

Influence of Additional Educational Expenses on Pupils' Transition Rates from Primary to Secondary School in Mwingi East Sub-County, Kitui County, Kenya.

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ABSTRACT

This study sought to examine the determinants of pupils' transition rates from primary to secondary school in Mwingi East Sub-County, Kitui County, Kenya. The specific objective of the study was to determine the influence of additional educational expenses on pupils' transition rates from primary to secondary school in Mwingi East Sub-County, Kitui County, Kenya. The study employed descriptive survey research design. The target population was 722 respondents; comprised of 515 class eight teachers, 103 Parents Association (PA) chairpersons, 103 Head of Institutions, and the Sub-County Director of Education in Mwingi East Sub-County. Stratified proportionate, random, and census sampling techniques were used to select the sample size. A total of 218 respondents represented the sample size. The instruments of data collection were; questionnaires, interview schedules, and document analysis. Descriptive statistics was used to analyse quantitative data and thematic analysis for qualitative data. The study revealed that additional educational expenses are a major barrier to pupils' transition from primary to secondary school. The findings further indicated that these additional expenses directly influence pupils' entry into form one in Mwingi East Sub-County. The study concluded that additional educational expenses such as uniforms, lunch levies, personal effects, and learning materials remain a burden to many families and significantly reduce primary to secondary school transition rates. The study recommended that; the National Government Constituency Development Fund (NG-CDF) to expand bursary allocation and improve targeting mechanism to support pupils from economically disadvantaged households, the national government to review capitation policies to address indirect schooling costs.

Keywords: Additional Educational Expense, Transition Rates, Pupils Transition, Parents Association

INTRODUCTION

Education transition rate as the proportion of pupils who move up from one grade or level of education to the next, in this case, from primary to secondary school. Transition rates can be used to determine whether the development of education has been balanced or not between two levels. The computation involves dividing the total number of pupils in class eight for the year by the percentage of pupils who enrolled in form one secondary schools the year before (Zickafoose et al., 2024). In the Competency Based Education system secondary school plays a crucial role in placing the learners in specific pathways to equip them with skills, attitudes and knowledge required for social and economic development. These to some extent has additional cost implications which has led to notable low transition rates in many countries Kenya among them. Pupils, their families, companies, governments, and international development partners all have both private and societal stakes in education.

When individuals secure employment after completing school, they benefit from private economic returns, while society benefits from a more productive workforce (Kovaleva et al., 2023).

In education, “extra costs” refer to additional funds or fees demanded from parents beyond those approved by the government. These expenses include costs related to employing additional teachers, purchasing school supplies, motivating teachers, and organizing educational activities. Evidence indicates that pupils who are unable to pay these additional levies face barriers to enrollment and progression in secondary education (Psaki et al., 2022). Education is positively correlated with the quality and quantity of labor supply, which ultimately increases a nation’s gross domestic product. Education equips individuals with skills, competencies and knowledge necessary for entrepreneurship, innovation, and labor market competitiveness (Kovaleva et al., 2023). In a bid to prepare students for the impediments in the rapidly changing world, East African countries have realized the need to reform their education systems to competency based with a common goal of providing quality education to the pupils (Kithungu, 2026).

In many developing countries, limited economic capacity constrains government investment in education, as a result, secondary education often receives inadequate funding, placing a financial burden on households. As a result of secondary education being not fully subsidized, families are required to pay tuition fees and contribute to school operations, including staffing and instructional materials. These costs deter children from low-income households from continuing their education beyond primary school level. Consequently, a significant proportion of pupils complete primary education but fail to transition to secondary education, which highlights the need for policies that promote free and compulsory secondary education to enhance educational equity (Zickafoose et al., 2024).

In comparison to high-income countries, transition rates remain low in many African nations due to limited public investment in education. Studies show that pupils from low-income families continue to be underrepresented in secondary schools. Opportunity costs, combined with indirect and hidden educational expenses, significantly impact the likelihood that disadvantaged children will enroll in and complete secondary education across the country (Zickafoose et al., 2024). Access to secondary education often remains closely linked to household wealth, demonstrating that the elimination of tuition fees alone is insufficient to guarantee universal transition. The educational background of parents and guardians is positively correlated with pupils’ academic performance. Educated parents are more likely to support their children’s transition to secondary school and provide a supportive learning environment at home (Psaki et al., 2022).

In economically constrained contexts, parents from low social economic status families are often unable to meet tuition fees and other hidden costs associated with education, which limits pupils transition prospects (Zickafoose et al., 2024). Studies conducted in Kenya have demonstrated that family and school-based factors significantly influence pupils’ transition from primary to secondary school, with additional education-related costs frequently cited as major barriers to progression. Children’s academic achievement and transition rates is positively correlated with the additional educational expenses associated with education thus influencing pupils’ transition from primary to secondary school (Psaki et al., 2022). Pupils from stable households tend to perform better academically than those from low-income families, with parents from higher-income households being more likely to participate in school activities compared to parents of children living at or below the poverty line (Zickafoose et al., 2024).

The expansion of primary and secondary schools and competency centered education has resulted in increased enrollment at all levels of education with teachers and parents bearing an unseen responsibility. In primary school parents are required to provide financial support in terms of buying teaching and learning resources needed for a smooth educational process which impacts on pupils transition rates to secondary level. Teachers are the core implementors of the curriculum; therefore, they need to have significant knowledge, skills, abilities, attitudes and competencies to enable them to actualize all the components of the curriculum, maintain good teacher-learner interaction, apply the best pedagogical skills, create a conducive learning environment, and improve the quality of education (Kithungu, 2026). Government initiatives such as Free Primary Education and Free Day Secondary Education have accelerated participation in schooling and eased the financial burden. Population growth and sustained political commitment to education have further contributed to increased enrollment.

Legislative frameworks enacted between 2010 and 2014 strengthened education provision in line with constitutional and international obligations. Additional reforms, including increased capitation under Free Day Secondary Education and the introduction of a 100 percent transition policy, aimed to reduce financial barriers to secondary education (Ministry of Education, 2023).

Despite sustained government efforts to promote collective transition from primary to secondary level of education, challenges in achieving equitable transition rates continue to persist in some parts of Kenya, particularly in marginalized and economically disadvantaged areas. This transition to secondary education remains a major concern in schools in Mwingi East Sub-County. While the national transition rate was reported at 83.03 percent in 2018, records from the Sub-County Director of Education indicated a considerably lower transition rate of 65 percent in Mwingi East Sub-County during the same period. The substantial inequality between the national and local transition rates indicate that pupils in Mwingi East Sub-County face background barriers that limit their progression from primary to secondary education level. This situation underscores the need for an investigation into the factors influencing pupils' transition from primary to secondary school in Mwingi East Sub-County, including additional educational expenses.

Statement of the Problem

The Kenyan Government has undertaken significant measures to achieve the 100 percent transition rate from primary to secondary education by covering tuition and operational costs for all students enrolled in day secondary schools through Free Day Secondary Education (FDSE) and subsidized secondary education. Pupils enrolling in secondary schools, including boarding institutions, have benefited from government capitation programmes intended to reduce the financial burden associated with secondary education. The Kenyan government has also undertaken measures, through relevant national and county administrative structures, to ensure pupils who complete the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) flawlessly proceed to secondary school. In addition, the Education Act, 2013, provides a legal framework that reinforces the responsibility of parents and guardians to ensure that children participate in and progress through basic education. Despite the governments continued investment in the education sector, Mwingi East Sub-County in Kitui County continues to experience relatively low transition rates from primary to secondary education compared to the national level. This persistent disparity raises concern about the contextual factors that may influence pupils' transition to secondary education.

Mwingi Sub-County schools have benefited from various education support initiatives, including the National Government Constituency Development Fund (NG-CDF), bursary programs from donors, support from Kenya Commercial Bank (KCB), and other charitable organizations. Transition rates from primary to secondary school in Mwingi East Sub-County have remained relatively low in recent years despite the interventions. Mwingi Sub-County education records indicate that transition rates were 72.4% in 2021, 74.9% in 2022, 77.8% in 2023, 79.6% in 2024, and 81.2% in 2025, which falls below national transition average rates. This gap implies that there are numerous factors which influence pupils' progression to secondary education in Mwala Sub-County. This study, therefore, focuses on the influence of additional educational expenses on pupils transition rates from primary to secondary school in Mwingi East Sub-County, Kitui County, Kenya.

Specific Objectives of the Study

This study pursued to establish the influence of additional educational expenses on pupils' transition rates from primary to secondary school in Mwingi East Sub-County, Kitui County, Kenya.

Research Question

The study attempted to answer the following research question;

What is the influence of additional educational expenses on pupils' transition rates from primary to secondary school in Mwingi East Sub-County, Kitui County, Kenya?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The transition from primary to secondary education is a critical stage in the educational pathway of pupils, particularly in low-and middle-income countries where household resources are constrained. Although many governments have adopted policies aimed at improving access to secondary education through tuition subsidies and capitation grants, additional schooling costs associated with curriculum change among others remain a significant barrier to smooth transition (Vadivel et al., 2023). Additional schooling costs refer to all education-related expenses not fully covered by government funding, including school uniforms, meals, transportation, examination fees, learning materials, boarding charges, activity levies, and contributions for infrastructure and non-teaching staff. These costs disproportionately affect pupils from low-income households and have been consistently linked to low transition rates, increased absenteeism, and school dropout. Curriculum planners and designers should engage all education stakeholders at all levels for smooth curriculum transition (Kithungu, 2026). Problems associated with transition rates at various educational levels are occasioned by numerous factors among them spontaneous curriculum reforms and additional educational expenses. The instructors displayed lack of readiness in the utilization of the new pedagogical skills which affected the teaching and learning process thus low transition rates.

This section critically reviews contemporary literature on the relationship between additional schooling costs and pupils' transition from primary to secondary school, drawing on recent global, regional, and Kenyan studies. The review situates the discussion within the broader context of socioeconomic inequality, post-COVID-19 educational disruption, and policy implementation gaps, while identifying key empirical gaps that the present study in Mwingi East Sub-County seeks to address. While tuition fees are often the most visible cost associated with schooling, research increasingly emphasizes that indirect and hidden costs constitute a substantial financial burden for households. Bradley (2022) argues that education systems frequently underestimate the cumulative impact of non-tuition expenses on learner participation, particularly during transition phases and curriculum changes. Heads of Institutions should engage proper practices to ensure a conducive environment for teachers to undertake their roles well (Kithungu, 2026). Even in contexts where secondary education is officially subsidized, families are often required to meet a wide range of ancillary costs that determine whether pupils enroll, persist, or drop out.

Dotterer (2022) highlights that adolescents' educational trajectories are shaped not only by parental attitudes and aspirations but also by families' material capacity to support schooling. When additional costs exceed household income, parents may delay enrollment, opt for lower-quality schools, or withdraw children entirely from the education system. These dynamics are particularly pronounced during the transition from primary to secondary school, when costs typically increase due to uniforms, transport, boarding requirements, and examination-related expenses. From a theoretical perspective, human capital theory suggests that households weigh the costs of education against expected future benefits. For low-income families, high additional schooling costs reduce the perceived net return on education, increasing the likelihood of non-transition. Social reproduction theory further explains how these cost barriers perpetuate intergenerational inequality by limiting educational mobility for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Recent global studies provide compelling evidence that additional schooling costs remain a major barrier to educational access and progression. Vadivel et al. (2023) demonstrate that children from low socioeconomic backgrounds face compounded disadvantages, including limited access to educational materials, inadequate nutrition, and inability to afford school-related expenses. These constraints significantly reduce academic performance and increase the risk of dropout, particularly during transition points. Briones et al. (2022), in a survey study on factors affecting pupils' scholastic performance, identify school-related costs as a key determinant of learner engagement and persistence. Their findings suggest that financial stress associated with schooling expenses negatively affects pupils' concentration, attendance, and motivation, thereby undermining successful transition to higher levels of education.

Ukanwa, Jones, and Turner (2022) further argue that school systems that rely on parental contributions, even implicitly, create stratified access to education, attract teachers without apt pedagogical skills which impacts on

transition rates. Teachers need to be provided with adequate ICT knowledge and skills to enable them apply the appropriate pedagogical approaches, prepare quality assessment tools, develop lesson plans, and choose the right instructional materials that can accommodate pupils at different levels (Kithungu, 2026). Families with greater financial resources are better positioned to absorb additional costs, while poorer households face exclusion or are forced to choose lower-cost, lower-quality educational options. This stratification directly influences transition rates from primary to secondary school. In low- and middle-income countries, additional schooling costs are particularly burdensome due to widespread poverty, informal employment, and limited social safety nets. Zickafoose et al. (2024) identify financial barriers as one of the most persistent challenges to achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 (quality education) in sub-Saharan Africa. Despite policy commitments to free or subsidized education, households continue to bear significant education-related expenses that undermine access and equity.

Psaki et al. (2022), in a systematic review of policies and interventions aimed at removing gender-related barriers to education, find that schooling costs disproportionately affect girls' participation and transition rates. In many contexts, when families cannot afford to educate all children, boys are prioritized over girls, leading to gender disparities in secondary school enrollment. These findings underscore the intersection between schooling costs, poverty, and social norms in shaping educational outcomes. Mónus (2022) highlights that socioeconomic background influences not only access to schooling but also school quality and learning experiences. Pupils from low-income households often attend under-resourced schools with limited facilities and extracurricular opportunities, further diminishing the perceived value of transitioning to secondary education.

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated existing financial barriers to education by disrupting household incomes and increasing schooling-related costs. Moscoviz and Evans (2022) document widespread learning loss and increased dropout rates following prolonged school closures, with the greatest impacts observed among pupils from economically disadvantaged households. As families struggled to recover economically, many were unable to meet the costs associated with re-enrollment and transition to secondary school. Azevedo et al. (2022) argue that the pandemic widened educational inequalities by amplifying cost-related barriers. Households faced new expenses related to remote learning, such as digital devices, internet connectivity, and learning materials, which many could not afford. These challenges persisted even after schools reopened, affecting pupils' readiness and ability to transition to secondary education.

Tomaszewski et al. (2023), using administrative data from Australia, demonstrate that pupils from lower socioeconomic backgrounds experienced sharper declines in attendance during and after the pandemic. Although the study is based in a high-income country, its findings reinforce the global pattern that economic vulnerability intensifies educational exclusion during periods of crisis. In Kenya, government initiatives such as Free Primary Education and Free Day Secondary Education have significantly increased enrollment at both levels. However, several studies indicate that additional schooling costs continue to limit effective access to secondary education. Kotiano, Immonje, and Mabonga (2022) found that parents' income and ability to meet supplementary school expenses significantly influenced student retention in both primary and secondary schools in Kakamega Municipality. Bradley (2022) notes that even modest fees can act as exclusionary mechanisms for low-income families. In the Kenyan context, costs such as uniforms, meals, transportation, examination fees, and contributions to Boards of Management place substantial pressure on households, particularly in rural areas where incomes are unstable and seasonal.

Zickafoose et al. (2024) emphasize that rural and marginalized regions in sub-Saharan Africa face compounded challenges due to limited infrastructure, long distances to schools, and reliance on parental contributions for basic school operations. These factors are particularly relevant to semi-arid regions such as Mwingi East Sub-County, where poverty levels are high and economic activities are predominantly subsistence-based. Additional schooling costs also have gendered implications for educational transition. Psaki et al. (2022) highlight that financial constraints often interact with gender norms to disadvantage girls' education. When families cannot afford schooling expenses, girls are more likely to be withdrawn from school or prevented from transitioning to secondary education due to early marriage, domestic labor, or caregiving responsibilities.

Wrigley-Asante, Ackah, and Frimpong (2023) show that gender disparities in educational outcomes persist even at higher levels of education, reflecting cumulative disadvantages that begin during earlier transitions. These findings suggest that cost-related barriers at the primary-secondary transition stage can have long-term implications for gender equality in education and employment. Despite extensive research on schooling costs and educational outcomes, several critical gaps remain. First, many studies focus broadly on enrollment, retention, or academic performance, with limited attention to the specific transition from primary to secondary education as a distinct and vulnerable phase.

There is a lack of localized, sub-county-level studies examining how additional schooling costs influence transition rates in rural Kenyan contexts. While studies such as Kotiano et al. (2022) provide valuable insights in urban or peri-urban settings, they may not fully capture the realities of rural sub-counties like Mwingi East, where poverty, distance to schools, and reliance on parental contributions are more pronounced. Furthermore, few studies integrate the post-COVID-19 economic context into analyses of schooling costs and transition. Given the documented income shocks and learning disruptions caused by the pandemic (Moscoviz & Evans, 2022; Azevedo et al., 2022), there is a need for contemporary research that reflects current conditions.

Finally, existing literature often treats schooling costs in isolation, without examining their interaction with parental income, gender, and policy implementation gaps at the local level. This limits the ability of policymakers to design targeted interventions that address the specific barriers faced by vulnerable pupils. The present study seeks to address these gaps by examining the influence of additional schooling costs on pupils' transition from primary to secondary school in Mwingi East Sub-County, Kitui County. By focusing on a rural, economically disadvantaged context, the study provides empirical evidence on how hidden and indirect schooling costs continue to undermine transition rates despite government subsidies.

The study also contributes to the literature by situating the analysis within the post-COVID-19 period, thereby capturing the evolving nature of cost-related barriers to education. Its findings are expected to inform education policymakers, school administrators, and community stakeholders on the need for comprehensive support mechanisms that go beyond tuition subsidies to address the full spectrum of schooling costs. At the end this research enhances understanding of how additional schooling costs interact with socioeconomic conditions to shape educational transition outcomes, thereby contributing to efforts aimed at achieving equitable access to secondary education in Kenya.

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Study Design

The study employed a descriptive survey research approach. This design was deemed ideal for the study because it enabled the researcher to collect, analyze, and report data exactly as it was observed in the field without changing the factors under investigation (Kothari & Garg, 2024).

3.2 Target Population

The universal target population is made up of all the individuals being investigated in any given field. The population to whom the researcher hopes to generalize the study's findings is known as the target population (Kombo, 2006). The target population included 722 respondents; 103 Head of Institutions, 103 Parents Association chairpersons, 515 standard 8 subject teachers, and 1 SCDE in Mwingi East Sub-County.

3.4 Sampling Technique and Sample Size

Three educational zones Nuu, Nguni, and Mui comprise the 103 primary schools in the Mwingi East Sub-County. There are thirty-three schools in Mui, thirty-seven in Nguni and thirty-three in Nuu. To ensure that each zone had an equivalent representation, the schools were stratified based on their zones using a stratified proportionate sampling technique. A sample size of thirty (30%) of the schools was selected for a descriptive survey design, with a sample size of twenty to fifty percent suggested (Borg and Gall's, 2007). Thirty-one primary schools were

sampled, ten from Nuu zone, eleven from Nguni zone, and ten from Mui zone respectively. As a result, 155 standard 8 subject teachers, five from each school, 31 Head of Institutions, and 31 PA Chairpersons were involved in the study.

Schools with more than five teachers were used to select the five subject matter experts randomly. This was because these parties engage with their pupils on a daily basis while instructing them, subject teachers possess comprehensive knowledge about their pupils. Regarding parents' financial status and consistency in payment of school fees and levies, the PA chair had accurate information being the parents representative in the school. Mwingi East Sub-County Director of education was chosen purposively being in charge of the Sub-County's execution of government directives. Thus, 218 people made up the sample size: 31 Head of Institutions of primary schools, 31 PA chairpersons of primary schools, 155 standard 8 subject teachers, and 1 Sub-County director of education.

Table 3.1: Sample Size

Category	Target Population	Sample Size	Percentage
Head of Institutions	103	31	30
PA Chairpersons	103	31	30
Subject Teachers	515	155	30
Sub-County Director of Education	1	1	100
Total	722	218	30

Research Instruments

This study employed three main research instruments: questionnaires, interview schedules, and document analysis. Each instrument was designed to collect specific data relevant to the study objectives and target respondents.

Validity of the Research Instruments

Validity refers to the extent to which a research instrument accurately measures what it is intended to measure. An instrument is considered valid if the data it generates truly represents the concepts under investigation and enables the researcher to draw accurate conclusions aligned with the study objectives. To establish face validity, all items in the questionnaires and interview schedules were carefully examined to ensure that each question was directly related to one of the study objectives and was clearly worded. Content validity was ensured by aligning the items in the questionnaires and interview schedules with the study variable.

Reliability of the Research Instrument

Reliability refers to the degree to which a research instrument yields consistent and stable results when administered repeatedly under similar conditions (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). To ensure the reliability of the research instruments, a pilot study was conducted using the test–retest method. The pilot study was carried out in two public primary schools in Mwingi East Sub-County that were not included in the final study sample. A total of 20 respondents, comprising Head of Institutions and teachers, participated in the pilot study. The research questionnaire was administered to the respondents for the first time, and after a period of two weeks, the same questionnaire was re-administered to the same respondents.

The scores obtained from the first administration (test) and the second administration (retest) were then correlated using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (r) to determine the level of consistency

between the two sets of responses. Pearson's correlation coefficient measures the strength and direction of the linear relationship between two sets of scores.

$$r = \frac{n(\sum xy) - (\sum x)(\sum y)}{\sqrt{[n\sum x^2 - (\sum x)^2][n\sum y^2 - (\sum y)^2]}}$$

r = Pearson co-relation coefficient

x= results from the first test

y= results from the second test

n= number of observations

The analysis yielded a correlation coefficient (r) of 0.80 for the questionnaire. This indicates a strong positive correlation between the test and retest scores, implying that the questionnaire produced consistent results over time. According to Wiersma (2009), a correlation coefficient of 0.70 and above is considered acceptable for research instruments. Therefore, the questionnaire was deemed reliable for data collection.

To establish the reliability of the interview schedule, the same test–retest procedure was applied using the same pilot schools. Responses obtained during the first and second interviews were correlated using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient. The computed correlation coefficient for the interview schedule was $r = 0.70$, indicating a satisfactory level of consistency between the two sets of responses. Based on these results, both the questionnaire and the interview schedule were considered reliable instruments and were therefore suitable for use in the main study.

Procedures for Data Collection

An introductory letter was received from The Board of Postgraduate Studies (BPS) of SEKU, and a research permit from National Council of Science, Technology, and Innovation (NACOSTI). The authorization to obtain permission to conduct research in Mwingi East Sub-County, Kitui County, Kenya, was obtained from the Sub-County Director of Education (SCDE) and the Deputy County Commissioner (DCC). The researcher sought permission from the Heads of Institutions and scheduled time to interview the PA chairpersons. The researcher also scheduled a meeting with the Mwingi East SCDE to do a document analysis and interview.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis entails classifying, organizing, modifying, and summarizing data in order to answer research questions (Kothari & Garg, 2024). Both quantitative and qualitative data were produced by the research instruments. Using descriptive statistics, the quantitative data was examined. To make inferences that are relevant on each of the variables affecting the percentage of pupils in Mwingi East Sub-County who move from primary to secondary school. Descriptive statistics were used to illustrate the data using frequency tables, percentages, and Likert scales. Qualitative data was coded, transcribed, and narratively written for analysis. Responses from interviews were grouped systematically based on the study objective.

Data Analysis

The obstacle of high secondary school tuition fees prevents a high primary to secondary school transition rate. The government's FDSE policy pays for tuition and operating expenses; parents are responsible for covering all other school-related fees. The researcher intended to determine the impact of additional educational expenses on the rate at which pupils in Mwingi East Sub-County transitioned from primary to secondary school level.

The Head of Institutions were requested to provide the average annual meal levy for educating a learner in secondary education.

Table 4.1 shows the responses provided by the respondents.

Table 4.1: Head of Institutions' responses on lunch levy

Range	Frequency	Percentage
Below Kshs 4000	0	0%
Kshs 4500–6000	2	6.5%
Kshs 6500–9000	7	22.5%
Above 9000	22	71%
Total	31	100%

The data presented in Table 4.1 were obtained from the Head of Institutions' questionnaire and illustrate the annual lunch levy charged to pupils in secondary schools within Mwingi East Sub-County. The findings indicate that none of the respondents (0%) reported a lunch levy below Kenya Shillings 4,000. A small proportion of Head of Institutions, 2 respondents (6.5%), indicated that the annual lunch levy ranged between Kenya Shillings 4,500 and 6,000, while 7 respondents (22.5%) reported a lunch levy of between Kenya Shillings 6,500 and 9,000. Notably, the majority of Head of Institutions, representing 22 respondents (71%), reported that the annual lunch levy charged in their schools exceeded Kenya Shillings 9,000.

This finding suggests that lunch levies constitute a significant additional educational cost for parents in Mwingi East Sub-County, despite the government's provision of Free Day Secondary Education. The high proportion of schools charging lunch levies above Kenya Shillings 9,000 indicates that parents are required to meet substantial out-of-pocket expenses to support their children's participation in secondary education. The results imply that lunch levies may pose a financial burden to households, particularly those with low and unstable incomes, thereby potentially limiting pupils' ability to enroll in or remain in secondary school. These findings support the view that additional schooling costs, such as lunch levies, continue to undermine smooth transition from primary to secondary education in the Sub-County.

Further, the teachers were requested to provide their views on the average annual lunch levy for learners in secondary school. Their responses were captured in table 4.2.

Table 4.2: Teachers' responses on lunch levy

Range	Frequency	Percentage
Below Kshs 4000	0	0%
Kshs 4500–6000	11	7%
Kshs 6500–9000	32	21%
Above 9000	107	72%
Total	150	100%

The data presented in Table 4.2 were obtained from the teachers' questionnaire and show teachers' perceptions of the average annual lunch levy charged to pupils in secondary schools within Mwingi East Sub-County. The findings indicate that none of the respondents (0%) reported a lunch levy below Kenya Shillings 4,000. A small proportion of the teachers, 11 respondents (7%), indicated that the lunch levy ranged between Kenya Shillings

4,500 and 6,000, while 32 respondents (21%) reported a lunch levy of between Kenya Shillings 6,500 and 9,000. A large majority of the teachers, accounting for 107 respondents (72%), indicated that the annual lunch levy charged to pupils in secondary schools was above Kenya Shillings 9,000.

This result closely aligns with the responses provided by Head of Institutions in Table 4.1 suggesting consistency between school administrators and teaching staff regarding the magnitude of lunch-related costs borne by parents. Further, the findings demonstrate that lunch levies represent a substantial additional educational expense for households in Mwingi East Sub-County. Given that the majority of teachers reported lunch levies exceeding Kenya Shillings 9,000 annually, it can be inferred that many parents are required to meet significant non-tuition costs in order to keep their children enrolled in secondary school. Such financial obligations may negatively affect pupils from low-income households and potentially hinder their smooth transition from primary to secondary education.

Heads of Institutions were also requested to provide their views on the total cost of upkeep of pupils in secondary school. Table 4.3 provides data on the responses.

Table 4.3: Head of Institutions' responses on cost of upkeep of pupils

Range	Frequency	Percentage
Below Kshs 4000	0	0%
Kshs 4500–6000	2	6.5%
Kshs 6500–9000	7	22.5%
Above 9000	22	71%
Total	31	100%

The data presented in Table 4.3 were obtained from the Head of Institutions' questionnaire and reflect Head of Institutions' estimates of the average annual cost of upkeep for a learner in secondary schools within Mwingi East Sub-County. The findings show that none of the respondents (0%) indicated that the cost of upkeep was below Kenya Shillings 4,000. Only 2 Head of Institutions (6.5%) reported that the annual cost of upkeep ranged between Kenya Shillings 4,500 and 6,000, while 7 respondents (22.5%) estimated the cost to be between Kenya Shillings 6,500 and 9,000. A significant majority of the Head of Institutions, representing 22 respondents (71%), indicated that the annual cost of maintaining a learner in secondary school exceeded Kenya Shillings 9,000.

This suggests that learner upkeep costs, which may include expenses such as meals, learning support materials, utilities, and general welfare needs, place a considerable financial demand on schools and parents alike. The findings imply that, beyond tuition-related expenses, the cost of maintaining pupils in secondary schools in Mwingi East Sub-County remains relatively high. Such costs may pose challenges to parents from economically disadvantaged households and could negatively influence student retention and progression within the secondary education system. The results further highlight the continued existence of indirect education costs despite the implementation of Free Day Secondary Education.

Similarly. Teachers provided their responses on the total cost of upkeep of pupils in secondary school. Table 4.4 indicates data on the answers.

Table 4.4: Teachers' responses on cost of upkeep of a learner in secondary school

Range	Frequency	Percentage
Below Kshs 4000	0	0%

Kshs 4500 - 6000	13	7%
Kshs 6500 - 9000	34	21%
Above 9000	108	72%
Total	155	100%

The data presented in Table 4.4 were obtained from the teachers' questionnaire and reflect teachers' views on the average annual cost of upkeep for a learner in secondary schools within Mwingi East Sub-County. The findings indicate that none of the respondents (0%) reported a maintenance cost below Kenya Shillings 4,000. A small proportion of teachers, 11 respondents (7%), estimated the annual cost of upkeep to range between Kenya Shillings 4,500 and 6,000, while 32 respondents (21%) indicated that the cost ranged between Kenya Shillings 6,500 and 9,000. The majority of the teachers, representing 107 respondents (72%), indicated that the average annual cost of maintaining a learner in secondary school exceeded Kenya Shillings 9,000. These findings are consistent with the responses provided by Head of Institutions in Table 4.3, suggesting agreement between school administrators and teaching staff regarding the high cost of learner upkeep.

The results imply that maintenance-related expenses constitute a significant indirect cost of secondary education in Mwingi East Sub-County. Such costs may present financial challenges to parents, particularly those from low-income households, and could negatively affect pupils' enrollment, retention, and transition into secondary school. The consistency between teachers' and Head of Institutions' responses strengthens the reliability of the findings on the magnitude of learner upkeep costs.

To further examine the effect of these costs on student enrollment, Head of Institutions were asked through a questionnaire to indicate whether the cost of learner maintenance and lunch levies influence Form One enrollment.

The responses to this question are presented in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5: Head of Institutions' response on effect of lunch levy and upkeep cost on pupils joining form one

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Very much	9	29%
Fairly	22	71%
Not at all	0	0%
Total	31	100%

The data presented in Table 4.5 were obtained from the Head of Institutions' questionnaire and indicate Head of Institutions' views on the extent to which lunch levies and learner upkeep costs influence pupils' transition from primary to secondary school in Mwingi East Sub-County. The findings show that none of the respondents (0%) indicated that lunch levies and upkeep costs had no effect on Form One enrollment. A proportion of the Head of Institutions, 9 respondents (29%), reported that lunch levies and upkeep costs affect Form One enrollment very much, while the majority, 22 respondents (71%), indicated that these costs affect enrollment fairly. The absence of responses under the "Not at all" category suggests a unanimous agreement among Head of Institutions that lunch levies and learner upkeep costs play a role in determining whether pupils join secondary school.

The results imply that financial obligations related to meals and learner maintenance significantly influence pupils' transition to Form One. Although most Head of Institutions perceived the effect as moderate rather than

severe, the findings clearly indicate that indirect schooling costs remain a barrier to smooth transition from primary to secondary education in Mwingi East Sub-County.

To establish whether teachers held similar views, the same question was administered to teachers through a questionnaire, and their responses are presented in Table 4.6.

Table 4.6: Teachers response on Effect of lunch levy and upkeep costs on pupils joining form one

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Very much	38	25%
Fairly	117	75%
Not at all	0	0%
Total	155	100%

The data presented in Table 4.6 were obtained from the teachers' questionnaire and reflect teachers' perceptions of the extent to which lunch levies and learner upkeep costs influence pupils' transition from primary to secondary school in Mwingi East Sub-County. The findings indicate that none of the teachers (0%) believed that these costs have no effect on Form One enrollment. A quarter of the teachers, 38 respondents (25%), indicated that lunch levies and upkeep costs affect pupils' transition to Form One very much, while the majority, 112 respondents (75%), reported that these costs affect the transition fairly. These findings are consistent with those of Head of Institutions in Table 4.6, demonstrating a shared perception between school administrators and teachers that indirect schooling costs influence student enrollment into secondary education.

The results suggest that although lunch levies and learner upkeep costs may not always be viewed as severe barriers, they nonetheless present a notable challenge to pupils and their families. The unanimous acknowledgment of their influence highlights the continued presence of financial constraints affecting pupils' progression from primary to secondary school in Mwingi East Sub-County.

The study further examined the effect of other indirect costs associated with pupils joining secondary school. The Head of Institutions were issued with questionnaires to identify additional educational expenses incurred by pupils joining Form One.

The responses to this question are presented in Table 4.7.

Table 4.7: Head of Institutions' response on other educational costs

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Personal effects	25	80.1%
Uniforms	27	87.1%
Test books	10	32.2%
Stationeries	4	12.9%

The data presented in Table 4.7 were obtained from the Head of Institutions' questionnaire and highlight additional educational costs incurred by pupils when joining Form One in secondary schools within Mwingi East Sub-County. The findings show that a majority of Head of Institutions identified several non-tuition expenses that parents are required to meet at the point of entry into secondary school. Specifically, 27 Head of Institutions

(87.1%) indicated that the cost of school uniforms constitutes a major additional expense, while 25 respondents (80.1%) reported personal effects as another significant cost. In addition, 10 Head of Institutions (32.2%) identified textbooks as an additional financial requirement, and 4 respondents (12.9%) reported stationery as an extra cost for pupils entering Form One.

The results suggest that, beyond lunch levies and upkeep costs, parents are required to incur substantial one-time and recurring expenses when their children transition to secondary school. The high proportion of Head of Institutions citing uniforms and personal effects indicates that these costs represent the most significant financial burden at the entry level. Such expenses may pose challenges to families with limited financial resources and could negatively affect pupils' ability to enroll in or smoothly transition to Form One.

To determine whether teachers shared similar views regarding the influence of additional educational costs on pupils transition to secondary school, the same questionnaires were administered.

Their responses are presented in Table 4.8.

Table 4.8: Teachers' responses on other educational costs

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Personal effects	119	79.4%
Uniforms	134	89.5%
Test books	45	30.5%
Stationery	20	13.1%

The data presented in Table 4.8 were obtained from the teachers' questionnaire and indicate teachers' perceptions of additional educational costs incurred by pupils when enrolling in Form One in secondary schools within Mwingi East Sub-County. The findings reveal that several non-tuition expenses are required of pupils at the point of entry into secondary education. A large majority of teachers, 134 respondents (89.5%), identified school uniforms as a major additional cost, while 119 respondents (79.4%) reported personal effects as another significant expense for pupils joining Form One. In addition, 45 teachers (30.5%) indicated that textbooks constitute an additional cost, and 20 respondents (13.1%) identified stationery as an extra educational expense.

The results demonstrate that uniforms and personal effects represent the most substantial additional financial demands on parents when pupils transition to secondary school. The consistency between teachers' responses in Table 4.8 and Head of Institutions' responses in Table 4.8 strengthens the reliability of the findings and underscores the persistence of indirect schooling costs in Mwingi East Sub-County. Such costs may create financial barriers for families with limited resources and potentially affect pupils' ability to enroll and remain in secondary school.

To further assess the overall impact of lunch levies, uniform costs, and other additional educational expenses on pupils' transition from primary to secondary school, Head of Institutions were asked through a questionnaire to give their views on this issue.

Their responses are presented in Table 4.9.

Table 4.9: Head of Institutions' opinions on influence of lunch levy, school uniforms and other education costs on transition of pupils from primary to secondary school

Opinion	Frequency	Percentage
Very influential	7	22.5%

Influential	18	58.1%
Less influential	5	16.1%
Not influential	1	3.3%
Total	31	100%

The data presented in Table 4.9 were obtained from the Head of Institutions' questionnaire and reflect Head of Institutions' opinions on the extent to which lunch levies, school uniform costs, and other additional educational expenses influence pupils' transition from primary to secondary school in Mwingi East Sub-County. The findings indicate that the majority of Head of Institutions perceived these costs as having a notable influence on pupils' transition. Specifically, 7 Head of Institutions (22.5%) indicated that lunch levies, school uniforms, and other educational costs are very influential in determining pupils' transition to secondary school, while 18 respondents (58.1%) reported that these costs are influential. A smaller proportion, 5 Head of Institutions (16.1%), felt that the costs were less influential, and only 1 respondent (3.3%) indicated that such costs are not influential.

The results suggest that most Head of Institutions acknowledge the significant role played by indirect schooling costs in shaping pupils' transition from primary to secondary education. The high proportion of respondents categorizing these costs as influential or very influential underscores the continued presence of financial barriers that may hinder access to secondary education in Mwingi East Sub-County, particularly for pupils from economically disadvantaged households.

To determine whether teachers shared similar views, the same questions were administered to them through a questionnaire.

Teachers responses are presented in Table 4.10.

Table 4.10: Teachers' opinions on influence of lunch levy, school uniforms and other education costs on transition of pupils from primary to secondary school

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Very influential	29	19%
Influential	96	62.5%
Less influential	25	15.5%
Not influential	5	3%
Total	155	100%

Table 4.10 presents findings from the teachers' questionnaire, which sought to establish teachers' opinions on the influence of lunch levies, school uniforms, and other education-related costs on pupils' transition from primary to secondary school in Mwingi East Sub-County. Teachers were asked to rate the level of influence these costs have on pupils' ability to progress to secondary education. The results indicate that a majority of the teachers (62.5%) reported that lunch levies, school uniforms, and other educational expenses are influential in determining pupils' transition from primary to secondary school. In addition, 19% of the respondents indicated that these costs are very influential, suggesting that a substantial proportion of teachers perceive education-related expenses as a major barrier to pupils' progression. When combined, over four-fifths of the respondents (81.5%) acknowledged that such costs play a significant role in influencing transition rates.

On the other hand, 15.5% of the teachers indicated that these costs are less influential, while a very small proportion, 3%, reported that the costs are not influential. This minority view suggests that although some pupils may manage to transition despite these financial demands, such cases are relatively limited within the Sub-County. The findings from the teachers' questionnaire imply that even with government support programs such as Free Day Secondary Education, hidden and indirect education costs, including lunch levies, purchase of uniforms, and other school-related expenses continue to pose challenges to many families. Teachers, by virtue of their daily interaction with pupils and parents, are well positioned to observe the effects of financial constraints on school attendance, completion of primary education, and eventual transition to secondary school. Their responses therefore provide credible evidence that these costs often discourage or delay pupils from enrolling in secondary school, particularly those from low-income households.

Further, the study sought to examine Head of Institutions' level of agreement with statements related to the influence of lunch levy, school uniforms, and other education-related costs on access to and transition to secondary education in Mwingi East Sub-County.

The statements were rated using a five-point Likert scale; **5 = Strongly Agree, 4 = Agree, 3 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, and 1 = Undecided.**

Table 4.11 presents findings.

Table 4.11: Head of Institutions' responses on statements

Statement	5	4	3	2	1	Mean
Affordability of lunch levy and other education costs in secondary school is the major challenge to access to secondary education.	929%	2064.5%	00%	00%	26.5%	4.2
Parents are not able to meet lunch levy and other education costs of secondary education.	722.6%	1858%	00%	13.2%	516.2%	3.68
Children from poor households are less likely to participate in secondary education due to lunch levy and other education costs.	825.8%	2167.7%	00%	00%	26.5%	4.06
Lunch levy and other education costs influence school transition rate between primary and secondary school.	929%	2064.5%	00%	00%	26.5%	4.09

The mean scores were computed to determine the overall level of agreement with each statement. The first statement examined whether the affordability of lunch levy and other education costs in secondary school is a major challenge to access to secondary education. The results show that 64.5% of the Head of Institutions agreed, while 29% strongly agreed with the statement. Only 6.5% were undecided, and none disagreed. The high mean score of 4.20 indicates strong overall agreement among Head of Institutions that the cost of lunch levy and other education-related expenses constitutes a major barrier to accessing secondary education. These findings suggest that Head of Institutions widely perceive affordability issues as a key factor limiting enrolment in secondary schools.

The second statement assessed whether parents are not able to meet lunch levy and other education costs of secondary education. The results indicate that 58% of the Head of Institutions agreed and 22.6% strongly agreed with this statement. A small proportion, 16.2%, were undecided, while 3.2% disagreed. The mean score of 3.68 reflects a generally high level of agreement, though with slightly more variation in opinion compared to the first statement. These findings from the Head of Institutions' questionnaire suggest that many parents in Mwingi East Sub-County face financial difficulties in meeting secondary school-related costs, which may hinder their children's continued participation in education.

The third statement sought to determine whether children from poor households are less likely to participate in secondary education due to lunch levy and other education costs. The results reveal that a substantial majority of respondents, 67.7%, agreed with the statement, while 25.8% strongly agreed. Only 6.5% of the Head of Institutions were undecided, and none expressed disagreement. The high mean score of 4.06 demonstrates strong consensus among Head of Institutions that pupils from economically disadvantaged households are disproportionately affected by education-related costs, making them less likely to transition to or remain in secondary school.

The fourth statement examined whether lunch levy and other education costs influence the transition rate between primary and secondary school. The findings show that 64.5% of the respondents agreed and 29% strongly agreed, while 6.5% were undecided. No respondents disagreed with the statement. The mean score of

4.09 further confirms strong agreement among Head of Institutions that education-related costs significantly affect pupils' transition from primary to secondary school in the Sub-County.

The results from the Head of Institutions' questionnaire presented in Table 4.11 indicate a strong and consistent perception that lunch levy, school uniforms, and other education-related costs negatively influence access to secondary education and transition rates in Mwingi East Sub-County. The consistently high mean scores across all four statements suggest that Head of Institutions view financial constraints as a critical factor contributing to low participation and transition to secondary education, particularly among pupils from poor households.

Teachers were also requested to indicate their level of agreement with statements related to the influence of education-related costs on pupils access to and transition to secondary education in Mwingi East Sub-County.

The statements were rated using a five-point Likert scale; **5 = Strongly Agree, 4 = Agree, 3 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, and 1 = Undecided.**

The responses were presented in table 4.12.

Table 4.12: Teachers' responses on statements

Statement	5	4	3	2	1	Mean
Affordability of lunch levy and other education costs in secondary school is the major challenge to access to secondary education.	45	81	3	7	14	3.91
Parents are not able to meet lunch levy and other education costs of secondary education.	3624%	84 56%	85.4%	74.6%	1510%	3.74
Children from poor households are less likely to participate in secondary education due to lunch levy and other education costs.	3422.7%	8758%	21.3%	64%	2114%	3.71
Lunch levy and other education costs influence school transition rate between primary and secondary school.	3020%	9060%	42.6%	53.4%	2114%	3.63

The results show that the biggest barrier to secondary education access in Mwingi East Sub-County is the affordability of the lunch tax and other educational fees. Of the respondents, 54% agreed and 30% strongly agreed with this statement. In Mwingi East Sub-County, parents' inability to pay for secondary education expenses, including the lunch tax, is acknowledged by 56% of respondents, with 24% strongly agreeing. Given the lunch levy and other educational expenses in Mwingi East Sub-County, 58% of respondents agreed, and 22.7% strongly agreed that children from low-income families are less likely to attend secondary school. In Mwingi East Sub-County, the transition rate from primary to secondary education is influenced by other education fees, such as the lunch levy, as agreed upon by 60% of respondents, and highly agreed by 20% of individuals.

The researcher conducted an interview with the Sub-County director of education to find out if there are any examples of pupils who were unable to move from primary to secondary school because their parents could not afford the additional costs of education, if the government subsidy for education is adequate to run the schools, and how additional costs affect pupils' transition from primary to secondary school in Mwingi East Sub-County. The results from their responses were summed up as follows: additional expenses for schooling, such as lunch fees and uniforms, prevent pupils from moving from primary to secondary school; some pupils did not transit to secondary school because of these expenses; government funding for education is insufficient to operate schools; additional funding is required; and additional expenses for education reduce the percentage of pupils who move from primary to secondary school.

Similarly, the PA chairpersons were interviewed. Their responses were summarized as follows; additional expenses for education, such as school uniforms and meal levies, prevent pupils from moving from primary to secondary school. Of the 31 respondents, 18 (or 72%) felt that additional expenses associated with schooling, such as the school uniform and lunch tax, prevent pupils from moving from primary to secondary school. Owing to the expense of schooling, some pupils choose not to transit to secondary school. Some pupils did not enroll in secondary schools, according to 22 out of 31 respondents (88%) of the sample. Schools were not adequately funded by the government's education subsidies.

The majority of respondents 24 out of 31 (96%) felt that the government's education subsidy was insufficient to operate schools and suggested that it be increased. Secondary school transition rates are lowered by additional educational expenses. The transition rate from primary to secondary school in Mwingi East Sub-County is lowered, according to 21 out of 31 respondents, by additional educational fees.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Although secondary education in Kenya is subsidized by the government, the study findings show that additional educational expenses continue to pose a major barrier to pupils' transition from primary to secondary school in Mwingi East Sub-County. These expenses include lunch fees, uniforms, personal effects, textbooks, and stationery, all of which must be met by parents. Both Head of Institutions and teachers identified uniforms and personal belongings as the most common additional costs, followed by textbooks and stationery. The lunch levy emerged as a particularly significant burden, with most respondents indicating that the annual cost of meals in secondary schools exceeds Ksh 9,000. For households already struggling with low incomes, this amount represents a substantial financial obligation.

The findings further indicate that these additional expenses directly influence pupils' entry into Form One. A large proportion of respondents agreed that lunch levies and other maintenance costs fairly or significantly affect whether pupils enroll in secondary school. When parents are unable to meet these costs, pupils may delay enrollment, enroll irregularly, or fail to transition altogether. Importantly, the study shows that additional educational expenses undermine the intended benefits of government subsidies. While tuition costs may be covered, indirect costs continue to exclude pupils from poor households.

The Sub-County Director of Education noted that schools impose these levies to sustain operations due to inadequate government funding, creating a tension between institutional survival and equitable access to education. PA chairpersons overwhelmingly agreed that lunch levies and related expenses reduce transition rates. This finding highlights the cumulative effect of multiple costs on households already burdened by poverty. The interaction between low income and high indirect costs creates a cycle in which pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds are systematically excluded from secondary education.

The findings demonstrate that additional educational expenses are a critical barrier to transition in Mwingi East Sub-County. Addressing this challenge requires policy measures that go beyond tuition subsidies to include comprehensive support for indirect schooling costs. Zickafoose et al (2024) findings agree with findings of this study.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that additional educational expenses significantly reduce primary-to-secondary school transition rates. Despite government capitation, costs such as uniforms, lunch levies, personal effects, and learning materials remain a burden to many families.

The findings showed that these expenses discourage parents from enrolling their children in secondary school, particularly immediately after completing primary education. Thus, hidden and indirect schooling costs continue to undermine the government's efforts to achieve universal secondary education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends that the national government review secondary school capitation policies to address indirect schooling costs, including uniforms and lunch levies. This recommendation is supported by findings that additional educational expenses discourage enrollment and reduce transition rates.

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