

**A COMPARATIVE STUDY ON FACTORS INHIBITING TRANSITION RATES FROM  
PRIMARY TO SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN KAKAMEGA EAST  
AND KAKAMEGA SOUTH SUB-COUNTIES OF KAKAMEGA  
COUNTY, KENYA.**

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**Abstract**

*The Kenyan government introduced Free Primary Education (FPE) in 2003 as a cost reduction strategy geared towards increasing access to basic education for its citizens as well as improving transition rates from primary school to secondary school levels. While the national average transition rate was 70.8 percent between 2009 and 2011, the average transition rates in Kakamega East sub-county was 22.9 percent and 31.7 percent in Kakamega South sub-county. The low transition figures in the two counties influenced the study's need to comparatively examine the factors that contributed to the situation. A descriptive survey research design was used. The sample comprised of 17 primary schools in Kakamega South, 20 primary schools in Kakamega East and 30 households drawn from the two sub-counties. The study respondents were 37 head teachers, 37 teachers, 30 parents and 30 pupils who had dropped out at the primary school level. The data collection instruments employed in the study were: a questionnaire, an interview schedule and a document analysis guide. The study identified the four major obstacles inhibiting transition rates from primary to secondary school in the two sub-counties as: inadequate physical facilities; inadequate teachers; socio-economic factors; and, inadequate parent-teacher consultation. In comparison, the transition rates were lower in Kakamega South sub-county compared to Kakamega East sub-county. The study recommends enhanced partnerships between the government of Kenya and the local communities in order to mobilize resources that would promote transition rates in the two sub-counties.*

(239 words)

*Key words:* Low Transition Rates, Primary to Secondary schools, Kakamega East Sub-county and Kakamega South Sub-county.

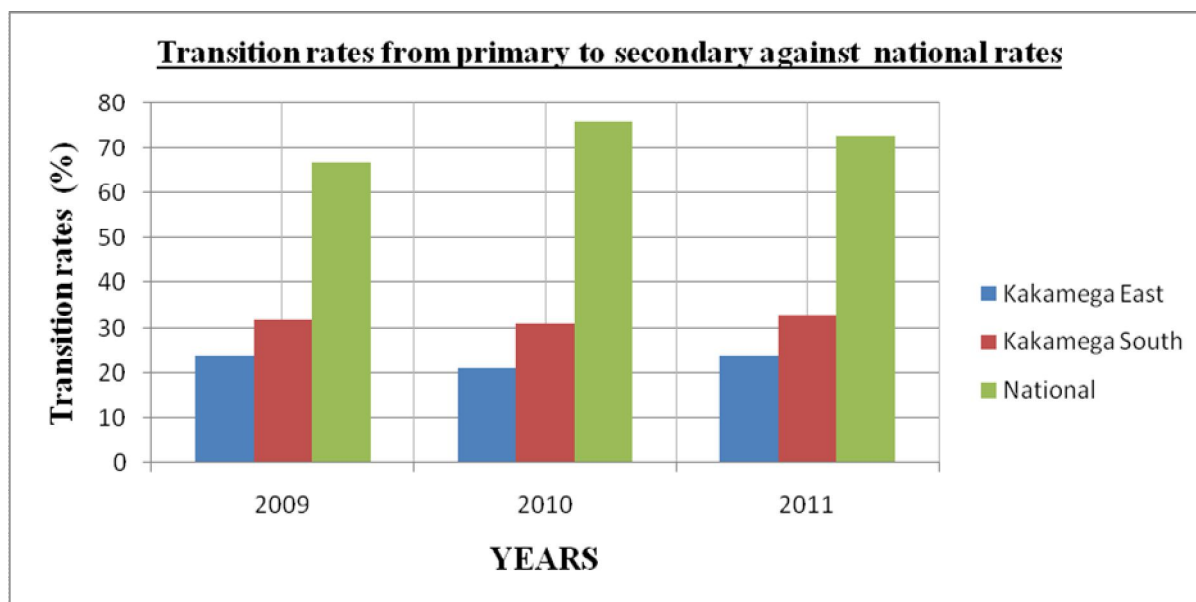
## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background to the study

Improving transition rates from primary school level to secondary school level remains a worldwide concern. Huebler (2007) observed that, 83.8 percent of children worldwide attend primary school, but the rate drops to 59.3 percent for secondary school. He further observed that, comparison of transition rates between East and Southern Africa and West and Central Africa shows 67.1 percent against 52.4 percent respectively. This contrasts sharply with 98 percent in the industrialized countries and 85 percent worldwide. Kirungi, (2006) observes that, failure to absorb the growing number of primary school leavers will undermine the attainment of Universal Primary Education (UPE) goal which is key to eliminating poverty by empowering all towards economic efficiency.

In 2003, the government of Kenya implemented the Free Primary Education (FPE) policy which aimed at improving access to and quality of education at primary school level (Republic of Kenya, 2004). The resultant quantitative expansion of education escalated the cost of education and training to the government. The Kenya's 9th National Development Plan identified factors that render the education system inefficient and translate to wastage of resources as: dropout in school; low transition rates from primary to secondary school level; over centralized school curriculum; and, unduly lengthy completion periods in higher education (Republic of Kenya, 1999).

A study to investigate ethnic inequality in education in Kenya by Always and Schech (2004) established that, educational inequalities exist among different ethnic groups. The indicators of this inequality include: variations in Gross Enrolment Ratios (GER), the number of schools and the number of qualified teachers. These are not only evident on a national scale but are also prevalent in each of the forty-seven counties in the Kenya and its forty-two distinct ethnic communities. Owing to diversity in each of the ethnic communities, the inequalities manifest themselves in specific distinct ways. This study sought to compare the manifestation of these inequalities in two sub-counties in Kenya namely, Kakamega East and Kakamega South. The two sub-counties differ significantly owing to the fact that, the former has an urban orientation while the later is in a rural setting. Comparative data on the transition rates between the two sub-counties and the national transition rates (Fig. 1.1) shows a very high wastage rate hence making the current study timely and necessary.



**Figure 1.1: Transition rates from primary to secondary against national rates**

(Source: MoE 2012, DEO Kakamega South Sub-county & DEO Kakamega East Sub-county, 2012).

## 1.2 Statement of the problem

Between 2009 and 2011, the transition rates for pupils from primary to secondary schools in Kakamega East and Kakamega South sub-counties averaged at 22.9% and 31.7% respectively (Fig. 1.1). These rates are quite low in comparison with the national average of 70.8 percent over the same period. Despite the fact that, the government of Kenya introduced FPE in 2003 and subsidized day secondary education Free Secondary Education (FSE) in 2008, the transition rates from primary to secondary schools in Kakamega East and Kakamega South remain low.

Comparing the factors that contribute to continued low transition rate in the two sub-counties was core to this study. To realize this goal, a descriptive survey to identify the causes of continued low transition rates was necessary. The information obtained would be utilized to suggest guidelines to design intervention mechanisms to mitigate the situation towards attaining the national EFA goal.

## 1.3 Objective of the Study

The objective of this study was to comparatively assess factors that contributed to low transition rates from primary school to secondary school in Kakamega East and Kakamega South sub-counties in the period between 2009 to 2011.

## 2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Before January, 2003, the number of Kenyan children estimated to be out of school was over three million (Republic of Kenya, 2004). Children's enjoyment of the right to education had been curtailed by the cost sharing policy in education which made schooling unaffordable to many families in Kenya (ANPPCAN, 2004). Implementation of the FPE Policy in Kenya led to an estimated 1.3 million children getting back to school. However, in spite of the commendable efforts

that Kenya has made towards this, achieving the EFA goal still remains a mirage (ANPPCAN, 2004). Out of the 587,961 candidates who sat for Kenya Certificate of Primary Examinations (KCPE) at the end of the year 2010, only 270,205 got chances to proceed to secondary schools. This means that the remaining 317,756 (over 54%) of the children who completed their primary school did not get opportunities to further their education. There is need to address the issue of transition with effective interventions that would cater for the over 300,000 children who are unable to proceed with further education (ANPPCAN, 2011). This study endeavored to make a contribution towards this goal.

Observations by (MoEST, 2003), show that, only 55 percent boys and 35 percent girls who enrolled in class one entered standard eight. Grade repetition due to academic failure, age inadequacy and absenteeism and lack of local educational opportunities could explain this scenario (UNESCO, 2001). Repetition has been cited as a major cause of school dropout (UNICEF, 1997). Njeru and Orodho (2003) avers that, repetition prolongs the learners' stay in school without necessarily increasing significantly the level of school achievement. Further, it tends to lower pupil' self esteem and damage personal relations (Ngau, 1991). This study sought to assess the influence of repetition on transition from primary to secondary school level.

Since 1971, the GoK has continued to establish policy intervention to improve transition rates. These include: a presidential decree which abolished tuition fees for sub-counties with unfavorable geographical conditions – Arid and Semi arid Land (ASAL) in 1973, leading to an increase in enrolment from the annual estimate of 400,000 to approximately 1,000,000 children (Sifuna, 2004). In 1978, the government officially abolished all forms of school levies in all public primary schools in the country. The launch of FPE in 2003 where school fees and other levies for tuition in primary school education were abolished increased enrolment in public primary schools to 9.4 million in 2010 (Department of Education, 2012).

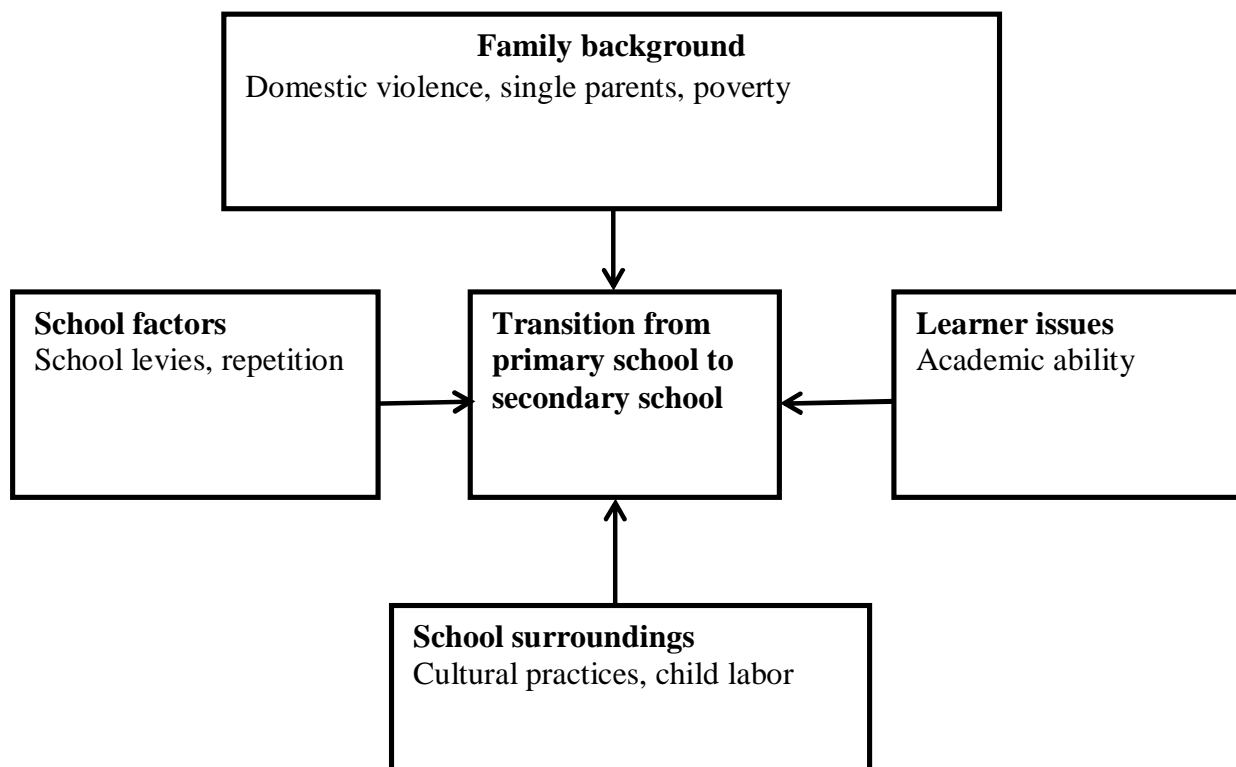
Mutahi (2004) cited the factors that contributed to low transition rates in Kenya as: inadequate capacity in secondary schools; reduced household capacity to cost-share at secondary school level; poverty; socio-cultural attitudes; and, the increase in the number of orphans resulting from the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Further, Sifuna (2004) noted that, in order to make sure that enrolment rates remained high, the government needed to address attrition rates and maintain proper records on retention. This was keen to establish the impact of governments' strategies for retention on the attrition rates.

Inadequate secondary school opportunities is a transition problem caused by FPE. The Kenya government has continually come up with measures to deal with the challenge. One key strategy is to expand basic education from 8-12 years in order to give an opportunity to every Kenyan child to attain a minimum of secondary school education (Republic of Kenya, 1999). Other tactics include: making a deliberate effort to control fee payment in secondary school education and fee ceiling recommendation; enhancing training opportunities in non-formal education and the informal sector training; eliminating school levies; and, outlawing repetition of grades (MoEST, 2012). In the face of these diverse strategies to improve transition rates from Primary to Secondary school, this study therefore sought to identify the causes of continued poor transition rates in Kakamega South and Kakamega East sub-counties.

## 2.1 Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks

The study was guided by the by Mace (1979) production function theory. The theory describes the relationship between outputs and inputs. In this context, education is viewed as a productive activity that combines various inputs (staff, materials and buildings) to realize intended outputs (graduates to secondary level). For primary schools, the major goal is to ensure that pupils complete primary schooling and transit to secondary schools. Therefore, the primary school plays a major role in determining the transition rate to secondary level. Primary schools accomplish their objectives when their pupils graduate and join secondary school.

In comparing the factors that contribute to low transition from primary to secondary schools in Kakamega East and Kakamega South sub-counties, the study assumed that: a family's economic status; education background of parents; and, family type and size are crucial determinants. Figure 2.1 represents the study's conceptualization on the interaction of these variables.



**Fig. 2.1: Conceptual framework (Source: Researcher 2012)**

The dependent variable was transition from primary to secondary schools, while independent variables were family (domestic violence single parents and poverty), school factors (school levies, repetition). The intervening variable was the community around the school (child labor, cultural practices).

## 3.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the descriptive survey design. According to Lockesh (1984), descriptive research studies are designed to obtain pertinent and precise information concerning the status of a phenomena and whenever possible, to draw valid general conclusions from the facts discovered. The study population was all the 76 primary schools in Kakamega East sub-county and the 84 in

Kakamega South sub-county. Non-probability random sampling was employed to select 20 schools in Kakamega East and 17 schools in Kakamega South. This was to ensure that the sample size for the study was proportional to the size of the sub-county. This formed a sample size of 26.4 percent. The study chose to select a sample higher than the recommended minimum of 10 percent (Gay, 1976) for descriptive studies in order to have a bigger sample for generalization purposes.

Purposive sampling was used to select all the head teachers and class eight teachers from the sampled schools for the study. Snowballing technique was used to identify households with children who dropped out after class eight. Teachers assisted to realize this. This data formed the sampling frame from where thirty household heads and their children who failed to join secondary school were randomly sampled for inclusion in the study. The study considered thirty respondents adequate in line with the assertions of Kiess and Bloomquist (1985) who aver that, the minimum number of subjects that allow for statistical data analysis is 30.

The study utilized a questionnaires, an interview schedule and a document analysis guide as the tools for data collection. The questionnaires were considered a suitable method for data collection because they allowed the researcher to reach a larger sample within limited time (Orodho, 2003). Interview schedules were considered appropriate because the sample to be interviewed was small and comprised of both literate and illiterate respondents. The guide also allowed for the researchers to probe so that they could get more information and clarifications from respondents: this could not have been possible using questionnaire (Kiess & Bloomquist, 1985).

A pilot study in two primary schools which were not included in the study helped to improve both validity and reliability of the instruments. Validity determines whether the research truly measures that which it was intended to measure (Hulley, 2007) while a reliable research instrument is one that yields consistent results each time it is applied (Kerlinger & Lee, 2000). The Split-Half technique of reliability testing was employed where the study instruments were divided into two halves and a correlation coefficient for the halves calculated. Through the use of Cronbach's Alpha, a reliability coefficient of 0.7 was accepted as recommended by Mugenda and Mugenda (1999). Data analysis was done qualitatively and descriptive tables were used to present data on frequencies and percentages.

### **3.1 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The findings are discussed under four sub-headings: adequacy of physical facilities: adequacy of teachers; reasons for drop-out and parent-teacher consultation.

#### **a) Adequacy of physical facilities**

The 37 headteachers were asked whether the physical facilities in their schools were adequate. Physical facilities include classrooms, offices, toilets, dormitories, libraries, playing fields and playground equipment, among others. The results are summarized in table 4.1.

**Table 4.1: Adequacy of physical facilities**

Kakamega South			Kakamega East		
Category	Frequency	Percentage	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	6	35	Yes	6	30
No	11	65	No	14	70
<b>Total</b>	17	100	<b>Total</b>	20	100

**Source: Researcher, 2012**

Table 4.1 shows that, 6 (35%) of the headteachers in Kakamega South stated that the physical facilities were sufficient while 11 (65%) felt that they were inadequate. In Kakamega East 6 (30%) of the head teachers felt that the physical facilities were adequate while 14 (70%) said the facilities were not sufficient to cater for all learners. This shows that, Kakamega East had a bigger problem with physical facilities compared to Kakamega South Sub-county. Kakamega South was thus likely to have a higher enrolment than Kakamega East. This could be due to better accessibility and proximity to Kakamega town which is the head quarters of Kakamega County. Physical facilities form part of a comfortable atmosphere for learning. Mutahi (2004) avers that, low levels of learning among children in developing countries can partly be attributed to poor or inadequate facilities of the schools. Ng'ethe (2004) observed that, adequate facilities are important to ensure that a child learns through concrete rather than abstract experiences. This study concurs with Sifuna (2004) who avers that, the government needs to consider issues of congestion in classrooms and text books in order to make the participation in FPE meaningful.

#### b) Teacher adequacy

Head teachers were asked whether their schools had sufficient number of teachers. Table 4.2 summarizes the data.

**Table 4.2: Adequacy of teachers in the two sub-counties**

Kakamega South			Kakamega East		
Category	Frequency	Percentage	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	7	41	Yes	9	45
No	10	59	No	11	55
<b>Total</b>	17	100	<b>Total</b>	20	100

**Source: Researcher 2012**

The findings in table 4.2 show that, 7 (41%) of the head teachers in Kakamega South said they had enough teachers while 10 (59%) felt that the number of teachers was insufficient. In Kakamega East 9 (45%) felt teachers were inadequate while 11 (55%) did indicate that the number of available teachers was not enough. Kakamega South thus experienced higher dissatisfaction.

From document analysis, the study established higher Pupil-Teacher Ratios (PTRs) in Kakamega East compared to Kakamega South. Given that Kakamega East has a more urban setting compared to Kakamega South, the findings concur with those of MoE & MoHEST (2012) which established that, schools within close proximity to towns have a higher PTRs than those far from towns. This is because towns tend to be densely populated while rural areas are sparsely populated. Improving the PTR in Kakamega East is important to ensure that the quality of education is not compromised.

### c) Reasons for dropping out of school

The pupils who had dropped out of school were asked for the reasons that led them to do so.

The results are summarized in table 4.3.

**Table 1.3: Causes of dropping out of school**

Kakamega South			Kakamega East		
Category		Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Family	Domestic violence	4	59	6	55
	Single parents	3		4	
	Poverty	3		1	
Community			29		30
	Child labor	2		3	
	Cultural practices	3		2	
School issues	School levies	1	12	3	15
	Repetition	1		1	
<b>Total</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>
				<b>20</b>	<b>100</b>

#### Source: Researcher 2012

In Kakamega South, 4 (24%) of the pupils cited domestic violence while Kakamega East and had 6 (30%). Therefore, domestic violence caused more drop outs in Kakamega East. Interviews revealed the reasons for this violence as rooted in drugs abuse: *cannabis sativa* and illicit brews. Both drugs are stimulants and lead to aggressiveness and violent behavior especially among the men. Similarly, single parenthood caused more drop outs in Kakamega East 4 (20%) against 3 (18%) in Kakamega South. The higher percentage in Kakamega East was due to proximity to many recreational amenities especially along the Kakamega –Kisumu road. This led to high rates of promiscuous behavior and early pregnancies. Comparison of poverty rates in the two sub-counties showed that Kakamega East had a lower poverty rate at 1 (5%) against Kakamega South's 3 (18%). An assessment of the economic activities in the two counties showed prevalence of activities like: tea farming (Nyayo tea Zone); and charcoal burning business along the Kakamega Forest.

On child labor, Kakamega East had higher percentage 3 (20%) than Kakamega South 2 (12%). From interviews, the higher percentage in Kakamega East was attributed to pupils dropping out of school to engage in income generating activities like: hawking, illegal charcoal business, *boda boda* (motorcycle riding) business and employment as house helps due to proximity to Kakamega town.

On cultural practices, Kakamega South had more 3 (18%) against 2 (10%) in Kakamega East. Cultural practices like bull fighting and consumption of local illicit brew (*busaa*) were more rampant in Kakamega South due to encouragement, influence and participation by elected political leaders. The politicians use the practices as campaign mobilization tools. These cultural practices were less prevalent in Kakamega East owing to the fact that its population is more cosmopolitan due to closer proximity to Kakamega town in comparison with Kakamega South.

Mutahi (2004) identified reduced household capacity to cost-share at secondary school level, poverty, social-culture attitudes and the increase in the number of orphans resulting from HIV/AIDS pandemic as factors responsible for low transition. The current study findings support these



sentiments given that some interviewed pupils in the two sub-counties indicated that they had dropped out of school to engage in child labour to support their siblings after they were orphaned due to HIV/AIDS pandemic. The cultural practices like bull fighting and taking of illicit brews need to be discouraged with appropriate legislation in order to ensure that pupils of school going age can remain in school and transit from one level to the next.

On the aspect of dropping out because of inability to pay school levies, Kakamega East had a higher percentage of drop outs at 3 (15%) while Kakamega South had 1 (6%). The higher percentage in Kakamega East could be attributed to higher enrolments in the sub-county. This resulted in more school infrastructure needs in form of classrooms, toilets and desks among others compared to Kakamega South where enrolment was lower. In the two sub-counties repetition levels were almost the same (one). Both dropouts said they left school because they were told to repeat because of poor academic performance. This is a common practice in many schools in Kenya where poor academic achievers are considered likely to lower the mean score in national examinations. Further, Ngau (1991) observed that, repetition tends to lower pupil' self esteem and damages personal relations. Even UNICEF (2001) cited it as a major cause of school dropout. The study supports the sentiments of Theuri (2004) who posits that, schools need to find more creative strategies to deal with low academic achievers because repeating prolongs the learners' stay in school without necessarily increasing significantly the level of school achievement on the amount learnt by the repeaters.

#### d) Parents' consultation with teachers on academic progress of learners

Class teachers were asked about the frequency of consultations with parents on their children's academic progress. The responses were rated on a four point scale. The data is summarized in Table 4.4.

**Table 4.4: Frequency of parents' consultation with teachers**

Kakamega South			Kakamega East		
Category	Frequency	Percentage	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Often	3	18	Often	5	25
Sometimes	8	47	Sometimes	11	55
Rarely	4	24	Rarely	3	15
Never	2	12	Never	1	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source: Researcher 2012**

The results show that parents were not very keen to consult on their children's academic progress. The largest number of teachers 8 (47%) and 11 (55%) in Kakamega South and Kakamega East appear to have observed inconsistent commitment by parents. Most only consulted sometimes. It was alarming to observe that 2 (12%) of the class teachers stated that parents never visited school in Kakamega South against 1 (5%) in Kakamega East. Interviews with parents of the pupils who dropped out showed that their failure to visit school could be attributed to ignorance as a result of their below average academic levels of education, and fear of being asked for school levies. A quest to compare the academic level of parents on their keenness to consult on their children's academic progress showed that, those who consulted often had at least form four level education while those who never consulted had barely made it past lower primary (standard three).

Frequent consultation between the parents and teachers has been said to enhance students' commitment towards their academic achievement. The joint effort between teachers in school and parents at home can help correct ill behavior that pupils may have acquired through peer influence. From interviews with teachers, manifestations of inadequate parental support took various forms including: refusal to pay fees; apathy among parents exhibited via low turnout in meetings called to discuss the welfare of their children; refusal to attend meetings; shifting parental responsibilities to teachers; failure to provide children with personal effects; and, leaving the students under care of grandparents among others. Further, from interviews, teachers evaluated parents attitude towards school visits as geared towards discussing school levies; a task the parents considered quite unpleasant because it put further financial strain on them. Parents thus appear not keen to support their children in pursuit of education; the government's strategies to keep children in school have not helped lift the burden of financing either.

The results suggest the need for concerted efforts to mitigate against the vice of low transition. This is because, strategies like presidential decrees to abolish tuition fees have not helped (Sifuna, 2004). Further, they bear credence to the observations of ANPPCAN (2004) that cost sharing policy in education continues to make schooling unaffordable to many families in Kenya. This is ironical considering that the FPE strategy was supposed to improve access and retention by reducing the cost of education (Government of Kenya, 2004).

## 5.1 Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study the following conclusions were made: First, with regard to adequacy of physical facilities, both sub-counties experienced shortages although Kakamega East experienced higher shortage of physical facilities than Kakamega South. Inadequate facilities have the potential to make schools not absorb the growing number of primary school leavers hence undermining the attainment of UPE goal (Kirungi, 2006). There is need to correct this state of affairs.

Second, with reference to the aspect of teachers' adequacy, both sub-counties need more teachers. Kakamega East experienced a bigger shortage than Kakamega South due to higher enrolment owing to its proximity to the Kakamega County headquarters. This inadequacy is a factor that will continue to inhibit transition from primary to secondary schools unless it is corrected (Mutahi, 2004).

Third, on causes of school drop out; domestic violence was the biggest cause in both sub-counties followed by single parenthood and child labor. The three issues were more manifest in Kakamega East. Secondary school levies also inhibited transition from primary school to secondary school. This trend needs to be checked because it is contributing to the two counties not being able to contribute to improving the transition rates in East and Southern Africa which have stagnated at 67.1 percent against the global rate of 85 percent (Huebler, 2007).

Forth, teacher-parent consultations in both sub-counties were irregular though Kakamega East parents consulted better than those in Kakamega South. This was partly attributed to the fact that the parents in Kakamega East had a higher level of education than those in Kakamega South. A parents' level of education thus directly influences their willingness to take an interest in the education of their children. This study therefore concludes that, given that education is one of the most powerful

instruments for reducing poverty and inequality by laying a foundation for sustained economic growth (World Bank, 1998); there is need to address the challenges facing the two sub-counties in order to improve transition rates towards realization of the EFA goal in Kenya.

## **5.2 Recommendations**

Based on the findings, analysis, discussions and conclusions the study made the following recommendations for the purpose of improving the transitional rates from primary school to secondary school in the two sub-counties:

Local partnerships and local resource mobilization should be enhanced for the purposes of improving the existing school infrastructure and construction of appropriate facilities. Such partnerships should include local communities, county government organs, civil society, private sector and development partners.

On teacher shortage, the county government of Kakamega should consider making Kakamega South more accessible through building more access road and improve social amenities such as housing. Further, the national government should improve the pupil-teacher ratio in both sub-counties in order to improve the quality of education.

There is need for massive sensitization campaigns against domestic violence, retrogressive cultural practices, child labor, drug and alcohol abuse.

The government should provide adequate funding in primary schools in order to reduce on the amount of school levies. Further, government should enforce strict adherence to the school fees guidelines it sets in secondary schools as well as improving efficiency in the bursary schemes.

Parent-teacher consultation should be enhanced. Schools should consider pre-planned regular consultation framework of at least once a month. The plan should be developed and announced to parents as part of strategic planning at the beginning of the year. Further, consultation time should be divorced from discussion of school levies. Further, illiterate and semi-literate adults should be sensitized on the need to attend adult basic education classes in order to appreciate the value of education and become more supportive to their children.

## **5.3 Suggestions for Further Research**

A further study is necessary on community based, community driven and community monitored mitigation measures against domestic violence. This is because, domestic violence accounted for a bigger percentage of school dropout cases in both sub-counties. This was a major impediment to transition from primary to secondary school.

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