

Relationship between Learner Support Strategies for supporting 100 Percent Transition Policy and Quality Teaching and Learning in Public Secondary Schools in Machakos County, Kenya

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How to cite this article: Ndunge, M. E., Ogola, M., & Otieno, D. (2022). Relationship between Learner Support Strategies for supporting 100 Percent Transition Policy and Quality Teaching and Learning in Public Secondary Schools in Machakos County, Kenya. *Journal of Education*, 2(4), 1-10.

Abstract

The Kenyan government adopted the 100 percent transition policy in 2018 in response to universal access to basic education following international and national instruments that demand that all children should complete free, equitable, and quality secondary education. Nevertheless, due to inadequate preparation, the policy seems to narrow the access gap alone without paying sufficient attention to how the students would be taught and learn. This study sought to investigate the relationship between learner support strategies to support 100 percent transition policy and quality teaching and learning in public secondary schools in Mwala Sub County, Machakos County. Open Systems Theory and correlational design guided this study. The target population consisted of all principals, heads of department (HODs), and teachers from the 68 public secondary schools in Mwala Sub-County. A random sampling technique was used to sample ten schools to participate in the study. Qualitative data was collected from principals through an interview guide while quantitative data was obtained from the HODs and teachers through a questionnaire. Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive and correlation analysis. The findings indicated learner support strategies ($r=0.738$, $p<0.05$) had a positive and significant relationship with quality teaching and learning. The study concluded that learner support strategies contribute significantly to improved quality teaching and learning in public secondary schools in Mwala Sub County. The study recommends that the school management should ensure adequate learner support in public secondary schools including supporting needy students, effective anti-bullying rules, and instilling discipline among the students.

Keywords: *Learner support strategies, 100 percent transition policy, quality teaching and learning, public secondary schools*

1.0 Introduction

Throughout the world, the transition to secondary from primary school is a significant milestone in the lives of children as most students do it at some point during early adolescence. It is considered important as it gives every child free access to learning for 12 years. The exact timing of transition can however differ per country (Global Education Digest, 2011). For instance, in England, children transit in year 6 at age 11 from primary schools to secondary

schools, while in the United States (US) the age is between 10 and 14 depending on one school and another and also per state.

Transition for all children to secondary school is recognized more in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically goal number 4(SDG4). SDG4 recognizes secondary school as the second stage of basic education for all children as it is the key source of workers who are knowledgeable and skilled (The Common Wealthy Education Hub, 2016; Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2012). Consequently, all United Nations (UN) member countries are compelled to see to it that every child accesses free and quality basic education. This has led to emergence of increased demand for secondary school education.

Clearly, with the increase in numbers in secondary schools, quality education remains a significant challenge (High-Level Political Forum (HLPF), 2019). There have been criticisms that SDG4 policies concentrate more on the transition for all students from primary to secondary schools at the expense of quality teaching and learning (Global Education Monitoring Report team, 2019). World Bank (2018) notes that governments and other education stakeholders are thus under pressure to ensure enlargement does not dilute quality teaching and learning in secondary schools.

The high transition rate has led to overcrowding in schools which has rendered it difficult for the teacher to identify learners with difficulties in learning resulting in lower grades that dilute quality education (Luseno & Malicha, 2020). Research has found that in schools where there is a small student-teacher ratio, better teaching and learning are provided. This is because teachers can give individualized attention to students and can monitor their progress through various assessment tools and this enables them to prepare a distinct teaching plan that is more suitable to each student (Johnson, 2011). Thus, there should be a limit to the average number of students a teacher instructs in a school for teaching and learning to be effective. To deal with the problem, due to budgetary constraints the government consequently introduced employment of teachers on contract terms commonly known as intern teachers to improve the teacher-student ratio in the schools. Such temporary engagements raise concerns about the quality of teaching and learning. The strategies employed seem to have impressive progress in narrowing the access gap but negative progress in teaching and learning. Improved enrolment without paying sufficient attention to how the students would be taught and learn would be an oversight of the SDG4 spirit of achieving quality education.

In Machakos County, the average transition rate was 84% in 2019 (Mwikya, Cheloti & Mulwa, 2019). In 2021, the Cabinet Secretary in charge of education announced that some counties had attained 100 percent transition and above, but Machakos County was not one of them (People's Daily, August 26th, 2021). Study findings by Otieno and Ochieng (2020) done in Machakos Sub County, show 100 percent transition policy had effects on teaching and learning in public secondary schools as physical infrastructure was overstretched, there was a shortage of teaching staff and student support programs were constrained. The interest of this study was thus to investigate the relationship between 100 percent transition strategies and the quality of teaching and learning in secondary schools in Mwala, Machakos County.

There is also a range of learner support strategies that have been employed to ensure that they transition smoothly to secondary schools. In Bolivia, for example, school vouchers are given to facilitate school attendance for poor children. The vouchers are used to offset transport, books, and uniform. In Bahamas, the curriculum office is supporting the development of digital content and each student is given a tablet to access this content and additional digital resources

(UNESCO, Global Education Monitoring Report team, 2019). Education foundations in the country also raise funds to cater to programs and classroom requirements that a normal school budget cannot take care of.

Problem Statement

The Kenya government adopted the 100 percent transition policy in 2018 in response to international and national instruments that demand that every single child should complete free, equitable, and quality secondary education. Earlier in 2003, the government introduced free primary education that led to increased enrolment without much provision for the subsequent implications on teaching and learning in secondary schools. By 2019 the national transition rate in secondary schools was estimated to be 71.3% and 80% in 2021. Besides, in Machakos County, it stood at 84% in 2019 and 75% in 2021, which is commendable. With an increase in access, concerns have emerged particularly on how the students would be taught and learn. Although a raft of coping strategies are being put in place by different stakeholders to ensure that quality teaching and learning takes place, more effort seems to be geared towards access than quality. There was thus a need to collect empirical data to inform the extent the 100 percent strategies have been implemented as well as their relationship to teaching and learning to achieve quality education. The current study, therefore, assessed the relationship between learner support strategies to support a 100 percent transition policy and quality teaching and learning in public secondary schools in Mwala Sub County, Machakos County.

Research Hypothesis

H0: There is no relationship between learner support strategies to support 100 percent policy and quality teaching and learning in public secondary schools in Mwala Sub County.

2.0 Literature Review

Theoretical Review

Systems Approach to Management Theory emanating from the work of Bertalanffy Von Ludwing (1973) guided this study. The simplest definition of a system is when different independent but interrelated elements work together to accomplish a whole. The theory looks at the organization as an open system made up of connected and interdependent segments that are linked to each other. Organizational achievements are pegged on the interlinkage and interdependence between the subsystems. The approach suggests that choices and measures taken in one area of the organization will affect the other areas. The different areas thus work together as a unit. Open systems are influenced by both internal and external components.

In this study secondary schools are seen as open systems as they always interact with the external environment. The school as an open system has different inputs would include; physical and human resources, finances, and technologies who represent different sub-systems. Change in the measure taken in one of the areas would lead to change in the other thus affecting the whole. The four areas are not standalone as they are also affected by other factors such as the cultural values, economic, legal, or politics within the environment in which the school sits among others.

The theory also envisions that organizations are made up of the following basic components: inputs, transformation process, and outputs (Lunenburg, 2010). The components in the theory apply in this study as follows: Inputs were the measures taken in the different areas of the school (physical resource, human resource, and students support and community linkage-related transition measures). These inputs formed the independent variables for this study.

The transformation processes would be combining and coordinating the various transition measures in teaching and learning to attain the goal which is to ensure all students are equipped with quality education. This study sought to determine the extent of implementation of the transition measures associated with access and quality teaching and learning in secondary schools in the proposed study locale.

The theory stipulates that to attain outputs an entire system must be run. The outputs are the products, accomplishments, or the system's results. The output of this study is quality education. Thus, transformation process is quality teaching and learning to be measured by establishing a mode of content delivered, frequency of assessment, and the attainment of the learning outcomes measured in mean grades. This study was set to ascertain the extent to which learner support strategies for supporting 100 percent transition policy relate to quality teaching and learning in public secondary schools. Selected public schools were regarded as open systems.

Empirical Review

Learner support measures are services given to individual students undergoing transitional challenges to assist them in the teaching and learning process. The World Bank Development report notes that transiting from primary to secondary school is an important life stage transition for young people and very challenging as most pupils struggle to adapt. Majority of them admit that it is stressful (Rice, Frederickson, Shelton, McManus, Riglin & Ng-Knight, 2019).

Williams, Abbot and Mupenzi (2015) did a study in Rwanda which pointed out guidance and counseling as a strategy that improves transition. Teachers thus need to be better equipped to provide the new students with the necessary guidance and support so that they can experience a sense of belonging. This involves emotional and social support and monitoring friendships after the transition which are found to facilitate successful transitions (Rice et al., 2019). Mukonyia and Onkware (2020) did a study in Kakamega County that looked at the strategies used to improve students' participation in secondary school education and found out that guiding and counseling services were offered relating to sexuality, drug, and substance abuse and to orphaned children who were prone to drop out of school.

Cunningham (2020) adds that implementation of pastorals and academic care, orientation, communication, and support systems between new students and senior students can also assist students to become familiar with the school environment. Besides the teachers, guest speakers' programs and pastoral services were reported as strategies used during counseling sessions to motivate and mentor the students.

In Rwanda Ndiritu, Magoma and Mugiraneza (2020) revealed that the costs households incurred when sending their children to school negatively affected students' transition rate. Republic of Kenya (2012) The Kenyan task force recommended all school levies which put poor households in a disadvantaged position be abolished. In an attempt to ensure that uniform costs were not a threat to transition, Abuya (2021) observed that some students who had been identified through the combined government effort were to attend school in their primary school uniform or in-home clothes following a directive from the education cabinet secretary then.

Poverty has been identified as the main factor affecting students' transition to secondary school. Bursaries from CDF are thus used as a measure to improve student transition in secondary school. It needs to be noted though that there are other factors such as child labor, broken family units, HIV and AIDS, and drug & substance abuse which are impediments to

transition (Williams, Abbot & Mupenzi, 2015). Wekesa and Momanyi (2021) noted the contribution of the Government scholarship program to needy students, Equity Bank, Kenya Commercial Bank (KCB), and the Jomo Kenyatta Foundation have enabled the ministry to ensure students transit to secondary school.

To guide attendance at school and lessons, school rules were also used as strategies. Schools that emphasize their school rules, motto, vision, and mission statement had higher student transitions. Other measures that have been put in place in the area of learner support by national and county governments in Kenya are sensitization on the bad cultural practices and attitudes that hinder access to secondary education, with a keen interest in girls (Otieno & Ochieng, 2020).

3.0 Methodology

The study adopted a correlational research design. The target population consisted of all principals, heads of department (HODs), and teachers from the 68 public secondary schools in Mwala Sub-County. A random sampling technique was used to sample ten schools to participate in the study. Teachers in the five departments and those to take part were sampled using simple random sampling. Ten principals from ten schools and ten teachers from each department took part in the study. Ten HODs were sampled using purposive sampling. Qualitative data was collected from principals through an interview guide while quantitative data was obtained from the HODs and teachers through a questionnaire. Descriptive statistics in form of mean and standard deviation was used to measure the extent to which the 100 percent transition policy measures had been implemented. Inferential statistics (Pearson's correlation) was used to measure the strength of the relationship between the implementation of 100g percent measures and quality teaching and learning. Qualitative data was put into thematic categories.

4.0 Results and Discussion

Descriptive statistics of Learner Support Strategies

The study sought to establish the relationship between learner support strategies to support a 100 percent transition policy and quality teaching and learning in public secondary schools in Mwala Sub County. The respondents were asked to rate their agreement with the aspects under learner support strategies and the results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Learner Support Strategies

Learner support strategies	N	Mean	Std. Dev
Needy students in my school have been provided with a bursary from the CDF kitty	96	3.7	1.00
Candidates who are pregnant in my school are traced by the government officers to continue with learning in secondary school (to be answered by teachers in girls' school only)	57	2.6	1.33
No student has been denied admission for lack of uniform and nonpayment of lunch fees in our school	96	3.9	1.13
All school levies have been abolished in our school	96	3.3	1.30
My school has effective anti-bullying rules	96	4.3	0.97
Students and visitors are frisked at the gate to ensure no weapons are brought to school	96	4.1	1.16
We have digital content in our school	96	3.8	1.21
Our students can access digital content in our school	96	3.6	1.28

The school has education foundations that raise funds for student's school fees, that is, School Alumni	96	2.4	1.24
My School /has reinforced guidance and counseling to ensure a smooth transition	96	4.1	1.00
Some organizations offer counseling opportunities for learners during a transition in our school	96	3.2	1.42
Teachers, pastoral services, and guest speakers' programs are used as strategies to motivate students to stay in school.	96	4.2	1.03

The findings in Table 1 indicate that majority ($M=3.7$, $SD=1.35$) of the respondents agreed with the statement that needy students in the school have been provided with a bursary from the CDF kitty, no student had been denied admission for lack of uniform and nonpayment of lunch fee in our school ($M=3.9$, $SD=1.13$), the school has effective anti-bullying rules ($M=4.3$, $SD=0.97$), and students and visitors are frisked at the gate to ensure no weapons are brought to school ($M=4.1$, $SD=1.16$). Further, most of the respondents agreed that there is digital content in the school ($M=3.8$, $SD=1.21$), students can access digital content in our school ($M=3.6$, $SD=1.28$), the school has reinforced guidance and counseling to ensure a smooth transition ($M=4.1$, $SD=1.03$), and teachers, pastoral services and guest speakers' programs are used as strategies to motivate students to stay in school ($M=4.2$, $SD=1.03$). Majority of the respondents, however, disagreed with the assertion that school has educational foundations that raise funds for students' school fees such as School Alumni ($M=2.4$, $SD=1.24$). The findings imply that efforts have been made to ensure that learner support strategies such as effective anti-bullying rules, access to digital content, guidance, and counseling programs are in place. This is expected to significantly enhance the implementation of 100 percent transition policy translating to quality teaching and learning in public secondary schools.

Thematic analysis of learner support strategies based on Teachers/HOD Questionnaire

The respondents were asked to explain how the learner-supported strategies implemented in their school assist in ensuring quality teaching and learning. The respondents noted that student's welfare is catered for satisfactorily, pregnant girls are allowed to come back for learning, there is enhanced discipline of learners, strategies have ensured learners are comfortable and acquire knowledge holistically, the pastoral program helps the students to change their way of life and learners are informed on emerging issues related to education.

One respondent R4 cited that ... *"The learners are prepared for learning both mentally and psychology therefore there is readiness on their part"*. Another respondent R36 reiterated that ... *"school invites motivational speakers to take the students through the academic journey"*. Further, a respondent R45 observed that... *"There is more teacher-learner contacts time due to students' retention in school"*. Additionally, a respondent R63 noted that ... *"Guidance and counseling department helps in identifying some challenges in learners and deals with them making my teaching effective"*

The findings imply that learner support strategies are critical in determining quality teaching and learning. The descriptive analysis had similar results where participants supported the role of learner support strategies in enhancing quality teaching and learning. The findings were consistent with those of Williams, Abbot and Mupenzi (2015) who pointed out guidance and counseling as a strategy that improves transition.

Thematic analysis of learner support strategies based on Principals' Interview guide

The respondents were asked to explain the strategies that have been put in place in their school to support students during transition. Based on their responses, several strategies were

identified as follows: kitty to support the most vulnerable, class meetings to sensitize parents, allowing parents to pay school fees in kind, guidance and counseling, motivational speakers, and individualized support programs.

Quality Teaching and Learning

The dependent variable in this study was quality teaching and learning in public secondary schools in Mwala Sub County. The respondents were asked to rate their agreement with the aspects of quality teaching and learning and the results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Quality teaching and learning

Quality teaching and learning	N	Mean	Std. Dev
Our school uses a variety of teaching methods	96	4.3	0.86
We identify students with special learning needs in my school	96	4.0	0.92
Our school frequently gives continuous assessment test and mark them	96	4.4	0.74
We mark students' exercise books (assignments)	96	4.4	0.82
Our school integrates ICT into teaching and learning	96	4.2	0.93
We engage students and interact with them during learning	96	4.3	0.79

As indicated in Table 2, majority ($M=4.3$, $SD=0.86$) of the respondents agreed that school uses a variety of teaching methods, teachers identify students with special learning needs ($M=4.0$, $SD=0.92$), school frequently gives continuous assessment test and mark them ($M=4.4$, $SD=0.74$), teachers mark students exercise book ($M=4.4$, $SD=0.82$), school integrates ICT in teaching and learning ($M=4.2$, $SD=0.93$), and teachers engage students and interact with them during learning ($M=4.3$, $SD=0.79$).

The findings imply that efforts have been made to enhance quality teaching and learning in public secondary schools. Some of the measures taken include use of different teaching methods, continuous assessments, ICT integration, and student-teacher interaction.

Thematic analysis on teaching and learning based on Teachers/HOD Questionnaires

The respondents were asked to explain the challenges they face in the school in ensuring quality teaching and learning based on implemented of 100 percent transition strategies. The respondents noted that many students verse few teachers, inadequacy of learning materials/ lack of enough classrooms for each stream, congestion in classes is an obstacle in good content delivery, overcrowding in classes hence a teacher cannot reach all the students, teachers not given incentives, views are rejected therefore difficult in ensuring quality teaching.

One of the respondents R10 observed that “*Poor internet connectivity for ICT integrations, low entry marks for learners joining form one which tremendously affects their final grades of KCSE*”. Another respondent R49 cited that ... “*inadequacy of learning materials forcing the learners to share affecting the teaching methodology, limiting exposure to the learners*”. Further, a respondent R59 noted that ... “*The huge number of learners places strains on both physical facilities and human resources*”

Thematic analysis on quality teaching and learning based on Principals' Interview guide

The respondents were asked to state how the strategies put in place assisted in ensuring quality teaching and learning takes place in their school. The respondents noted that the strategies have worked because the student-teacher ratio has improved, levels of absentees have decreased,

more spacious classrooms with less than 50 students per room, more teachers mean a better student-to-teacher ratio, and more infrastructure to reduce congestion in classes and labs.

The respondents were also asked to state the challenges their school is facing in ensuring quality teaching and learning as a result of the measures put in place to implement 100 percent transition policy. The respondents indicated that poor fee payments where some parents are not supportive, hunger, higher salaries for additional teachers and non-teaching staff, limited financial resources to invest in improving the teacher's learning environment, low enrolment, and lack of enough TSC teachers and low government funding.

The respondents were further asked to explain how the challenges mentioned above can be handled. The respondents indicated the following: Increasing the government capitalization to meet the need of the school, building more science and computer class through government initiatives, more bursaries, community support, close collaboration of stakeholders in resource mobilization, and placing learners in an environment that they best fit.

Correlation Analysis

This section presents correlation analysis findings on the relationship between learner support and quality teaching & learning in public secondary schools in Mwala Sub County. Table 3 shows the correlation results.

Table 3: Correlation analysis

	Quality teaching and learning	Learner support
Quality teaching and learning	1	
Learner support	.738** 0.000	1

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

Results in Table 3 show that there is a strong positive and significant relationship between learner support strategies and quality teaching and learning ($r=0.738$, $p<0.05$). This implies that an improvement in learner support strategies is positively and significantly related to quality teaching and learning. Based on the findings where the p-value <0.05 , the null hypothesis (H_0) that there is no relationship between learning support strategies to support 100 percent policy and quality teaching and learning in public secondary schools in Mwala Sub County was rejected in favor of the alternative which predicted a significant relationship between learning support strategies and quality teaching and learning.

The findings were consistent with those of Williams, Abbot and Mupenzi (2015) who pointed out guidance and counseling as a strategy that improves transition. Similarly, Cunningham (2020) adds that implementation of pastorals and academic care, orientation, communication, and support systems between new students and senior students can also assist students to become familiar with the school environment.

5.0 Conclusion

The study concluded that learner support strategies are positively and significantly related to quality teaching and learning. This implies that learner support strategies contribute significantly to improved quality teaching and learning in public secondary schools in Mwala Sub County. The key learner support strategies include supporting needy students (through bursaries, uniforms, and food), effective anti-bullying rules, instilling discipline among the

students, students access to digital content, guidance, and counseling as well as transformational programs facilitated by teachers, pastoral services and guest speakers.

6.0 Recommendations

1. The school management should ensure adequate learner support in public secondary schools including supporting needy students (through bursaries, uniforms, and food), effective anti-bullying rules, and instilling discipline among the students.
2. The school management should also ensure that students have access to digital content, guidance, and counseling as well as transformational programs facilitated by teachers, pastoral services, and guest speakers.

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