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The Paradox of Access: An Evaluation of the Effects of Kenya's Hundred Percent Transition Policy on School Resources and Academic Performance in Migwani sub-County, Kitui County, Kenya

By

[1]Amos Mbai Ithuku, [2]Dr. Domitila Mwanzia and [3]Dr. Zephaniah Marwa

[1]Postgraduate Student, School of Education and Social Sciences, Lukenya University, Kenya
[2]Lecturer, School of Education and Social Sciences, Lukenya University, Kenya
[3]Lecturer, School of Education and Social Sciences, Lukenya University, Kenya

Abstract
This study investigated the effects of the 100% transition policy on academic performance in public secondary schools in Migwani Sub-County, Kenya, focusing on three key mediating factors: the adequacy of physical facilities, the student-teacher ratio, and the availability of student support services. The main contention of the study is that in recent years, Kenya has pursued an ambitious 100% transition policy to ensure universal access to secondary education, aligning with global Education for All mandates. While this policy has dramatically increased enrollment rates, its effects on the quality of education and the sustainability of school systems, particularly in rural areas, remain critically under-examined. Anchored in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Resource Dependency Theory, the study employed a descriptive research design with a mixed-methods approach. Data were collected from a sample of 244 participants, including 233 teachers and 11 educational administrators (principals, BOM chairs, and a Sub-County Director of Education), through structured questionnaires and in-depth interviews. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative data underwent thematic analysis. The findings reveal a profound strain on school resources directly attributable to the surge in enrollment. An overwhelming majority of teachers reported that physical facilities are inadequate, with 88.8% stating that classrooms are insufficient and 86.7% reporting a lack of library resources. Furthermore, 100% of respondents disagreed that the recommended student-teacher ratio is adhered to, leading to overcrowded classrooms and increased teacher workload. While guidance and counseling services were reportedly available, crucial academic supports like mentorship and individualized coaching for weak students were almost non-existent. These resource deficits were qualitatively linked by administrators to a perceived decline in the quality of instruction and a negative impact on academic performance. The study concludes that the 100% transition policy, while successful in achieving its access goals, has created a crisis of quality by severely overstretching school resources. It recommends an urgent realignment of policy to match enrollment targets with commensurate investment in infrastructure, teacher staffing, and student support systems to ensure the long-term sustainability and academic viability of secondary education in Kenya.

Keywords: 100% Transition Policy, Academic Performance, Resource Strain, School Facilities, Student-Teacher Ratio, Educational Equity, Kenya

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By

[1]Amos Mbai Ithuku, [2]Dr. Domitila Mwanzia and [3]Dr. Zephaniah Marwa

1. Introduction

The global commitment to education as a fundamental human right, enshrined in declarations from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) to the Sustainable Development Goals, has catalyzed a worldwide movement towards universal access to basic education. In Sub-Saharan Africa, this has translated into ambitious national policies aimed at eliminating barriers to schooling. Kenya has been at the forefront of this movement, first with the implementation of Free Primary Education (FPE) in 2003 and later with Subsidized Free Day Secondary Education (SFDSE) in 2008. These initiatives culminated in the landmark 100% transition policy, a concerted effort by the Kenyan government to ensure that every learner completing primary school progresses to the secondary level, thereby guaranteeing a minimum of 12 years of learning (Crawfurd & Ali, 2021).

On the surface, the policy has been a resounding success, dramatically increasing secondary school enrollment and moving the nation closer to the goal of universal basic education (Ministry of Education, 2020). By removing the barrier of competitive entry based on national examination scores, the policy has opened the doors of secondary education to hundreds of thousands of children who would have previously been excluded. This expansion of access is a laudable achievement, aligning with the global consensus that secondary education is critical for fostering economic growth, enhancing productivity, and reducing social inequality (Bedasso & Sandefur, 2024).

However, this rapid and massive expansion has raised profound questions about the quality and sustainability of the education being provided. Reports from across the country have highlighted a system grappling with an unprecedented surge in enrollment, leading to severe overcrowding, strained facilities, and overstretched teaching staff (Otieno & Ochieng, 2020). This creates a classic policy paradox: in the quest to guarantee access for all, has the quality of education for each individual been compromised?

The core tension between quantity and quality is the central issue motivating this research. While the government's efforts to increase access are commendable, the sustainability of this policy and its ultimate effect on academic performance depend entirely on the capacity of schools to absorb and effectively educate this influx of students. This study, therefore, seeks to provide an empirical investigation into the on-the-ground effects of the 100% transition policy, focusing on its impact on key school resources physical facilities, teacher staffing, and student support services and the subsequent consequences for academic performance in the specific rural context of Migwani Sub-County, Kenya.

2. Statement of the Problem

The implementation of the 100% transition policy in Kenya triggered an immediate and massive increase in student enrollment in public secondary schools. While this achieved the primary policy goal of universal access, it simultaneously placed an unprecedented strain on a school system that was, in many cases, not adequately prepared for the surge. Anecdotal

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evidence and media reports have consistently pointed to a looming crisis characterized by severely overcrowded classrooms, acute shortages of teaching and learning materials, and dangerously high student-teacher ratios. This situation raises a critical problem: the policy, while designed to enhance educational opportunity, may be inadvertently undermining the very quality of that education by creating a learning environment that is not conducive to effective teaching and academic achievement.

While the challenges of resource scarcity in Kenyan schools are well-documented, a significant research gap exists in the systematic, empirical analysis of the effects of the 100% transition policy on the key pillars of educational quality. Most existing studies have focused on the success of the policy in terms of enrollment numbers or have explored general resource challenges without specifically linking them to this particular policy shock. There is a lack of localized, in-depth research that quantifies the strain on specific school-level resources—such as the adequacy of classrooms, laboratories, and libraries; the actual student-teacher ratios in practice; and the capacity of schools to provide essential student support services—and then connects this resource strain to academic performance outcomes.

This problem is particularly acute in rural and marginalized areas like Migwani Sub-County, which may have had a weaker resource base to begin with and are less visible in national policy debates. Without a clear, evidence-based understanding of how the 100% transition is affecting schools in such contexts, policymakers and administrators are operating in an information vacuum, unable to design targeted interventions to ensure the policy's long-term sustainability and academic viability. This study, therefore, seeks to fill this gap by systematically examining the effects of the 100% transition on physical facilities, student-teacher ratios, and student support services, and evaluating the subsequent impact on academic performance in the public secondary schools of Migwani Sub-County.

3. Literature Review

The physical environment of a school is a fundamental component of the learning process, profoundly influencing student engagement, teacher morale, and academic outcomes. A substantial body of international literature affirms that the quality and adequacy of school facilities are not merely a matter of comfort but are directly linked to educational effectiveness. Research by Riniati et al. (2023) emphasizes that core environmental factors such as adequate lighting, proper ventilation, and minimal distractions are crucial for enhancing student focus and participation. This is complemented by the work of Siswato and Hidayati (2023), who argue that modern, technology-friendly classrooms facilitate innovative teaching methods that are essential for achieving desired learning outcomes. The provision of specialized facilities, such as well-equipped science laboratories, computer rooms, and libraries, offers students hands-on learning experiences that are critical for boosting academic achievement and fostering a deeper understanding of complex subjects (Obro, 2022).

This principle holds true across diverse global contexts. In Europe, a focus on well-designed instructional infrastructure, including spacious classrooms and recreational facilities, is considered standard for supporting effective teaching and learning (Kovacs et al., 2023). In stark contrast, studies in West and East African countries consistently report that public schools suffer from inadequate and often dilapidated physical facilities, a condition that is a major impediment to educational quality (Mpu & Adu, 2021). In Kenya, research by Etale et al. (2020) observed that most public schools struggle with inadequate facilities to serve overcrowded classrooms, a situation that would predictably be exacerbated by a policy of mass enrollment like the 100% transition. According to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

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Theory (Altymurat et al., 2021), a safe, clean, and physically adequate environment is essential for meeting learners' basic physiological and safety needs. Without this foundation, learners cannot be expected to reach higher levels of esteem or self-actualization, which includes academic achievement.

The 100% transition policy, by dramatically increasing student numbers without a commensurate, pre-emptive expansion of facilities, thus creates a direct conflict with this fundamental principle of human development.

The student-teacher ratio (STR) is one of the most widely cited indicators of educational quality. A lower STR is consistently associated with more personalized instruction, increased teacher-student interaction, and better academic outcomes. Scholars like Kawuryan et al. (2021) and Hojo (2021) argue that smaller class sizes provide teachers with the opportunity to offer individualized guidance, address specific learning needs, and foster a more engaging instructional process. This allows for the use of more diverse and effective teaching strategies beyond the traditional lecture method, which is often the only feasible approach in an overcrowded classroom (Jensen & Solheim, 2021).

Conversely, high student-teacher ratios are linked to increased teacher workload, higher levels of stress, and a significant decline in the quality of instruction. Overburdened teachers in overcrowded classrooms struggle to meet the individual needs of learners, provide timely feedback, or manage classroom discipline effectively (Ronfeldt, 2021; Jerrim & Simm, 2022). Research in Ghana by Osai (2021) found that teachers in overcrowded classrooms suffer from high stress levels that make the realization of learning outcomes extremely difficult. This is a well-documented reality in Kenya, where Otieno and Ochieng (2020) observed that the high STR in public schools already placed learners at a disadvantage compared to their counterparts in private schools.

This issue is central to the evaluation of the 100% transition policy. The policy's primary effect is a massive increase in the student population. Without a proportional and simultaneous increase in the number of teachers deployed by the Teachers' Service Commission (TSC), the STR is mathematically guaranteed to worsen. This aligns with Resource Dependency Theory (Jiang et al., 2023), which would view the school as an organization dependent on a key external resource: teachers provided by the TSC. The policy, by increasing the demand (students) without increasing the supply of this critical resource, creates an organizational imbalance that directly threatens the school's core function of providing quality instruction.

Beyond formal instruction, a student's academic success is heavily influenced by the availability of a range of support services designed to meet their academic, social, and emotional needs. The literature identifies services such as guidance and counseling, mentorship, academic advising, and individualized coaching as crucial components of a holistic educational environment (Shabani & Maboe, 2021). These services play a vital role in helping students overcome academic challenges, develop effective study skills, and maintain a positive attitude towards learning (Salimi, Gere, and Talley, 2023).

Mentorship programs, where students are paired with teachers or peers, provide guidance and encouragement (Claro & Perelmiter, 2023), while counseling services address emotional and psychological issues like stress and anxiety that can severely impact academic performance. Individualized coaching and remedial lessons are particularly critical for supporting struggling learners and ensuring no one is left behind. This is central to the perspective of Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, which emphasizes the importance

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of a supportive environment and positive role models in shaping a learner's self-efficacy and belief in their ability to succeed (Bandura, 2023).

The 100% transition policy poses a direct threat to these essential services. The influx of a large and academically diverse student body, including many learners with lower primary school scores and from vulnerable backgrounds, dramatically increases the demand for such support. However, the simultaneous increase in teacher workload and class sizes severely diminishes the school's capacity to provide this support. The time that teachers would have previously dedicated to mentorship or remedial coaching is consumed by the demands of managing larger classes. This creates a critical gap: at the very moment when student support is needed most, the system is least able to provide it. This study seeks to empirically investigate the extent of this dilution of support services and its perceived impact on academic performance in Migwani Sub-County.

4. Methodology

This study employed a descriptive research design with a mixed-methods approach to provide a comprehensive analysis of the research problem. The study was conducted in Migwani Sub-County, Kitui County, Kenya, a region representative of the rural contexts grappling with the implementation of the 100% transition policy. The target population included all public secondary school principals, Board of Management (BOM) chairpersons, teachers, and the Sub-County Director of Education (SCDE).

A multi-stage sampling procedure was used. First, the 43 public secondary schools in the sub-county were stratified, and six schools were selected to ensure representation across different school categories. A sample size of 244 participants was targeted. Purposive sampling was used to select the six principals, six BOM chairpersons, and the SCDE as key informants due to their expert knowledge. A sample of 233 teachers was then selected from the participating schools. The final response rate was high, with all 13 administrators and 233 of the targeted 280 teachers responding, yielding an overall response rate of 85.6%.

Data were collected using two primary instruments. A structured, closed-ended questionnaire was administered to the 233 teacher respondents to gather quantitative data on their perceptions of the policy's impact on physical facilities, student-teacher ratios, and student support services. A structured interview schedule was used to conduct in-depth interviews with the 11 administrators (principals, BOM chairs, and the SCDE who responded) to capture qualitative insights on the policy's implementation, challenges, and sustainability.

Quantitative data from the questionnaires were analyzed using SPSS Version 25. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, were used to summarize the data and identify key trends. Qualitative data from the interviews were transcribed and analyzed thematically, with responses reported verbatim to provide rich, explanatory context to the quantitative findings.

5. Findings

The findings are organized around the three core areas of inquiry: the impact on physical facilities, the student-teacher ratio, and student support services.

The data reveals a profound and widely perceived inadequacy of physical facilities to cope with the increased enrollment from the 100% transition policy.

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Table 1: Teacher Perceptions of Physical Facility Adequacy (N=233)

Adequacy of Resources	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Classrooms	50.6%	38.2%	9.0%	2.1%
Books	51.1%	48.9%	0.0%	0.0%
Laboratories	0.0%	1.7%	48.9%	49.4%
Library Resources	57.1%	29.6%	6.9%	6.4%

Source: Field Data 2025

The findings in Table 1 are stark. An overwhelming majority of teachers (88.8%) either disagreed or strongly disagreed that there were enough classrooms, pointing to severe overcrowding. This was confirmed in the interviews, with Principal 1 stating,

> "I would say, it is a big lie that the classes are enough. There is a lot of overcrowding in the available classes. The number of learners in one classroom is overwhelming to the teachers."

The situation with learning materials was even more dire. A full 100% of teacher respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that enough books were available to support effective learning. Similarly, 86.7% reported that library resource materials were inadequate.

> One administrator lamented, "In most cases, the library resources are not adequate to meet the needs of all learners in the school environment. Thus, realization of academic goals remains an uphill task."

The only area where a majority perceived some adequacy was in laboratories, although this was still seen as a major challenge.
The study found that the surge in enrollment has led to a critical strain on the teaching workforce, with student-teacher ratios far exceeding recommended levels.

Table 2: Teacher Perceptions of Student-Teacher Ratio and Staffing (N=233)

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
The appropriate student-teacher ratio is adhered to.	63.9%	36.1%	0.0%	0.0%
Staffing is done based on class sizes.	21.0%	57.1%	21.9%	0.0%
There is teacher adequacy for all subject combinations.	24.0%	76.0%	0.0%	0.0%

Source: Field Data 2025

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The data in Table 2 shows a complete consensus among teachers (100%) that the appropriate student-teacher ratio is not being adhered to.

> This was described vividly in an interview: "Most teachers are handling ballooned classes. Even the teacher to learner ratio is overwhelming. Thus, realization of good grades in such an environment is a bit difficult... That's from a realistic point of view."

Furthermore, 78.1% of teachers felt that staffing was not aligned with class sizes, and 100% disagreed that there was teacher adequacy across all subject combinations. This points to a severe teacher shortage that directly compromises the quality of instruction.
The study found that as student numbers increased and teacher workloads grew, essential student support services were severely diluted or eliminated altogether.

Table 3: Teacher Perceptions of Student Support Services (N=233)

Statement on Availability of...	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Mentorship opportunities are available to students.	19.7%	76.0%	4.3%	0.0%
Extra hours for individualized coaching for weak students.	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Guidance and Counselling services are available.	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%

Source: Field Data 2025

As shown in Table 3, while 100% of teachers confirmed that guidance and counseling services were available (a mandatory school function), other crucial support systems have collapsed. A massive 95.7% of teachers reported that mentorship opportunities were not available. Most critically, 100% of respondents stated that there were no extra hours available for individualized coaching for weak students. This is a devastating finding, as the 100% transition policy brings in a larger number of academically vulnerable students who are most in need of such support.

> One principal explained the dilemma: "With ballooned classes, a teacher's time is consumed by marking and crowd control. The one-on-one time needed to help a struggling student has simply vanished."

6. Discussion

The findings of this study paint a clear and concerning picture of the on-the-ground consequences of Kenya's 100% transition policy in Migwani Sub-County. The data strongly supports the conclusion that the policy, while exceptionally successful in achieving its primary goal of universal access, has simultaneously precipitated a crisis of quality by severely overstretching the resources of public secondary schools. This creates a profound access-quality trade-off, where the laudable goal of educating every child is undermined by the system's inability to do so effectively.

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The severe inadequacy of physical facilities directly validates the principles of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory (Altymurat et al., 2021). The findings of overcrowded classrooms and insufficient learning materials indicate a failure to meet the students' basic physiological and safety needs for a conducive learning environment. According to Maslow, without this foundational security, learners are unable to progress to higher-order needs such as esteem (academic confidence) and self-actualization (achieving their academic potential). The policy, therefore, places students in an environment that is structurally misaligned with the psychological prerequisites for learning.

Furthermore, the findings provide a powerful case study for Resource Dependency Theory (Jiang et al., 2023). Schools are organizations that depend on external resources primarily funding and teachers from the government to function. The 100% transition policy represents an external shock that dramatically increased the demand on the system (i.e., the number of students) without a commensurate and pre-emptive increase in the supply of critical resources (classrooms, books, and most importantly, teachers). The result, as documented in the findings, is an organizational system in a state of severe strain, forced to ration its core services and unable to operate at an optimal level. The high student-teacher ratios are a direct manifestation of this resource imbalance.

The collapse of individualized student support services is perhaps the most tragic consequence. As Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (2023) would suggest, a learner's belief in their own ability (self-efficacy) is heavily shaped by their environment and their interactions with mentors and teachers. The 100% transition policy brings a wave of academically diverse learners, including many who struggled in primary school, into the secondary system. These are the very students who require the most intensive support to build their confidence and skills. Yet, the study concludes that these are precisely the services that have been sacrificed due to resource strain. This creates a cruel paradox where the students most in need of support are the least likely to receive it, making it highly probable that they will continue to underperform, thereby reinforcing a cycle of academic disadvantage.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study concludes that the 100% transition policy, while noble in its intention to provide universal access to secondary education, has had a significant and deleterious effect on the key resources that underpin academic performance in the public secondary schools of Migwani Sub-County. The policy has resulted in severely strained physical facilities, unsustainably high student-teacher ratios, and the near-total erosion of individualized academic support services. While access has been achieved, the quality of the educational environment has been severely compromised, creating significant doubts about the policy's long-term sustainability and its ability to foster genuine academic achievement.
Based on these conclusions, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **For Policy and Governance (Ministry of Education & TSC):**
    - Implement a Phased, Resource-Contingent Transition Model: It is recommended that the government moves away from a blanket 100% transition and adopts a phased approach where increased enrollment is directly tied to a school's verified capacity in terms of infrastructure and staffing.
    - Revise the Teacher Deployment Formula: The TSC must urgently revise its staffing norms to account for the reality of the 100% transition, prioritizing the

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deployment of teachers to rural and marginalized areas like Migwani to alleviate the extreme student-teacher ratios.

2. **For Institutional Practice (School Administrators):**
    - Develop and Fund a National School Infrastructure Masterplan: The Ministry of Education should conduct a national audit of school facilities and develop a targeted, multi-year masterplan to build new classrooms, libraries, and laboratories in the most strained schools. This should be a prerequisite for the policy's continued implementation.
    - Institutionalize Remedial and Mentorship Programs: School administrators, with support from the Ministry, must institutionalize and allocate specific time and resources for remedial coaching and mentorship programs, recognizing that these are essential, not optional, services for supporting the academically diverse student population brought in by the policy.
3. **For Future Research:**
    - A Longitudinal Study on Academic Outcomes: A longitudinal study is critically needed to track the academic performance of the 100% transition cohorts over their four years of secondary school to empirically measure the long-term impact on KCSE results.
    - A Comparative Cost-Benefit Analysis: Future research should conduct a cost-benefit analysis comparing the social benefits of increased access against the economic and academic costs of diminished educational quality to inform a more balanced and sustainable policy approach.

By addressing the severe resource imbalances identified in this study, stakeholders can begin to align the admirable goal of universal access with the equally important promise of a quality education for every Kenyan child.

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