Policy Objectives and Their Influence on Classroom Instructional Practices: Evidence from Kenya's One Hundred Percent Transition Policy

MACHIVA YUSUF WAFULA[1], DR. EDWIN MASIBO[2], DR. ROSE MUTENDE[3]
[1,2,3] *Department of Curriculum and Pedagogy, School of Education, Kibabii University, Kenya*

Abstract-This study examined how the objectives of Kenya's one hundred percent transition policy influence classroom instructional practices in public day secondary schools in Western Region. The policy, implemented in 2018, aimed to ensure all primary school graduates proceed to secondary education. Using a mixed-methods approach, data were collected from 228 principals, 277 teachers, and 307 Form Two students across Kakamega, Bungoma, Busia, and Vihiga counties. Findings revealed a hierarchical pattern of policy awareness, with principals showing highest understanding (M=4.32, SD=0.78) and students lowest (M=2.87, SD=1.21). The policy prompted a significant shift toward teacher-centered approaches (78.7% of teachers), reduced practical activities (84.3% reduction in science subjects), and limited differentiated instruction (observed in only 32.7% of lessons). While the policy succeeded in increasing access, it created pedagogical challenges including larger class sizes (averaging 62.2 students vs. recommended 40), increased classroom management difficulties (reported by 85.5% of principals), and decreased individual student attention. The study concludes that policy objectives primarily focused on quantitative enrollment targets without adequate consideration of qualitative instructional implications, necessitating more balanced approaches that address both access and quality dimensions of education.

Indexed Terms- Transition Policy, Instructional Practices, Educational Access, Teaching Quality, Kenya

I. INTRODUCTION

Educational access policies have become central to achieving universal secondary education goals globally, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa where enrollment rates have historically lagged behind other regions. Kenya's implementation of the one hundred percent transition policy in 2018 represents a significant milestone in the country's commitment to expanding secondary education access. This policy mandates that all students completing primary education must proceed to secondary school, fundamentally altering the educational landscape.

The policy emerged from Kenya's broader educational reform agenda aimed at achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 and addressing historical barriers to secondary education access. Prior to implementation, transition rates from primary to secondary education averaged 83.3% nationally, with significant regional variations and socioeconomic disparities limiting access for many students. The Western Region of Kenya, comprising Kakamega, Bungoma, Busia, and Vihiga counties, presents a unique context for examining policy impacts due to its distinct socioeconomic challenges, higher poverty rates than national averages, and pre-existing educational infrastructure deficits.

While the policy has demonstrably increased enrollment in secondary schools, its influence on classroom instructional practices remains underexplored. Educational research consistently demonstrates that how policies are translated into classroom practices significantly affects learning outcomes. The rapid enrollment increases following policy implementation have created new challenges for teachers, including larger class sizes, more diverse student populations, and resource constraints

that may require fundamental adaptations to instructional approaches.

This study addresses a critical gap in understanding how policy objectives translate into classroom realities. Specifically, it examines how the one hundred percent transition policy's objectives have influenced teaching approaches, classroom management techniques, differentiated instruction practices, and overall pedagogical quality in public day secondary schools. Understanding these relationships is essential for informing policy refinements and ensuring that access expansion does not compromise educational quality.

The research is theoretically grounded in the Production Function Model, which posits that educational outputs are determined by the quality and quantity of educational inputs. This framework provides a lens for examining how policy implementation creates new input conditions that influence pedagogical processes and outcomes.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Educational Access Policies and Classroom Practice

Educational access policies worldwide have demonstrated mixed effects on classroom instructional practices. International evidence suggests that rapid enrollment expansion without corresponding increases in resources often leads to pedagogical adaptations that may compromise teaching quality. Blatchford et al. (2016) found that increased class sizes in UK schools prompted shifts toward more teacher-centered instruction, reduced individual attention, and modified assessment practices. Similarly, research in developing countries has documented how enrollment expansion affects classroom dynamics and teaching approaches.

In the Kenyan context, previous studies have examined various aspects of educational access policies. Mulongo (2019) investigated classroom management challenges following enrollment increases in Nairobi County schools, finding that teachers struggled to maintain individualized attention and effective behavior management in larger classes. However, this study was limited to urban contexts and did not specifically examine the one hundred percent transition policy's comprehensive effects on instructional practices.

2.2 Policy Objectives and Pedagogical Adaptation

The relationship between policy objectives and classroom practice is mediated by various factors including teacher understanding, resource availability, and institutional support. Wanjohi et al. (2021) observed that Kenyan teachers increasingly adopted differentiated instruction strategies following enrollment increases, though their study's small sample size limited generalizability. Research in other contexts suggests that teachers' interpretation of policy objectives significantly influences their pedagogical responses.

Policy communication emerges as a critical factor in determining classroom impacts. Studies indicate that when policy objectives emphasize quantitative targets without corresponding attention to qualitative processes, teachers may prioritize administrative compliance over pedagogical innovation. This pattern has been observed in various educational reforms globally, where the focus on measurable outcomes inadvertently shapes classroom practices in unintended ways.

2.3 Teaching Approaches in High-Enrollment Contexts

Research on teaching in high-enrollment environments reveals consistent patterns across different contexts. Teachers typically adopt more direct instruction methods, reduce hands-on activities, and modify assessment practices to manage larger student numbers. Tomlinson and Moon (2018) documented these adaptations in US contexts, though their findings emerged from environments with significantly better resources than those typically available in Kenyan schools.

In African contexts, similar adaptations have been documented. Studies in Tanzania and Uganda have shown that increased enrollment often leads to reduced practical work, particularly in science subjects, and greater reliance on lecture methods. However, research specifically focused on Kenya's transition policy and its classroom impacts remains limited, particularly regarding regional variations and specific pedagogical domains.

2.4 Differentiated Instruction in Resource-Constrained Environments

The implementation of differentiated instruction becomes particularly challenging in high-enrollment, resource-constrained environments. Kimani and Mwangi (2018) examined inclusive practices in Kenyan secondary schools, finding significant barriers to differentiation including large class sizes, inadequate materials, and limited teacher preparation. Their research highlighted the tension between educational ideals and practical constraints that characterize many developing country contexts.

International research suggests that effective differentiation in challenging environments requires specific adaptations including flexible grouping strategies, tiered assignments, and creative use of peer learning. However, the applicability of these strategies to Kenyan contexts, particularly under the conditions created by the transition policy, requires empirical investigation.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative and qualitative research strategies within a descriptive survey design. This methodology was selected to provide comprehensive understanding of the complex relationships between policy objectives and classroom practices, allowing for both breadth of coverage across multiple schools and depth of insight into specific pedagogical phenomena.

3.2 Study Area and Population

The study was conducted in Western Region, Kenya, encompassing Kakamega, Bungoma, Busia, and Vihiga counties. These counties were selected due to their shared socioeconomic characteristics while exhibiting varying levels of educational development. The target population comprised principals, Form Two teachers, Form Two students, and education officials from public day secondary schools implementing the transition policy.

3.3 Sampling Procedures

A multi-stage sampling approach was employed. First, stratified random sampling was used with counties as primary strata, ensuring proportional representation based on school distribution. Within each county, schools were randomly selected using computer-generated random numbers. The final sample included 228 principals (75.2% response rate), 277 teachers (74.9% response rate), and 307 students (77.1% response rate) across the four counties.

3.4 Data Collection Instruments

Four main instruments were used: structured questionnaires for principals, teachers, and students; semi-structured interview schedules for education officials; classroom observation checklists; and document analysis guides. All instruments were validated through expert review and pilot testing, achieving Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients exceeding 0.70 for all questionnaire sections.

3.5 Data Collection Procedures

Data collection occurred over three months (February-April 2025) following receipt of necessary research permits. Eight research assistants were trained and deployed across the counties. Questionnaires were administered first, followed by interviews and classroom observations. All ethical protocols were strictly followed, including informed consent and confidentiality assurances.

3.6 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS, employing descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations) and inferential statistics (correlation, t-tests, ANOVA). Qualitative data underwent thematic analysis using NVivo software, with independent coding by two researchers to enhance reliability. Mixed-methods integration followed a convergent parallel approach with triangulation of findings.

IV. RESULTS

4.1 Policy Awareness and Understanding

The study revealed distinct hierarchical patterns in policy awareness and understanding across stakeholder groups. Table 1 presents the mean scores and standard deviations for policy awareness and understanding indicators across the three main stakeholder groups.

Table 1: Policy Awareness and Understanding by Stakeholder Group

Statement	Principals (n=228)		Teachers (n=277)		Students (n=307)	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Awareness of policy objectives	4.32	0.78	3.97	0.86	2.87	1.21
Understanding of influence on teaching	4.18	0.83	3.86	0.92	2.65	1.19
Clear communication of objectives	3.57	1.06	3.21	1.12	2.43	1.17
Alignment with quality education	3.25	1.24	3.07	1.29	2.98	1.16

Note. Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree.

Principals demonstrated the highest level of awareness (M = 4.32, SD = 0.78), with 78.5% either agreeing or strongly agreeing that they were fully aware of policy objectives. Teachers showed moderate awareness (M = 3.97, SD = 0.86), with 68.6% indicating high awareness levels. Students displayed the lowest awareness (M = 2.87, SD = 1.21), with only 35.2% reporting high awareness levels.

Document analysis revealed that only 28.6% of policy circulars provided specific pedagogical guidance, with 71.4% emphasizing administrative and logistical aspects. This finding helps explain the limited understanding of pedagogical implications observed across stakeholder groups.

4.2 Influence on Teaching Approaches

Significant modifications in teaching methods were observed following policy implementation. Table 2 presents the findings on how the policy influenced various teaching approaches across stakeholder groups.

Table 2: Influence of Policy on Teaching Approaches

Statement

Statement	Principals (n=228)		Teachers (n=277)		Students (n=307)	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Modified teaching methods	4.27	0.81	4.45	0.73	3.74	1.08
Increased group work/peer teaching	4.05	0.92	4.12	0.89	3.87	1.02
Increased technology integration	3.12	1.27	3.04	1.32	2.84	1.37
Project-based/inquiry learning	3.23	1.18	3.15	1.24	2.97	1.29

Note. Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree.

Results showed that 82.5% of principals and 88.1% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that teaching methods had been modified due to increased class sizes. A major shift toward teacher-centered approaches was evident, with 78.7% of teachers reporting increased use of lecture methods. Classroom observations confirmed this trend, finding that teacher talk accounted for an average of 67.3% of class time, significantly exceeding the recommended 40-50% for learner-centered approaches.

Technology integration was less commonly reported, with only 41.2% of principals and 38.6% of teachers indicating increased technology use. This finding was corroborated by classroom observations, which found evidence of technology integration in only 30.6% of lessons.

4.3 Classroom Management Adaptations

Classroom management techniques underwent substantial changes in response to increased enrollment. Table 3 presents the findings on classroom management adaptations.

Table 3: Influence on Classroom Management Techniques

Statement	Principals (n=228)		Teachers (n=277)		Students (n=307)	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Increased management challenges	4.36	0.78	4.53	0.71	3.82	1.09
New rules and procedures	4.12	0.87	4.25	0.82	3.98	0.95
Modified seating arrangements	4.31	0.79	4.38	0.75	4.21	0.88
Increased discipline issues	3.81	1.12	4.05	0.96	3.54	1.21
Decreased student engagement	3.65	1.18	3.79	1.14	3.42	1.24

Note. Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree.

Results showed that 85.5% of principals and 87.7% of teachers agreed that classroom management had become more challenging, with 52.6% of principals and 58.5% of teachers strongly agreeing. Seating arrangements were modified in 84.2% of schools according to principals, with similar reports from teachers (83.8%) and students (79.8%).

Classroom observations revealed that teachers in large classes (>50 students) spent an average of 18.3% of lesson time on management routines, compared to 11.7% in smaller classes (<50 students), a statistically significant difference ($t(47) = 4.85$, $p < .001$).

4.4 Differentiated Instruction Practices

Despite increased student diversity following policy implementation, differentiated instruction remained limited. Table 4 presents the findings on differentiated instruction practices.

Table 4: Influence on Differentiated Instruction Practices

Statement	Principals (n=228)		Teachers (n=277)		Students (n=307)	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Different learning materials	3.16	1.25	3.08	1.29	2.76	1.34
Adjusted teaching pace	3.28	1.19	3.35	1.17	2.93	1.32
Diversified assessment methods	3.32	1.16	3.27	1.21	3.05	1.28
Remedial classes	3.76	1.12	3.68	1.15	3.47	1.22
Enrichment for gifted students	2.87	1.32	2.74	1.35	2.58	1.39

Note. Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree.

Only 45.2% of principals and 41.2% of teachers reported providing different learning materials for students of varying abilities. Classroom observations found evidence of differentiated materials in only 28.6% of lessons. Remedial classes were the most commonly implemented differentiation strategy, with 62.3% of principals and 59.6% of teachers reporting regular remedial programs. However, enrichment activities for gifted students were much less common, reported by only 34.2% of principals and 30.7% of teachers.

4.5 Regional Variations

Significant variations in policy implementation and pedagogical adaptation were observed across the four counties. Table 5 presents the comparative analysis of key indicators across counties.

Table 5: Regional Variations in Policy Implementation and Classroom Practice

Indicator	Kakamega	Bungoma	Busia	Vihiga	Regional Average
Policy awareness and understanding	3.85 (0.89)	3.72 (0.93)	3.41 (1.06)	3.54 (1.02)	3.63 (0.97)
Teaching approach adaptation	3.92 (0.87)	3.78 (0.91)	3.53 (1.03)	3.65 (0.97)	3.72 (0.94)
Classroom management adaptation	3.84 (0.90)	3.73 (0.94)	3.48 (1.07)	3.62 (0.98)	3.67 (0.97)
Differentiated instruction implementation	3.47 (1.12)	3.29 (1.18)	2.92 (1.25)	3.15 (1.21)	3.21 (1.19)
Average class size	63.7 (8.3)	59.4 (7.8)	67.2 (9.1)	58.3 (7.5)	62.2 (8.4)

Note. Values represent mean scores on a 5-point scale (1 = Very Low, 5 = Very High) with standard deviations in parentheses. Class size represents actual number of students.

Kakamega County demonstrated the highest ratings across most indicators, while Busia County showed the lowest performance. Resource allocation differences explained much of this variation, with Kakamega allocating 26.8% of its education budget to transition policy implementation compared to Busia's 19.7%. This resource disparity correlated strongly with implementation effectiveness ratings ($r = .72$, $p < .001$).

Classroom observations revealed that 78.9% of lessons in Kakamega showed significant adaptations to larger class sizes, compared to 53.8% in Busia. Similarly, differentiated instruction was observed in 42.1% of lessons in Kakamega compared to 23.1% in Busia.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that the objectives of Kenya's one hundred percent transition policy have significantly influenced classroom instructional practices in public day secondary schools, though not always in pedagogically desirable ways. While the policy has successfully achieved its primary objective of increasing access to secondary education, its implementation has created substantial challenges for teaching and learning quality.

The hierarchical pattern of policy awareness and understanding, with diminishing comprehension from principals to teachers to students, reflects the predominantly top-down approach to policy communication. This pattern has limited stakeholder buy-in and understanding of the policy's pedagogical implications, potentially reducing implementation effectiveness.

The significant shift toward teacher-centered approaches, while pragmatic given resource constraints and increased class sizes, contradicts contemporary educational best practices and Kenya's curriculum reform objectives emphasizing learner-centered instruction. The reduction in practical activities, particularly in science subjects, threatens the development of critical skills and competencies necessary for Kenya's development aspirations.

The limited implementation of differentiated instruction despite increased student diversity highlights a fundamental tension between policy objectives and pedagogical reality. The policy's success in increasing access has created more diverse classrooms precisely when teachers' capacity to address this diversity has been constrained by resource limitations and large class sizes.

Regional variations in implementation effectiveness demonstrate that policy impact is significantly mediated by local contextual factors, particularly resource availability and stakeholder engagement quality. These variations suggest that uniform policy implementation approaches may be less effective

than differentiated strategies that account for regional capacities and constraints.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on these findings, several recommendations emerge for policy makers and education stakeholders:

i. Develop comprehensive stakeholder engagement strategies that ensure all levels of the educational hierarchy understand both the administrative and pedagogical implications of transition policies. This should include specific guidance on maintaining teaching quality during enrollment expansion.
ii. Implement structured professional development programs specifically focused on teaching large, diverse classes. Priority should be given to differentiated instruction techniques, classroom management strategies for large groups, and assessment approaches that maintain quality while managing increased workloads.
iii. Revise resource allocation frameworks to address both infrastructure and pedagogical needs. While physical expansion is necessary, corresponding investments in teaching materials, teacher preparation, and quality assurance are essential for maintaining educational standards.

REFERENCES

[1] Blatchford, P., Russell, A., & Webster, R. (2016). Reassessing the impact of teaching assistants: How research challenges practice and policy. Routledge.
[2] Kimani, P., & Mwangi, J. (2018). Inclusive education practices in Kenyan secondary schools. African Journal of Education Research, 15(3), 78-94.
[3] Ministry of Education. (2018). Circular on 100% transition from primary to secondary education. Government Printer.
[4] Mulongo, G. (2019). Classroom management challenges in urban Kenyan schools. Educational Management Quarterly, 12(4), 156-171.
[5] Republic of Kenya. (2020). Basic Education Statistical Booklet. Ministry of Education.
[6] Tomlinson, C. A., & Moon, T. R. (2018). Assessment and student success in a differentiated classroom. ASCD.
[7] Wanjohi, M., Kariuki, P., & Murage, L. (2021). Differentiated instruction in Kenyan secondary schools: Challenges and opportunities. East African Education Review, 8(2), 45-62.