

Bridging the Gap: Transition of Pupils Abled Differently from Mainstream Primary Schools to Junior Secondary Schools in Rachuonyo Sub-County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the transition of pupils abled differently from mainstream public primary schools to junior secondary schools in Rachuonyo Sub-County, Homabay County, Kenya. The study aimed to establish the transition rate and identify challenges influencing the transition of these learners within the framework of inclusive education. A descriptive research design was adopted and conducted in 32 mainstream public primary and junior secondary schools within the sub-county. The target population comprised learners with physical impairments in Grades 6, 7, and 8, their teachers, headteachers, and the County Officer in charge of special needs education. Using purposive sampling, a total of 141 respondents were selected, including 57 learners with physical impairments, 53 teachers, 30 headteachers, and one county special needs education officer. Data were collected using student questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis of class registers. Instrument validity was ensured through expert review, while reliability was confirmed through a pilot study which produced a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.865. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies, means, and percentages. Findings indicated that the transition rate for pupils with physical impairments in the study area was lower than the Siaya county average of 99.8 percent (Ouma et al.,2024), with most respondents estimating it at around 70% and above, while others reported lower rates. Document analysis further revealed a decline in enrolment and promotion of pupils with physical impairments from Grade 6 to Grade 8. Major challenges identified were inadequate infrastructure, limited teaching and learning resources, lack of assistive technologies, shortage of trained special needs teachers, social stigma, inadequate health support, and limited parental involvement. The study concludes that despite progress in inclusive education, systemic and institutional barriers continue to hinder the effective transition of pupils with physical impairments to junior secondary schools.

Key words: Transition rate, Physical impairments, Inclusive education, mainstream public primary schools, educational accessibility.

INTRODUCTION

Any act of experience that shapes a person's mind, character, or physical capabilities is referred to as education. Society shares information, skills, and values from one generation to the next through the process of education. According to Hueblar (2016), the percentage of pupils moving on to the next educational level is the education transition rate. It is calculated by dividing the proportion of pupils enrolling in secondary schools for the following year by the total number of pupils who completed primary school in the previous year. Transition is a normal part of life that everyone goes through at some point, such as when a pupil moves from pre-school to primary school, primary school to secondary school, and so on.

According to a 2015 estimate from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Institute of Statistics (UIS), 85% of primary school pupils globally progress on to secondary education. Since education is a requirement for development, the majority of the industrialized worlds including Europe, Asia and America have continued to make significant investments in this area. Except for South and West Asian nations like Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan, which have Net Enrollment Ratios (NER) ranging from

20% to 24%, all developed nations, according to a 2019 UNESCO assessment, have transition rates from elementary to secondary education that are above 90%. In barely four decades, the Republic of Korea, one of the world's poorest nations in the 1950s, was able to accomplish nearly 100% secondary education transition by the end 1980s.

Education is a fundamental right that should not be taken away and is essential to the fulfilment of all other rights (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, UN 1948). Several international, regional, and national laws and policies also reaffirm this. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 marked a turning point in educational reform in the United States of America (USA). Its goal was to raise the quality of public elementary and secondary schools. The statute required schools to account for the learning and performance of their pupils. Prior to NCLB, many schools did not pay attention to how disadvantaged pupils were doing. Special education pupils were frequently excluded from regular education. The purpose of NCLB was to increase educational opportunities for pupils, with a particular emphasis on low-income, minority and pupils receiving special education assistance as well as those who speak and comprehend little to no English at all. The law mandated that schools give priority to underprivileged pupils. The law largely altered the mindset of pupils with physical impairments, which finally resulted in a decrease in the number of dropouts, an increase in graduation rates, and the provision of efficient transitional measures.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, primary school exclusion rate is high at 21% where primary school children are being denied access to education. This number of children continues to be underrepresented in enrollments to secondary education. Tanzania has the lowest transition rate (20%). This is because some families cannot afford the cost of lunch and boarding fees and that girls face greater obstacles to continuing their education than boys (Fute 2019).

Achieving a life prosperity and dignity for all Kenyans is one of the government's top aims for the 21st century (Sustainable Development Goals, 2017; United Nations, 2020; and Kenya Vision, 2030). Since independence, Kenyan education policy documents such as the Kenya Education Commission (GOK, 1964), Sessional Papers No. 10 of 1965, No. 6 of 1988, and No. 1 of 2005, as well as both of the National Development Plans for 2002-2008 and 2008-2012, have emphasized the importance of education in achieving the SDGs (GoK, 2012). These policy documents state that education is not only a fundamental right of children but also a key component of the nation's socioeconomic development. Gross enrolment rate (GER) reached 104% in 2018 after the Kenyan government introduced free primary education in 2003. At the same time span, net enrolment rate (NER) grew to 92.4%.

Ouma, Amimo, and Ojwan'g (2024) found a 99.8% transition rate in Siaya County. In comparison, transition rates in Nyandarua, Kisii, and Wajir counties in Kenya range between 95% and 99% of the national average, while Nyamira, Mandera, and Bomet counties have a transition rate of 102%. Additionally, Kisumu County records a transition rate of 82%, whereas Homabay, Kirinyaga, Migori, and Kiambu counties stand at 96%. According to table 1 below, 5% of secondary school pupils in Kenya are impaired. This may be sign that few pupils with impairments are transitioning to secondary schools. Given their proportion in the general population, the number of pupils with impairments and special needs completing the primary school education cycle in Kenya is insignificant. In 2018, there were 2,495 pupils with impairments out of 1,052,364 pupils that took the Kenya Certificate of Primary Examination (MoE, 2018). The percentage of pupils with physical impairments transitioning from primary to secondary education climbed from 81.9% in 2015 to 88% in January of 2018. All pupils are required to transition from elementary to secondary education because of the transition policy being in place.

The transition of pupils with special needs from primary to secondary school is difficulty for the Republic of Kenya in its efforts to provide education for all, irrespective of ethnicity, gender, family history, or physical limitations (UNESCO, 2008). With the policy on transition in place, the rate of transition from primary to junior secondary education is expected to improve, necessitating the study to establish the determinants of transition rates for pupils with physical impairment in special public primary schools to junior secondary schools in Rachuonyo Sub- County, Kenya.

Statement of the Problem

The transition from mainstream public primary to public junior secondary schools is a major life event that can have an impact on one's life's quality. The transition rate from primary to secondary schools is 98%, based on more recent statistics from Kenya (Amunga et al., 2020). Furthermore, records from the County Education office demonstrate that Homa-bay County's transition rate is higher than 100% without mentioning the physically impaired pupils (Aute et al., 2020). In Rachuonyo Sub-County, there exists a critical issue concerning the transition rate of pupils with physical impairments from mainstream public primary schools to secondary schools (Aute et al., 2020). Despite the established policies and programs aimed at promoting inclusive education, a significant disparity persists, limiting these pupils' access to secondary education. Aired colleagues to drop out if their educational requirements are not met (Trainor et al., 2019).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Transition of Pupils with Physical Impairments

The Children's Act (2001) obligates parents to provide for the educational needs of their children and ensure that no child be discriminated against based on disability. The premise of the law is that every child is entitled to a free basic and compulsory education and the adoption of the Constitution of Kenya in 2010 marked one of the most important milestones in the education for learners with impairments. Article 43 (1) (f) of the Constitution makes education a right for every citizen while Article 53 (1) (b) makes free and compulsory basic education a right for every child. Article 54 makes access to inclusive education by persons with impairments a constitutional right. These articles collectively appreciate the challenges faced by persons with impairments in accessing education and therefore requires educational institutions to modify their facilities to ensure integration of and greater access to learners with impairments (The Republic of Kenya, 2010).

In order to ensure barrier-free primary schools for pupils with special needs and physical impairments, the government of Republic of Kenya is dedicated to creating strategies that increase participation of pupils in special circumstances. This includes collaboration with partners like non-governmental organizations (NGOs), faith-based organizations (FBOs), community-based organizations (CBOs), and parents of pupils with impairments. The government has committed to offering specific capitation grants for special needs education to achieve this goal (Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology, 2004). Access to special education for individuals with special needs is still restricted despite these and numerous other government-implemented initiatives (Ministry of Education, 2009).

The government of the Republic of Kenya made a bold choice to offer free primary education going forward in January 2003. Through this program, all levies (i.e., forced fees) formerly connected to primary schooling were eliminated. These levies had prohibited children especially those from low-income families, from receiving an education. Since then, special education and schools for children with impairments have been included in the government's protections. These schools currently receive a little larger government subsidy than ordinary educational institutions. (The Ministry of Education, 2008; Ministry of Education Science and Technology, 2004) states that each learner with impairment receives an additional Kshs.2, 000 to cover costs related to their unique educational needs and the improvement of school facilities.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights first established access to education as a fundamental right in 1948. It was later expanded upon a few international treaties, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child and, more recently, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Impairments in 2006. A declaration and action plan was created by the World Conference on Special Needs Education in Salamanca, Spain in 1994. In order For all children to have access to adequate schools that can integrate them in child-centered pedagogy, the Salamanca Declaration urged governments to build education sector that adapt to various needs (UNESCO, 1994).

The United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) emphasized special education and the right of pupils with impairments to attend schools of their choice. The convention further

affirmed the right to education in an inclusive setting for all 4 children. The focus of the U.N. declaration was to enable children with special needs to enroll in schools of their choice within their localities.

Governments around the world started a movement centered on providing high-quality basic education for everyone, according to the Dakar Framework for Action published by UNESCO in 2000. Governments throughout the world have pledged to meet the (Education for All) EFA objectives by 2015. The six EFA goals that governments committed themselves to achieving are as follows: increase access to early childhood development and education; make basic education free and compulsory for everyone; encourage learning and life skills in children and adults; double adult literacy rates by 2005; and achieve gender parity and gender equality by 2015 UNESCO (2000). The idea put out in Education for All is that pupils with exceptionalities should still be placed in the ordinary classroom first and foremost.

Children with physical impairments, even at the family level, experience institutionalized neglect and rejection from their families, and the impaired are seldom ever sent to school in the callous culture with a well-known global reputation for false piety. For instance, a study by Rasheed (2016) on the Rate of Retention and Completion of Learners with Special Needs in Primary Schools in Pakistan, it was established that there are 1 million children with physical and mental impairments who are not enrolled in school. These children range in age from four to sixteen. The vast majority of them become vagrants because uncaring societies and parents, not because they choose to.

Similarly, Ministry of Education report (2012) states that several issues still hinder equity and accessibility in the education and training that children with special needs receive. These include a lack of data on children with special needs, inadequate tools and abilities for identification and evaluation, and unclear instructions and assistance for the implementation of an all-inclusive education strategy. It is also challenging to include special education into standard educational programming because of the deficiencies in the current system, which are exacerbated by improper facilities, poor infrastructure, and a shortage of equipment.

Many teachers are insufficiently prepared to deal with pupils with special needs which exacerbates the situation. Additionally, there is inadequate supply of teaching and learning resources, poor supervision and monitoring of special education programs, inappropriate placements of disabled children, ineffective coordination among service providers, and widespread negative attitudes towards disability among many Kenyans (Buhere & Ochieng, 2013).

As the U.N. declaration points out and the lagging enrollment numbers in Kenya illustrate, there is a need in Kenya to remove persistent barriers to inclusiveness and equity within the public education system (Waddington & Lawson, 2018).

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a descriptive research design to establish the transition rate of pupils with physical impairments from mainstream public primary schools to junior secondary schools in Rachuonyo Sub-County, Kenya. The study was conducted in 32 mainstream primary and junior secondary schools in Rachuonyo Sub-County, Homabay County, where pupils with physical impairments are enrolled. The target population comprised learners with physical impairments in Grades 6, 7, and 8, teachers, headteachers, and the county officer in charge of special needs education. A purposive sampling technique was used to select learners with physical impairments and their class teachers to ensure that respondents had direct knowledge and experience regarding the transition process. The final sample consisted of 57 learners with physical impairments, 53 teachers, 30 headteachers, and one county special needs education officer, giving a total of 141 respondents. Data were collected using student questionnaires, semi-structured interview schedules, and document analysis of class registers, which helped establish the actual transition rates of pupils with physical impairments from mainstream primary schools to junior secondary schools.

Validity of the research instruments was ensured through expert review and face validation by supervisors, while reliability was established through a pilot study conducted in four schools in Kasipul Kabondo Sub-County, which has characteristics like the study area. The pilot involved approximately 30% of the study sample, and

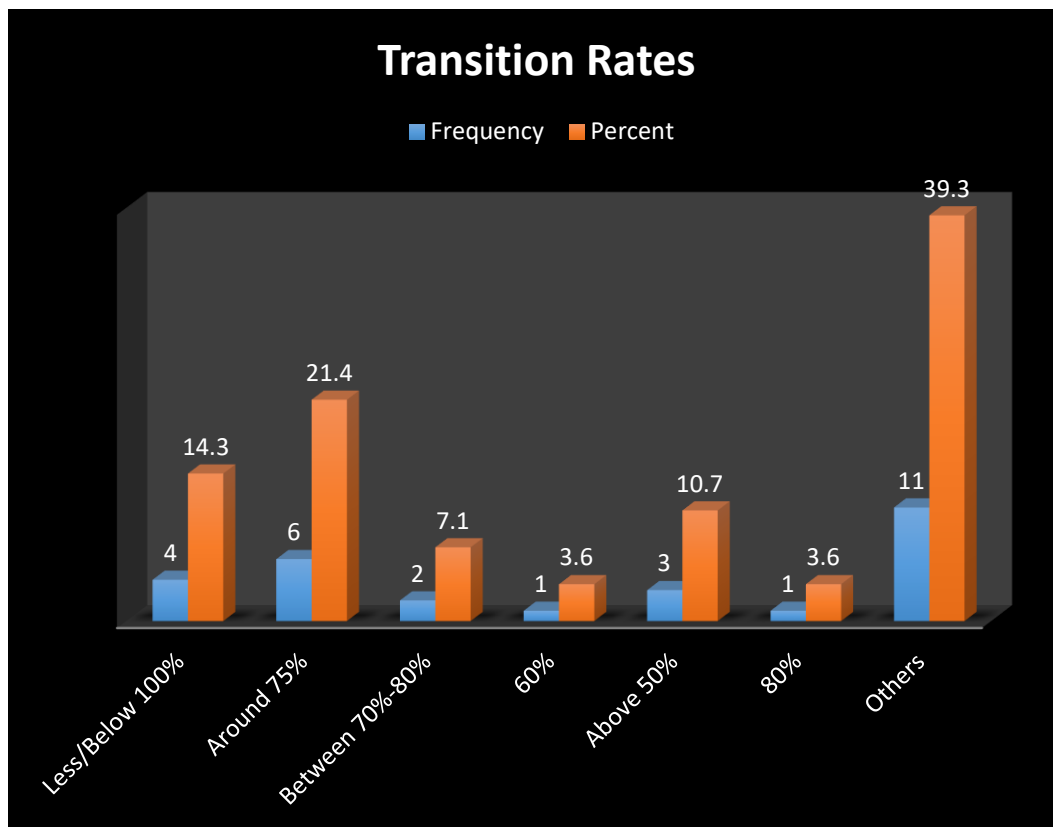
reliability testing using Cronbach’s alpha produced a coefficient of 0.865, indicating high internal consistency of the instruments. Data collection followed appropriate administrative and ethical procedures, including obtaining approval from the University of Eastern Africa Baraton Research Ethics Committee, research authorization from NACOSTI, and permission from county and sub-county education authorities as well as school administrators. Descriptive statistics, particularly means and standard deviations, were used to analyze data related to the transition rate of pupils with physical impairments, and the results were presented in frequency tables and figures. Ethical principles such as informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and anonymity of respondents were strictly observed throughout the study.

FINDINGS

To address this question, the researcher interviewed 27 head teachers and officer in-charge of Special Needs Education in Rachuonyo Sub-County. The interview questions were constructed to determine the transition rate for pupils with physical impairments from mainstream public primary to junior secondary schools. The researcher then summarized the responses from the interviews as shown below.

Figure 1

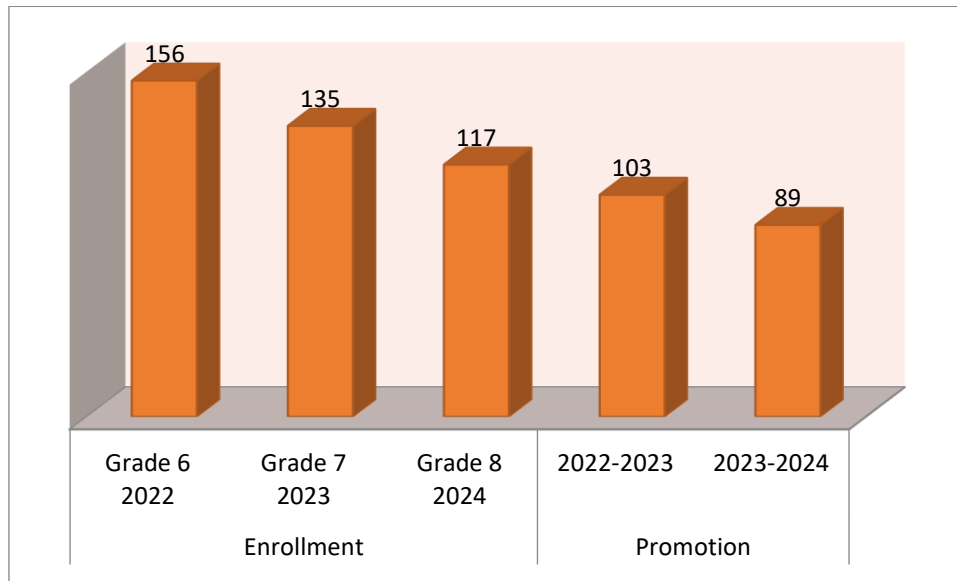
Interview Summary for Head Teachers and Officer in charge of Learners with Physical Impairments



From figure 1, majority (46.4%), of the respondents pointed out that transition rate for pupils with physical impairments was 70% and above with 14.3% indicating that transition rate of this group of pupils were 60% and below while 39.3% were not sure about the exact rate hence could not give their approximation in terms of percentage. On the same note, the officer in-charge of physical disabilities posited that pupils with physical impairments often experience lower transition rates due to a combination of systemic, social, and individual determinants. Systemically, educational institutions may lack adequate resources and accessibility measures needed to support these pupils through critical transitions, such as from primary to secondary school. Socially, stigma and discrimination hinder their integration and acceptance among peers, impacting their confidence and social skills development. In answer the same research question, the researcher analyzed class register to establish the enrollment rate and promotion from one grade to next for pupils with physical impairments as shown in figure 1.

Figure 2

Document Analysis

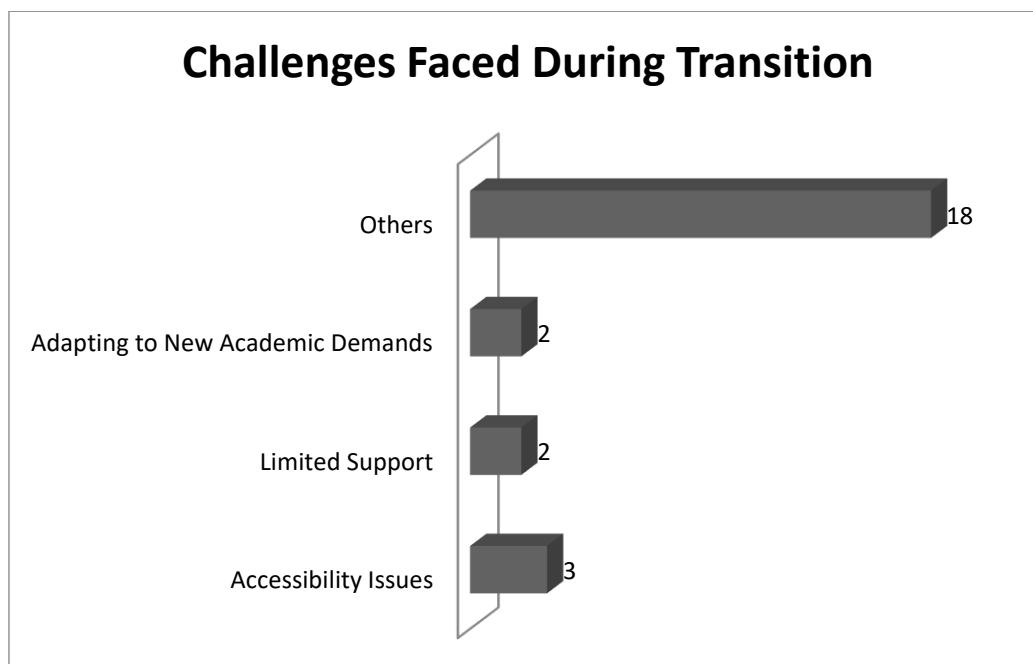


From figure 2, it can be noted that enrolment decreases drastically from grade 6 to grade 8. Similarly, promotion from one grade to the next also decreases. In my opinion, this implies that physical impairments may impact attendance and participation in school activities, leading to missed instructional time and challenges in keeping up with academic requirements. Additionally, the lack of adequate accessibility and support services within schools may have limited their ability to fully engage in learning experiences, thereby affecting their academic performance and progress. The findings of the study support those of (Buhere & Ochieng, 2013), which reported a decrease in promotion from one class to the next by pupils with physical impairments.

To the Question How Involved are the Parents or Guardians of Pupils with Physical Impairments in their Child's Transition to Secondary School? This question was responded to by both teachers and headteachers during a scheduled interview.

Figure 3

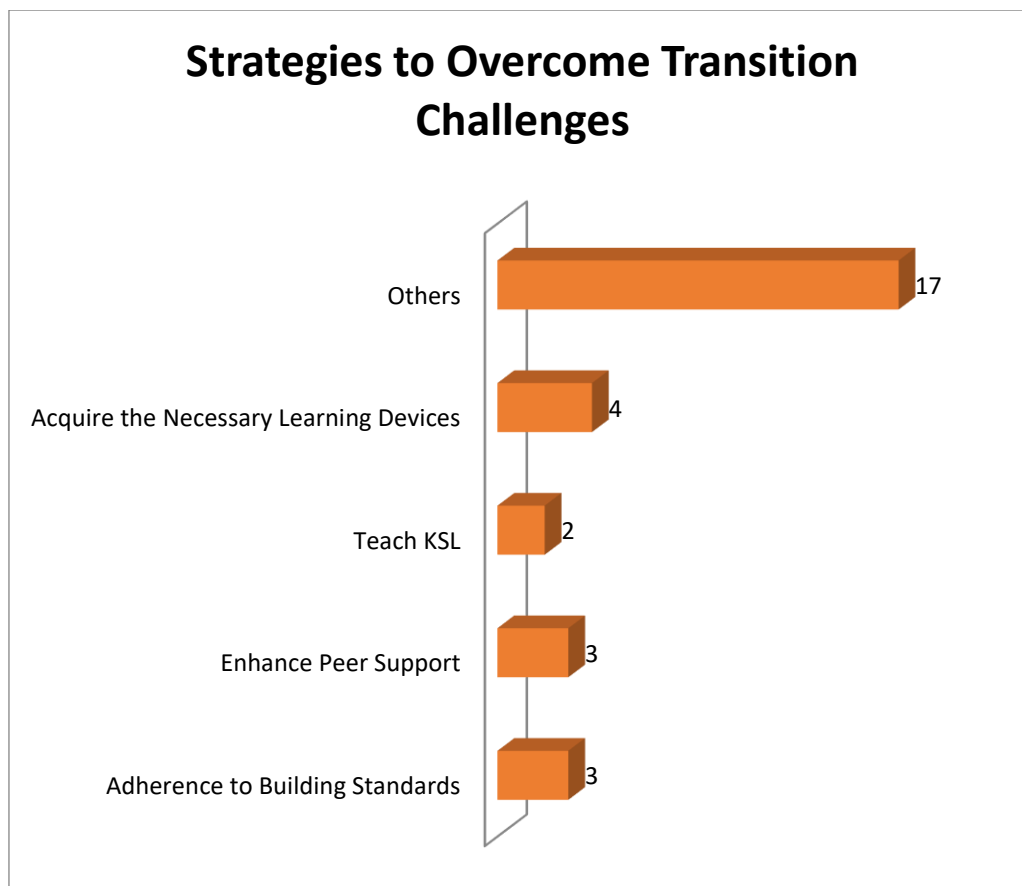
Teachers' Responses on Challenges Faced During Transition



From figure 3, the respondents identified several significant challenges faced by pupils with physical impairments during their transition periods. Firstly, accessibility issues were a major concern, as many educational institutions lack adequate facilities such as ramps, elevators, and accessible restrooms, which are essential for pupils with physical impairments to navigate the school independently. Secondly, there was often limited support available to these pupils. This encompasses both emotional support from peers and teachers and practical assistance such as note-taking services and adaptive technology. The absence of such support makes it difficult for pupils to fully participate in academic and social activities. Lastly, adapting to new academic demands poses a substantial hurdle. Pupils with physical impairments require additional time and resources to meet the academic standards of their new environment. This includes adapting to different teaching styles, managing a potentially increased workload, and accessing course materials in accessible formats. Collectively, these challenges significantly impacted the educational experience and success of pupils with physical impairments during their transition.

Figure 4

Teachers' Responses on Strategies to Overcome Transition Challenges



From figure 4, respondents suggested several strategies to address the challenges faced by pupils with physical impairments during their transition. One key strategy was the acquisition of necessary learning devices. This includes technology such as speech-to-text software, screen readers, and other assistive devices that help pupils engage with course materials and complete assignments more effectively. Another important strategy was ensuring strict adherence to building standards that mandate accessibility. This means constructing and modifying buildings to include ramps, elevators, and accessible restrooms, thus creating a more navigable environment for pupils with physical impairments. Enhanced peer support was also crucial; fostering a culture of inclusivity and understanding among pupils provide emotional and social support, helping pupils with impairments feel more mainstream into the community. Additionally, teaching Kenyan Sign Language (KSL) be instrumental in bridging communication gaps for pupils with hearing impairments, enabling them to participate more fully in academic and social activities. These strategies were essential in creating an inclusive and supportive educational environment for pupils with physical impairments.

Figure 5

Headteachers' Responses on Challenges Faced During Transition

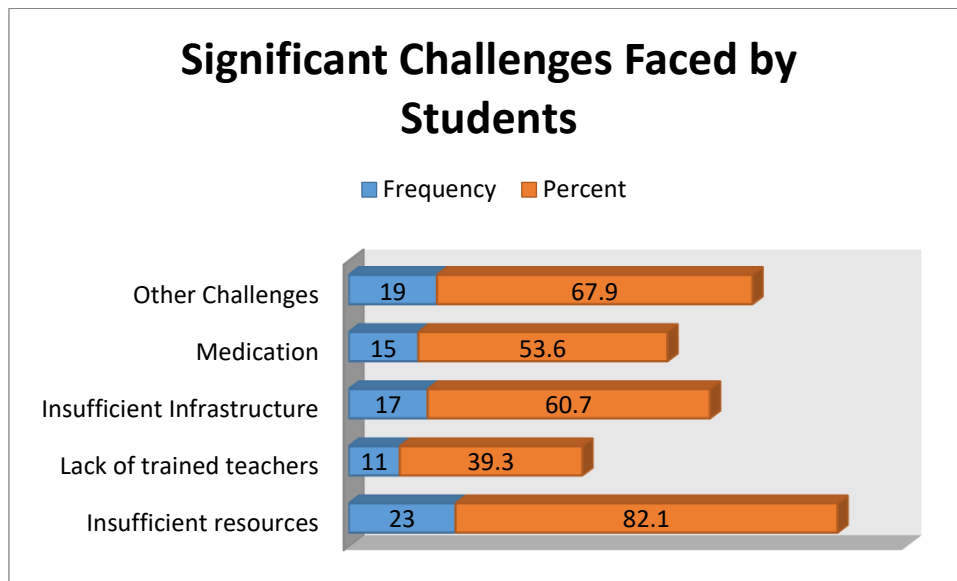


Figure reveals that 23 (82.1%) respondents identified insufficient resources as a major challenge faced by pupils with physical impairments. This indicates that the lack of adequate materials and support tools severely impacts these pupils' ability to succeed academically and socially within the educational system. Additionally, just like teachers, 17 (60.7%) of the respondents pointed to insufficient infrastructure, suggesting that their educational institutions lack the necessary physical facilities, such as ramps, elevators, and accessible restrooms, to accommodate pupils with physical impairments. Moreover, 53.6% mentioned that the absence of proper medication and healthcare support poses a significant barrier, which could affect the pupils' health and their ability to attend and participate in school regularly. Another critical issue highlighted by 39.3% of respondents is the lack of trained teachers capable of effectively educating and supporting pupils with physical impairments. This gap in teacher training was reported to be leading to inadequate instructional strategies and a lack of understanding and empathy towards these pupils' unique needs. Lastly, 67.9% of respondents indicated various other challenges, which included social stigma, transportation difficulties, and insufficient policy support. Together, these determinants showed the diverse and pervasive nature of the obstacles faced by pupils with physical impairments, pointing to the urgent need for comprehensive and inclusive measures to address these issues.

Figure 6

Headteachers' Responses on Strategies to Transition Challenges

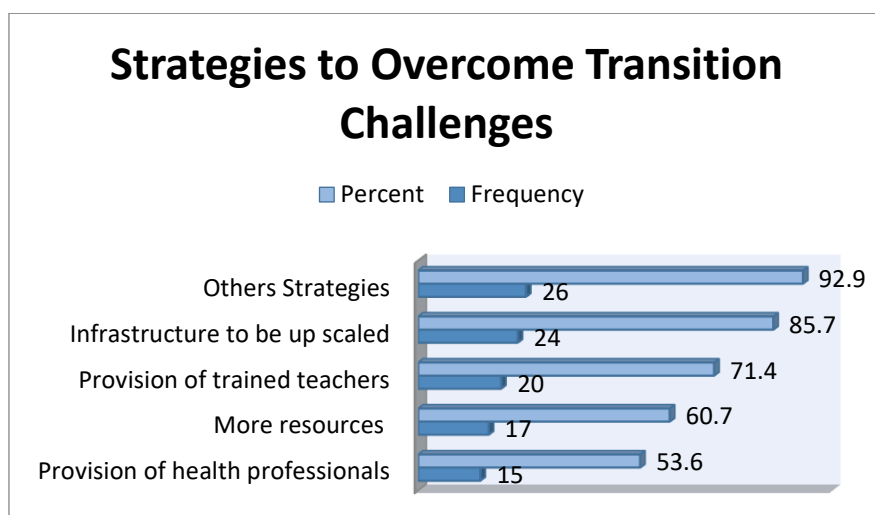


Figure 6 indicates a strong consensus on the need for various strategies to support pupils with physical impairments. A substantial majority (92.9%) of respondents highlighted the importance of other strategies, suggesting a broad recognition of diverse and potentially unlisted approaches to address the challenges faced by these pupils. Close behind, 85.7% of respondents emphasized the necessity of upgrading infrastructure to accommodate pupils with physical impairments. This showed a widespread acknowledgment that many junior secondary schools currently lack the essential physical modifications, such as ramps, elevators, and accessible restrooms, needed to provide an inclusive educational environment.

Additionally, 71.4% of respondents pointed out the critical need for providing special education teachers. This highlights the importance of equipping educators with the knowledge and skills required to effectively teach and support pupils with physical impairments, ensuring that these pupils receive a quality education tailored to their specific needs. Furthermore, 60.7% of respondents indicated the need for more resources. This encompasses a wide range of support, including educational materials, assistive technologies, and financial aid, all of which are vital for the academic success and overall well-being of pupils with physical impairments.

Lastly, 53.6% of respondents identified the provision of health professionals who attends to diverse needs of these learners as essential. This reflects the necessity of having medical and therapeutic support available within educational settings to address the health and rehabilitation needs of these pupils. Collectively, these responses highlight a comprehensive understanding of the diverse support required to create an inclusive and effective learning environment for pupils with physical impairments.

Figure 7

Headteachers' Responses on Parental Involvement

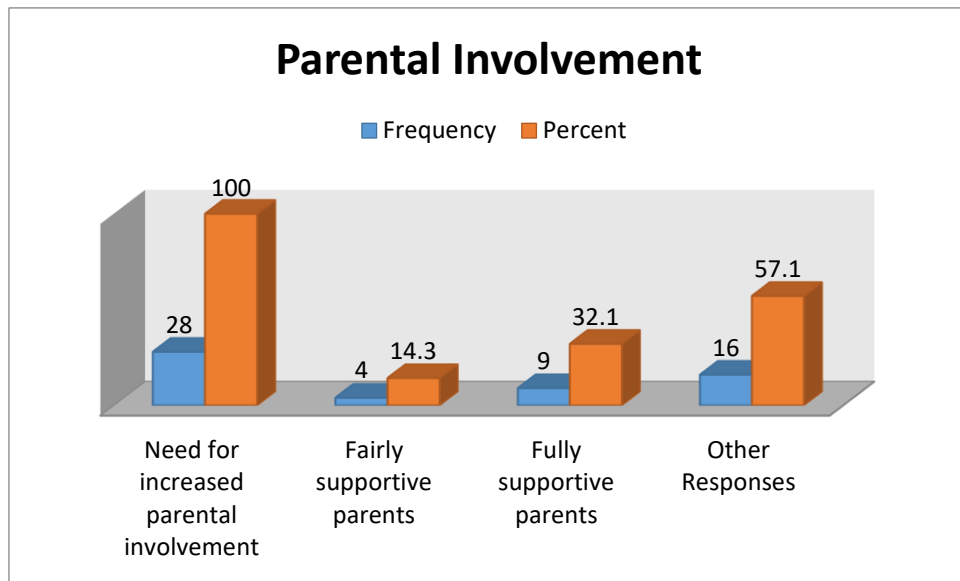


Figure 10 shows data on the need for increased parental involvement and categorizing parents into three groups based on their level of support: fairly supportive, fully supportive, and other responses. The data shows the frequency and percentage of each category, indicating that there are 28 responses highlighting the need for increased parental involvement (100%). Among the parents, 4 are classified as fairly supportive (14.3%), 9 as fully supportive (32.1%), and 16 fall into other responses (57.14%).

The data highlights a significant perceived need for increased parental involvement. Despite the acknowledgment of this need, only a relatively small proportion of parents are classified as fully supportive (32.14%). This indicates that while there is some level of parental engagement, it is not as widespread or robust as it should be. The largest category, "other responses" (57.14%), suggests that there might be a variety of perspectives or degrees of involvement that do not fit neatly into the "fairly" or "fully" supportive categories. This could include parents who are minimally involved, inconsistent in their support, or facing barriers to greater involvement.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

The study found that transition rates from mainstream public primary to junior secondary schools in Rachuonyo Sub-County are affected by multiple determinants. While some schools demonstrate commendable efforts in supporting pupils with physical impairments, overall transition remains a challenge due to systemic and societal barriers. Positive interventions reported show a weak correlation with transition rates, highlighting the need to address broader structural issues for effective academic progression.

Recommendation

The ministry of education should conduct Regular monitoring and evaluation of transition programs should be conducted to assess their effectiveness. Understanding the correlation between school interventions, environmental determinants, cultural attitudes, and parental involvement will help refine strategies to enhance the transition of pupils with physical impairments in Rachuonyo Sub-County.

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