance values ranged from .622 to .844 in Model 1 and from .62 to .90 in Model 2, while corresponding VIF values ranged from 1.19 to 1.61 and from 1.11 to 1.62, respectively. In the adjusted model, the maximum Cook's distance was .022. Visual inspection of the residual histogram and normal P-P plot suggested approximate residual normality. The plot of standardized residuals against standardized predicted values showed no clear curvature or pronounced funnel-shaped pattern, suggesting no major departures from linearity or homoscedasticity.

Table 3. Hierarchical multiple regression analysis examining associations between perceived social support and academic life satisfaction (N = 392)

Model	Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p	95% CI
1	Constant	5.83	2	—	2.91	0.004	[1.893, 9.774]
	Teacher support	0.1	0.03	0.19	3.12	0.002	[.037, .161]
	Peer support	0.09	0.05	0.11	1.87	0.062	[−.004, .175]
	Guardian support	0.09	0.06	0.08	1.57	0.118	[−.023, .200]
2	Constant	19.69	6.11	—	3.22	0.001	[7.666, 31.706]
	Teacher support	0.09	0.03	0.18	2.96	0.003	[.032, .156]
	Peer support	0.09	0.05	0.12	1.93	0.054	[−.002, .177]
	Guardian support	0.1	0.06	0.09	1.73	0.084	[−.013, .211]
	Age	−.79	0.33	−.12	−2.40	0.017	[−1.436, −.143]
	Gender (female vs male)	−.65	0.62	−.05	−1.06	0.29	[−1.868, .560]

Note. Dependent variable: academic life satisfaction. Gender was coded 0 = male and 1 = female. B = unstandardized regression coefficient; SE = standard error; β = standardized regression coefficient; CI = confidence interval.

Model 1: $F(3, 388) = 13.98, p < .001, R^2 = .01, \text{adjusted } R^2 = .09.$

Model 2: $F(5, 386) = 9.65, p < .001, R^2 = .11, \text{adjusted } R^2 = .10; \Delta R^2 = .01, \Delta F(2, 386) = 2.94, p > .05.$

DISCUSSION

The present study examined the associations between perceived social support from teachers, peers, and guardians and academic life satisfaction among Form Three students attending public secondary schools in Migori Sub-County, Kenya. Three main findings emerged. First, perceived support from teachers, peers, and guardians was positively associated with academic life satisfaction at the bivariate level, indicating that students who perceived greater support across these relationships also tended to evaluate their academic lives more positively. Second, when the three sources of support were considered simultaneously, teacher support demonstrated a statistically significant independent association with academic life satisfaction, whereas peer and guardian support did not. This association with teacher support remained after accounting for age and gender. Third, older age was independently associated with lower academic life satisfaction, while gender was not. Collectively, these findings highlight the relevance of adolescents' relational environments to their academic experiences while also suggesting that the associations of different sources of support with academic life satisfaction are not necessarily interchangeable.

The positive bivariate associations observed for teacher, peer, and guardian support are consistent with a broader body of evidence linking supportive interpersonal relationships with more favorable evaluations of adolescents' lives. Large cross-national studies have demonstrated positive associations between perceived support from family members, teachers, classmates, and friends and adolescent life satisfaction, although the magnitude of these associations varies according to the source of support and sociocultural context (Bi et al., 2021; Brisson et al., 2024). In a study involving more than 183,000 adolescents across 42 countries and regions, support from multiple social sources was positively associated with life satisfaction, with cross-country variation in the relative associations of different sources (Bi et al., 2021). More recent evidence involving over 700,000 adolescents across 44 countries and regions similarly demonstrated positive associations between multiple sources of perceived social support and life satisfaction (Brisson et al., 2024). Although these studies assessed global life satisfaction rather than academic life satisfaction specifically, their findings support the broader proposition that adolescents' subjective evaluations of their lives are related to the support they perceive within their interpersonal environments.

The present findings extend this relational perspective to adolescents' evaluations of their academic lives. Schooling occurs within a network of relationships in which teachers, peers, and guardians may provide different but potentially complementary forms of support. Teachers can provide academic guidance, feedback, encouragement, assistance, empathy, and reassurance within the school environment; peers may provide support while navigating shared academic demands; and guardians may provide support for students' schoolwork within the home environment (Rautanen et al., 2021). Previous research examining school-related support has similarly linked support from teachers, peers, and families with adolescent life satisfaction and school satisfaction (Jiang et al., 2013; Lyons & Jiang, 2022; Siddall et al., 2013). In an African context, research among adolescents in Angola found that perceived academic support from teachers, family, and peers was associated with school-related outcomes, including school engagement and satisfaction with school (Gutierrez et al., 2017). Taken together with the present findings, this evidence suggests that academic life satisfaction may be understood partly within the wider relational context in which adolescents experience schooling.

An important finding of the present study was that the pattern changed when the three sources of support were considered simultaneously. Although teacher, peer, and guardian support were each positively associated with academic life satisfaction at the bivariate level, only teacher support demonstrated a statistically significant independent association when their overlapping contributions were taken into account. Teacher support remained independently associated with academic life satisfaction after further accounting for age and gender. This finding is particularly noteworthy given the academic domain of the outcome examined in the present study. Teachers occupy a proximal position within students' everyday educational experiences and interact directly with students around learning, academic expectations, feedback, progress, difficulties, and achievement. Consequently, support perceived from teachers may be particularly relevant to how students evaluate their experiences within the academic domain.

The observed association between teacher support and academic life satisfaction is consistent with previous evidence linking supportive teacher relationships with positive evaluations of students' school experiences. In a short-term longitudinal study, Jiang et al. found that teacher–student relationships were particularly relevant to adolescents' school satisfaction when different sources of school-related support were examined (Jiang et al., 2013). Among Slovak adolescents, both teacher and classmate support were associated with greater satisfaction with school and education (Horanicova et al., 2020). Longitudinal research has also linked teacher and classmate support with adolescents' subjective well-being within school (Tian et al., 2015). Importantly, evidence relevant to the Kenyan context also exists. Among Form Three students in Murang'a County, perceived teacher support was positively associated with school life satisfaction (Kihia, 2024). The present findings extend this Kenyan evidence to Form Three students attending public secondary schools in Migori Sub-County by examining teacher support alongside peer and guardian support and by focusing specifically on academic life satisfaction.

The independent association observed for teacher support should nevertheless not be interpreted as indicating that teachers are universally more important than peers or guardians for adolescent well-being. Cross-national research demonstrates that the relative associations of different sources of social support with life satisfaction vary across countries and contexts (Bi et al., 2021; Brisson et al., 2024). The relevance of a particular source of support may therefore depend partly on the outcome being examined and the social and educational context in which support occurs. Because the present study focused specifically on academic life satisfaction rather than global life satisfaction, the proximity of teachers to students' everyday academic experiences may provide one possible explanation for the observed pattern. However, the cross-sectional design does not establish the direction or mechanisms of this association. Students who evaluate their academic lives more positively may perceive their interactions with teachers more favorably, and other unmeasured characteristics may contribute to both perceptions.

The findings for peer and guardian support also require careful interpretation. Their absence of statistically significant independent associations in the regression models does not indicate that these sources of support were unrelated to academic life satisfaction. Both were positively and significantly associated with academic life satisfaction at the bivariate level. Rather, their regression coefficients estimate their unique associations after the information shared with the other support sources has been taken into account. The social support

dimensions themselves were positively intercorrelated, with the largest correlation occurring between teacher and peer support. This pattern suggests that supportive relationships may overlap within adolescents' environments rather than operate entirely independently.

Previous research similarly indicates that source-specific associations can vary depending on whether different forms of support are examined separately or together, the outcome assessed, and the population studied (Bi et al., 2021; Jiang et al., 2013; Siddall et al., 2013). The present findings therefore support distinguishing among sources of social support rather than treating social support as a single undifferentiated construct. At the same time, the positive bivariate findings caution against interpreting the regression results as evidence that peer or guardian support is unimportant. Instead, teacher support was the source for which the present data provided evidence of a unique association with academic life satisfaction after the overlap among support sources was considered.

Age also demonstrated a significant negative independent association with academic life satisfaction, such that older students tended to report lower academic life satisfaction after accounting for perceived social support and gender. Although age was included primarily as an adjustment variable rather than as the principal focus of the study, this finding is consistent with evidence indicating that subjective well-being may decline across adolescence. Large cross-national and longitudinal research has documented decreases in life satisfaction with increasing age during adolescence (Daly, 2022). Longitudinal research examining both life satisfaction and school satisfaction has likewise demonstrated declines across secondary schooling (Wu & Becker, 2023). However, the present study assessed students at a single point in time and included only Form Three students; consequently, the observed age association cannot be interpreted as evidence of developmental decline within individuals. Further longitudinal research within Kenyan secondary schools would be needed to determine whether academic life satisfaction changes as student's progress through adolescence and secondary education and which developmental or educational factors might account for such changes.

Gender, in contrast, was not independently associated with academic life satisfaction after the other variables were considered. This suggests that, within the present sample and model, academic life satisfaction did not differ systematically according to gender after perceived social support and age were taken into account. Previous evidence regarding gender and adolescent subjective well-being varies according to age, outcome, and context. Cross-national research has identified gender differences in developmental trajectories of global life satisfaction (Daly, 2022), whereas research examining teacher and classmate support in relation to school satisfaction found no evidence that gender modified these associations (Horanicova et al., 2020). Given that gender was included as an adjustment variable in the present study, the absence of an independent association should be interpreted cautiously rather than as evidence that gender is unrelated to adolescents' academic experiences more broadly.

The findings highlight the relevance of supportive relationships to students' academic experiences. Teacher support remained positively associated with academic life satisfaction after adjustment for peer and guardian support, age, and gender. This association warrants further investigation of teacher–student relationships within Kenyan secondary schools. However, it does not establish that teacher support is more important than other sources of support or that teacher-focused interventions should be prioritized. The positive bivariate associations for peer and guardian support also suggest that students' wider relational environments deserve attention.

These findings identify potential avenues for further research rather than demonstrating intervention effectiveness. Longitudinal studies could examine whether changes in perceived support precede changes in academic life satisfaction, while intervention studies could evaluate whether strengthening supportive relationships within school and home environments improves students' academic experiences.

STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS

The present study has several strengths. First, it examined teacher, peer, and guardian support separately, allowing the associations of distinct sources of support with academic life satisfaction to be evaluated rather

than treating social support as a single overall construct. This approach was particularly informative because the findings demonstrated both shared and source-specific patterns of association. Second, the study examined both bivariate and multivariable associations, making it possible to distinguish the overall relationship of each support source with academic life satisfaction from its independent association after accounting for overlap with the other support dimensions. Third, participants were drawn from multiple public secondary schools using a two-stage stratified sampling procedure, and the study included boys', girls', and coeducational schools. Finally, the measures demonstrated acceptable to good internal consistency in the present sample, and the academic life satisfaction measure demonstrated support for its unidimensional structure.

Several limitations should be considered. First, the cross-sectional design prevents conclusions regarding the temporal or causal direction of the observed associations. Greater perceived social support may contribute to more positive evaluations of academic life, but students who are more satisfied with their academic experiences may also perceive their relationships more positively. Both may also be influenced by factors not assessed in this study. Second, all study variables were assessed through self-report and may therefore have been influenced by shared method variance, response biases, and social desirability. Third, participants were drawn exclusively from public secondary schools within Migori Sub-County. The findings may therefore not generalize to students attending private schools, adolescents who are not enrolled in school, or students in other regions of Kenya.

Fourth, the seven-item academic life satisfaction measure was selected following reliability analysis and evaluated in the same sample. Although it demonstrated good internal consistency and evidence supporting a unidimensional structure, further validation in an independent sample is needed to establish whether these measurement properties hold beyond the present participants. Fifth, the regression models explained a relatively modest proportion of the variance in academic life satisfaction, suggesting that additional factors warrant investigation. Future research could examine school climate, academic demands, educational achievement, socioeconomic circumstances, and psychological well-being. Finally, the relatively narrow age distribution and restriction to Form Three students limit conclusions regarding developmental differences. Longitudinal studies across different stages of secondary schooling would help clarify how social support and academic life satisfaction change over time.

CONCLUSION

The present study found that perceived teacher, peer, and guardian support were positively associated with academic life satisfaction at the bivariate level among Form Three students attending public secondary schools in Migori Sub-County, Kenya. When the three support sources were considered simultaneously, only teacher support showed a statistically significant adjusted association, which remained after accounting for age and gender. Older age was associated with lower academic life satisfaction, while gender did not show a statistically significant adjusted association.

These findings underscore the value of considering both the broader relational environment surrounding adolescents and the potentially distinct roles of different sources of support. In particular, supportive teacher–student relationships may represent an important relational component of positive academic experiences, while peer and guardian support remain relevant within adolescents' wider support networks. Longitudinal and intervention studies across diverse Kenyan educational settings are needed to clarify the direction of these associations and determine whether changes in supportive relationships are followed by changes in adolescents' academic life satisfaction.

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