



Received: 14 December 2022  
Accepted: 09 August 2023

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Reviewing editor:  
Solomon Arulraj David,  
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## STUDENT LEARNING, CHILDHOOD & VOICES | REVIEW ARTICLE

# Comparing Kenya and Hungary preschool to school transitions within the theoretical perspectives of transition

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**Abstract:** Despite progress in enrolment in most countries, preschoolers still face challenges before joining grade one prompting a critical understanding of child experiences during the preschool-to-school transition. This paper compares preschool-to-school transition characteristics in Kenya and Hungary based on six recurrent concepts in the theories of preschool-to-school transition: *relationships, pedagogy, readiness, transition activities, power, and policy* proposed by Boyle and colleagues in 2018. We followed narrative research to review the literature published in Google Scholar, ERIC, APA Info, Scopus, Science Direct, and Web of Science Databases from 2000 to 2022 based on the six themes. Despite the heavy emphasis on reducing the risk, the children undergo during the transition to school, there is more focus on the child than other stakeholders in preschool to school transition; family, peers, and community. Further, there is more discontinuity regarding relationships, pedagogy, readiness, and transition activities in Kenya than in Hungary. Therefore, children in Kenya, face more risks than in Hungary during the transition to school.

**Subjects:** Theory of Education; Childhood; Classroom Practice; Early Years; Education Policy & Politics; International & Comparative Education; Multicultural Education; Primary/Elementary Education

**Keywords:** Boyle's framework; comparative analysis; preschool to school transition; school readiness; preschool education

### 1. Introduction

Current worldwide attention has been directed to the early-year challenges of preschool-to-school transition of typically developing children (Docket & Perry, 2014; OECD, 2017; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000) as opposed to the previous focus on students with disabilities (Education Commission of the States, 2014). This emphasis is due to the fade out of the gains achieved during preschool as children move into schools (Bierman et al., 2017; Duncan & Magnuson, 2013). There is also emerging evidence that a positive start to school influences successful educational and social experience, development, and opportunities for later life (Barrett et al., 2017; Józsa, 2016; Russo et al., 2019). Additionally, if school and home experiences are similar, the transition will be more comfortable creating a significant opportunity for teachers, parents, and children (Hanson et al., 2011; Hugo et al., 2018). Finally, many children from low socioeconomic families are poorly prepared to transition to formal school, which is evident in low academic achievement



(Rathbun et al., 2004). Despite the awareness of the significance of early childhood education's impacts on academic achievement and success in life, studies still indicate that kindergarten teachers' reports show that a third of children entering school are not ready (Ackerman & Barnett, 2005). Surprisingly, researchers have not reached a consensus on how intervention practices can be implemented due to policy challenges, the contextual nature of different settings, or the ecological nature of transition practices (Ferretti & Bub, 2017). In addition, there is a dearth of research, programs, policies, and services for young children, especially in Low and Middle-income Countries (LMICs), especially in sub-Saharan Africa (Black et al., 2017; Piper et al., 2018a). The majority of transition studies around the globe are dominated by Europe, Australia, and the US (OECD, 2011). The lack of transition studies in LMICs increases the risk of poor school transition in those countries due to inadequate research evidence. We chose to focus on Kenya as one of the countries from sub-Saharan Africa and Hungary from Europe. Both Kenya and Hungary also have devolved Early Childhood Education (ECE) into Counties or Municipalities. Additionally, Hungary's ECE is unique and has advanced childcare and education for learners aged 3–6 years which is comparable to Norway, Finland, and Germany (Amukune & Józsa, 2021; OECD, 2004; Peterson et al., 2016). Therefore, the cross-national comparison between Kenya and Hungary has the potential of providing an avenue to investigate the effects of curriculum, education structure, culture, family structure, government organization, social values, and norms on the preschool education system among the regions being compared (Schirmbeck et al., 2021).

## 2. Theoretical perspectives of preschool-to-school transition

Due to the different range of challenges that face the child during school transition, several theories from different fields have been advanced to help teachers and other stakeholders to enhance preschool-to-school transition. Taken together, the theories of transition are grouped as critical, developmental, sociocultural, and ecological. According to Boyle et al. (2018), across these four theoretical perspectives of transition, six recurrent concepts emerge; relationships, pedagogy, readiness, transition activities, power, and policy. Readiness is a multifaceted concept used differently in the literature that refers to the formal and informal assessment of the child during preparation for schooling (McTurk et al., 2008; Piper et al., 2018a). For example, according to Boyle's multi-perspective view, readiness assessment is individualistic in developmental theory, collective in ecological, converged in socio-cultural, and contested in critical theory. Relationships feature commonly in ecological transition studies, as interactions between the child, family, peers, and surrounding contexts are either unidirectional, bidirectional, or absent. Close to relationships are transition activities which are actions done by stakeholders to induct the child, family, and other stakeholders into the school. In schools, various pedagogical activities are implemented including curriculum, decision-making, teaching and learning, and nurturing child-teacher relationships. For this study, power refers to the ability to control resources, activities, and people or authority to initiate consensual collaborations with others during the transition to school (Boyle et al., 2018). Policies, on the other hand, refers to "both text and action, words and deeds, it is what is enacted as well as what is intended" (Ball, 1994, p. 10). Policies are extremely important in guiding what collaborators in transition should do or not.

To judge whether the transition to school will pose some challenges to the child, it is vital to determine the possible risks to a smooth transition due to the nature of (dis)continuity between preschool and school (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000). This involves an assessment of what activities remained constant, improved, or deteriorated. Several studies have reported the fade out of the gains achieved in preschool as children advance to school (e.g. Bierman et al., 2017; Duncan & Magnuson, 2013). Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta (2000) developed the Ecological and Dynamic Model of Transition based on the work of Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1998), Pianta & Walsh, (1998), and Sameroff, (1995). This is one of the models that is highly cited in preschool-to-school transition studies. The model posits that the child's transition to Kindergarten is influenced by many changing interactions and relationships over time which could either be direct, indirect, or dynamic effects. Child effects include the characteristics of the learner that are important in predicting school adjustments such as language, cognitive, gender, poverty status and

temperament. Direct effects consider both child-related elements and their relationship to the surrounding context such as schools, peers, family and neighbourhood regarding a child's adjustment to school. Indirect effects encompass both direct and indirect interaction of the child factors (School, peer, neighbourhood) and its social networks.

According to Boyle's framework, relationships during transition can be analyzed theoretically based on their nature, characteristics, and conditions sustaining these relationships. Such relationships also connect with transition activities. Whether the activities are one-off, continuous, short term or long-term matters in enhancing transition. Some activities even extend deep into the school calendar. The more continuous they are such that there is no discontinuity the better. Regarding school readiness, Boyle's framework identified three themes that are critical in evaluating its appropriateness during the transition to school. They include assessment procedures either child-based or also including other stakeholders such as parents and enhancement programs after assessment. If the right assessments were done they can also support pedagogy in the school. The pedagogy approaches from preschool to school should be seamless, advocate for change in school and develop peer relationships among children. Both preschool and school teachers should work together towards a shared understanding and close the gap between the two systems. It is also prudent for institutions to draft policies that will stipulate what pedagogies should be adopted. Within those policies, powers should be equally distributed in similar contexts, especially in favour of schools and children.

### 3. Preschool education system in Kenya and Hungary

Similar to Kenya's, the Hungarian ECE system is divided by age. Children below three years and up to 6 or 7 years join early childhood centres and kindergarten (preschool) in Hungary and 3 to 5 in Kenya (Republic of Kenya, 2017b; The Basic Law of Hungary, 2011). Just like in Kenya, the National Government controls the curriculum, although in Hungary some supplements to the National Core program can be added locally (Hungarian Government, 2012; Republic of Kenya, 2017a). Currently, Kenya is implementing the new Competency Based Curriculum since 2018 (CBC; Republic of Kenya, 2017a). The aim of ECE in Hungary and Kenya is to promote the holistic development of the child, although Hungary has a special focus on personality development (Government Decree, 363/2012; Republic of Kenya, 2017b). The average time spent in a kindergarten in Hungary is 3.3 years (Józsa et al., 2018) compared to Kenya's 2.2. In addition, Hungary has a low repetition rate of 1.69% compared to Kenya's of 3.64% (UIS Statistics, 2022). As opposed to Kenya, most of the students, up to 91%, in Hungary attend public schools above the OECD average of 61% (OECD, 2015).

### 4. Study focus

The study sought to establish what literature reveals regarding similarities and differences in preschool-to-school transition in Kenya and Hungary based on the six recurrent concepts: *relationships, pedagogy, readiness, transition activities, power and policy* (Boyle et al., 2018). These six recurrent concepts formed the themes for the study. Throughout this review of the literature, we based our focus on the following research questions addressing the minimization of risks that children undergo during preschool to school transition in Kenya and Hungary:

- (i) What is the status regarding the recurrent themes: *relationships, pedagogy, readiness, transition activities, power, and policy* in Kenya and Hungary during the preschool-to-school transition period?
- (ii) What aspects of the six recurrent concepts continued, remained constant, or changed from preschool to grade one in Kenya and Hungary?
- (iii) Are there similarities and differences between Kenya and Hungary regarding the six recurrent concepts?

### 5. Methodology

To appraise the various preschool-to-school transition studies in Kenya and Hungary we adopted the narrative research (Rozas & Klein, 2010). We conducted a review of literature from 2000 to

2022 on the transition to school. First, we searched if there are other literature reviews on the topic of transition to school in Kenya and Hungary in the following databases in English; Google Scholar, ERIC, APA Info, Scopus, Science Direct, and Web of Science Databases. To capture country-specific databases we further explored university repositories in Kenya and Hungary starting from February to August 2022. Due to the paucity of studies on this topic, we, therefore, extended the focus to non-database materials belonging to ministries and government departments that addressed preschool-to-school transition using the key terms “preschool to school transition” “preschool transition” “preschool education” and “early childhood” in Kenya and Hungary in the same databases. Papers without these key terms were eliminated. From the identified literature we used the reference list to snowball other closely related studies in the respective countries (Soni et al., 2022). For all articles identified, we did a staged review by first scrutinizing the abstract, later followed by a detailed review of selected articles (Torraco, 2005).

## 6. Analytic plan

We developed a protocol that allowed for thematic analysis based on the six recurrent concepts in Kenya and Hungary (Patton, 2002). Before conducting a thorough search based on the key terms, as the first phase, we searched for related studies that reviewed preschool-to-school transition in Kenya and Hungary based on the six recurrent themes. In the second phase of coding, we selected themes that were unique in each country based on the key terms, “preschool to school transition,” “preschool transition,” “preschool education,” and “early childhood.” In the third phase, we evaluated which aspects of the six recurrent themes proposed by Boyle et al. (2018) continued, remained constant, or changed (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000) from preschool to grade one within the respective countries. This allowed the researchers to effectively analyze the possible risks due to (dis)continuity from preschool to school. We later developed a text-based narrative by establishing related themes across the two countries (Rozas & Klein, 2010). Finally, we identified any similarities and differences between Kenya and Hungary based on the recurrent concepts.

## 7. Findings

### 7.1. Related studies

We searched the databases for preschool-to-school review studies that have compared Kenya and Hungary on preschool-to-school transition or summarised transition based on the six recurrent themes. We found one study in Kenya, Kioko and Thiunguri (2016), that gave a critical analysis of the transition to school in Kenya (Table 1). However, this study is different from the current one because Kioko and his colleague were not guided by any framework and they did not compare Kenya with any country. Three studies compared preschool education in Hungary and other countries such as the US (Józsa et al., 2018), England and Kazakhstan (Murray et al., 2018), and Slovakia (Podráczy et al., 2022). These reviews did not address the specific themes of transition nor their change from preschool to grade one. In total eight studies ( $n = 8$ ) reviewed literature on the topic of transition or early childhood studies in Kenya and Hungary. In the first phase of coding, we identified literature from the respective databases based on the key terms, “preschool to school transition” “preschool transition” “preschool education” and “early childhood” from both countries as shown in Table 1. In total, 54 studies were reviewed, Preschool transition had the highest number of studies ( $n = 12$ ) and preschool-to-school transition the least ( $n = 4$ ) (Table 1).

#### 7.1.1. Status of recurrent themes of transition in Kenya and Hungary

To answer the first research question, the studies in Table 1 were coded into six recurrent concepts; relationships ( $n = 11$ ), readiness ( $n = 22$ ), pedagogy ( $n = 12$ ), transition activities ( $n = 7$ ), policy (8) and power ( $n = 5$ ) in both countries as shown in Table 2. The theme of school readiness attracted the highest number of studies in both Kenya ( $n = 9$ ) and Hungary ( $n = 13$ ).

## 8. Relationships

Five studies ( $n = 5$ ) in Kenya addressed relationships at preschool and school (Table 2). Kenya has 45 different tribes with diverse cultures that place the child at the centre of family relationships at

**Table 1. Studies of preschool-to-school transition in Kenya and Hungary**

Keywords	Kenya	Hungary	No. of studies
Review studies on Preschool to school transition or comparison with other countries	Kioko and Thiunguri (2016)	Peterson et al. (2016), Campbell-Barr et al. (2015), Józsa et al. (2018), Murray et al. (2018), Podráczky et al., (2022)	6
Preschool-to-school transition	Mureithi (2013), Amukune (2021)	Csapó (2007), Nagy et al. (2016)	4
Preschool Transition	Jemutai (2018), Mwoma (2019), Amukune et al. (2023), Piper et al. (2018a), Onyango and Gakii (2017), Njenga and Kabiru (2001), Matengo (2016), Njuguna, (2011)	Koles et al. (2013), OECD (2004), Gandotra et al. (2021), Kassai et al. (2019), Brayfield and Korintus (2011)	12
Preschool education	Bonface et al. (2015), Adhiambo (2019), Kimaiyo et al. (2021), Ong'ayi et al. (2020), Muasya (2018), Waithaka (2017), Mwoma (2017), KICD (2017), KICD (2018), Piper et al. (2018a), Ng'asike, (2014)	Böddi and Serfőző (2020); Silova (2010), Metaferia et al. (2021), Self-Assessment Manual (2021), Józsa et al., (2017), National Public Education, Government Decree, (2021)	17
Early childhood	Mbugua (2004), Mutindi et al. (2016), Wadende et al. (2016), Mbugua (2004), Kariuki (2002), Gatumu and Kathuri (2018), Wangila (2017), Koech et al. (2016), Republic of Kenya (2017b)	Korintus (2008); Szent Galy and Kiss (2022), Brayfield and Korintus (2011), Nagy et al. (2015), Amukune et al. (2023), Eurydice., (2019)	15
Total number of studies			54

home and with extended family. This family-child bond is strong in preschool when children are young and loosen as children progress in school (Kioko & Thiunguri, 2016). However, there are instances where parents are not aware of their role in stimulating children to participate in school activities; instead, they relegate this to teachers worsening parent-teacher partnerships (Koech 2014). Additionally, children speak the local dialect at home and Swahili or English at school and in public places, which undermines peer and teacher-child relationships (Mwoma, 2017). To enhance peer relationships majority of preschools facilitate free choice activities meant to encourage children to play together in their favourite games with the preferred materials and peers (Mureithi, 2013). In grade one, peer relationships improve for schools where learners moved together to the new school and worsen especially for children who relocated to a new school. In addition, children get a new teacher worsening the previous ties. Since there is no more use of local languages used at home and preschool, the grade-one peer-to-peer and child-to-teacher relationship deteriorates especially in rural areas (Njuguna, 2011). In cities, a majority have adopted Western culture and they mostly use English and Swahili both at home and in preschool thus enhancing preschool and school relationships with peers and teachers (Mbugua, 2004).

In Hungary ( $n = 6$ ), the role of the family and child relationship is significant. A parent who stays at home to ensure the child attends compulsory schooling is compensated (Korintus, 2008). Besides, the Government decree 255/2009 (XI.20) reinforces children's successful education within the families, kindergarten, and schools. Within each neighbourhood, the kindergarten maintains contacts with organizations, municipalities, and other relevant bodies thus strengthening the

**Table 2. Studies organised based on recurrent concepts in Kenya and Hungary**

<b>Recurrent Concepts</b>	<b>Kenya</b>	<b>No of studies</b>	<b>Hungary</b>	<b>Number of studies</b>	<b>No of studies</b>
Relationships	Kioko & Thiunguri (2016), Koech (2014), Mwoma (2017), Mureithi (2013), Njuguna, (2011),	5	Korintus (2008), Józsa et al. (2018), Murray et al. (2018), Metaferia et al. (2021), National Basic Programme for Kindergarten Education (2017)	5	10
Pedagogy	Wadende et al. (2016), Mwoma (2017), Republic of Kenya (2017a), KICD (2017), KICD (2018)	5	Böddi and Serfözö (2020), Murray et al. (2018), Hungarian Government (2012), OECD (2004), Eurydice., (2019); Self-Assessment Manual (2021),	5	10
Readiness	Jemutai (2018), Mureithi (2013), Mwoma (2019), Republic of Kenya (2019); Njuguna, 2011	5	Nagy (1976), Csapó (2007), National Basic Programme for Kindergarten Education (2017), Józsa, (2014), Miskolcziné & Nagy, (2006, Nagy, (2009), Csapó et al. (2014), Csapó and Molnár (2019), Barrett et al. (2017), Amukune et al. (2022),	10	15
Transition activities	Republic of Kenya (2017a), Matengo (2016),	2	Korintus (2008), Józsa et al. (2018), Campbell-Barr et al. (2015), Bakonyi & Karczewicz, (2016), Murray et al. (2018),	5	7
Power	Piper et al. (2018a), Republic of Kenya (2017b), Education Act of (2013)	3	Szent-Galy & Kiss (2022), Nagy et al. (2015)	2	5

(Continued)



Recurrent Concepts	Kenya	No of studies	Hungary	Number of studies	No of studies
Policy	Basic Education Act of (2013), Ng'asike, (2014); Republic of Kenya (2017b), Wadende et al. (2016)	4	National Public Education, Government Decree, (2021), Murray et al. (2018)	2	6
Total					53

relationships (Józsa et al., 2018). The partnerships vary from personal, events, and activities and there are no specific rules that guide these relationships apart from the local context (Murray et al., 2018). The kindergarten provides activities adapted to the child and the nature of the family where the child comes from. At home, the parents focus more on socio-emotional competence than academic skills alone (Metaferia et al., 2021). During these activities, the teacher plans for strategic intervention practices such as the play partner to the child and their peers. The teacher develops play relationships between children in singing, game, interests, and emotional safety. Further, the use of the Hungarian language at home, preschool, and grade one also maintains peer relationships at preschool that are enhanced in grade one (National Basic Programme for Kindergarten Education). Therefore, Hungarian preschool-to-school relationships are continuous, thus reducing the risk of school transition.

### 9. Pedagogy

The concept of pedagogy was coded into, the curriculum offered, language of instruction, learning areas, and methodology of teaching. In Kenya, seven studies ( $n = 7$ ) addressed this topic (Table 2). The language of instruction in Kenya is English and Swahili (Wadende et al., 2016). However, research evidence has consistently indicated that teaching children in the local vernacular gives better results (Mwoma, 2017). Regarding the curriculum of pre-primary two, it covers five learning areas: language, mathematics, psychomotor and creative, religious, and environmental activities starting from 8 am to midday (Republic of Kenya, 2017a). Each activity area covers 30 minutes with a total of 25 lessons per week. The teaching methodology is basically through games, play, themes, and fun (KICD, 2017). Different teaching approaches in preschool and school have been blamed for poor performance in grade one (Bonface et al., 2015; Mureithi, 2013). To address this challenge, recently a new curriculum has been introduced to train preschool and primary teachers together (KICD, 2018). In grade one, the number of learning areas is nine; Kiswahili, Indigenous, English, Mathematical, Environmental, Movement, Arts and Crafts, Music, Hygiene and Nutrition, and Religious activities. In addition, transversal competencies, life skills, living values, and Pertinent and Contemporary issues are also integrated into the curriculum designs. In grade one there is a formalized timetable that starts at 8.00 am to 4 pm. The number of learning areas increases from five to nine and 35 lessons per week. The teaching methodology changes from a thematic approach to a specific methodology per subject. New subjects are also added into the fold specifically, English, hygiene and nutrition, Kiswahili, Music, Art, and Craft (Republic of Kenya, 2017a) leading to the discontinuity between preschool and grade one.

The Hungarian curriculum (National Basic Programme for Kindergarten Education) aims to promote the full development of the child's personality (Murray et al., 2018). In addition, the pedagogical work in the kindergartens is controlled by the National Core Curriculum for Kindergartens which covers the following activity areas; Rhyming, Storytelling and play; Making Patterns, Painting, Drawing, Handwork; Singing Games, Children's Dances, Music; environmental and mathematics; Movement (physical activity); activities of a work nature; activity based learning

(Böddi & Serfözö, 2020). Preschool assessments are based on local contexts, although there is a need for standardization to take care of disadvantaged children entering school (Hungarian Government, 2012; OECD, 2004). To address children's needs during instruction, teachers are free to choose their teaching methods (National Core Curriculum for Kindergartens). To develop personality, the teacher provides holistic teaching through various activities such as painting, building, drawing, national symbols, customs, and environment. In grade one, children are taught Hungarian language and literature, math, ethics, faith and morality, arts, technology, physical education, and health promotion. The classes start from 8 am until 5 pm (Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency Eurydice, 2019). To maintain quality, Hungarian preschools and schools receive professional audits by external experts, and also teachers can undertake self-assessments following the Self-Assessment Manual (2021). As children transition to school instructional time increases, learning subjects, teaching methods and learning environment threatening transition. However, the language of instruction is the same, Hungarian.

### 10. Readiness

Failure to attend preschool affects academic performance in school up to grade three (Jemutai, 2018; Mureithi, 2013; Mwoma, 2019). In 2017, the Ministry of Education launched the Kenya School Readiness Assessment Tool (KSRAT; Republic of Kenya, 2019) which was later revised in 2019, to accommodate the new CBC activities and assessment rubrics. The primary purpose of the KSRAT is to establish the level of competency of a learner in the different activity areas as they transit to grade one but not for ranking or exclusion of learners during the transition process. The revised KSRAT assesses the five learning areas: mathematical activities, language activities, psychomotor and creative activities, environmental activities, and religious activities (Republic of Kenya, 2019). Each activity area is assessed based on a scoring guide: exceeding expectations, meeting expectations, approaching expectations, and below expectations. To complete the assessment tool, the assessor must refer to the learner's progress record developed in the year and the assessor's guide to complete the assessment tool. If the learner's performance meets most of the expectations of the set target of a teacher, the learner is approaching expectation. However, if the learner's performance exhibits the least of the teacher's expectations, the learner has achieved below expectations (Republic of Kenya, 2019). The assessment is done informally through teachers' physical observations of the child's work samples. However, many schools have developed their assessment rubrics when recruiting new grade ones especially private schools which is against the preschool policy (Republic of Kenya, 2017b). There are no readiness assessment rubrics for families, schools, and the community (Njuguna, 2011).

In Hungary, historically, the first school readiness assessment tool was known as PREFER (Preventive Development Assessment System for Children aged 4–7; Nagy 1976) test battery administered face-to-face. After its utilization for a decade, it was later revised and renamed Diagnostic Assessment Systems for Development (DIFER; Nagy et al., 2004). Studies have shown a strong correlation between DIFER test results and future school achievement. Although DIFER is not mandatory, more than half of the preschools use it (Csapó, 2007). First-grade teachers administer the DIFER to one-third of their students (Educational Authority 2016). The teacher administers the DIFER tests if he/she thinks the child has some disadvantage or has less developed pre-academic skills and needs extra help. Then, based on DIFER's diagnostic assessment, teachers set up an individual improvement plan for the child. A series of books have been written to help teachers implement improvement programs for ages four to eight (Józsa, 2014; Józsa et al., 2017; Miskolcziné & Nagy, 2006; Nagy, 2009). Computerized versions of DIFER have also been developed, and the effects of delivery mode studied (Csapó et al., 2014). Hungary has also developed an online school readiness assessment toolkit (Csapó & Molnár, 2019). The battery measures early numeracy skills, pre-reading skills, inductive reasoning, and tablet-using skills. In addition, there exists another game-based Android app, Finding of Children Unique Strength (FOCUS; Barrett et al., 2017; Józsa et al., 2017) that assesses pre-academic skills, mastery motivation, and executive functions: useful for assessing approaches to learning. A Kenyan version has also been developed to supplement KSRAT (Amukune et al., 2023). FOCUS app can be used to assess approaches to learning in and out of school (Amukune et al., 2022a; Józsa et al., 2017). The results of these tools are



supposed to help both the teacher in pre-school and primary school predict the child's school readiness.

### 11. Transition activities

During preschool to school, most preschools in Kenya prepare a file or a KSRAT booklet that contains the child's performance that is handed over to the child to forward to the grade one teacher in the primary school of choice (Republic of Kenya, 2019). In addition, some private schools allow preschool teachers to move with their classes from preschool to grade one until grade three. Although KSRAT is not used in grade one, the same format of assessment is used in all the subjects in elementary grade. After pre-primary, there are no special programs to enhance the transition to grade one; many schools, especially private schools, conduct interviews to admit children in grade one. The other most common activity in the majority of schools is graduation after preschool in preparation to join grade one the next year. However, some county governments have initiated school feeding programs that have improved school enrolment and transition to grade one (Matengo, 2016).

Hungarian teachers specialized in both qualifications from preschool and primary work together during the last year of kindergarten to ease boundary teaching. For a transition from preschool to school to be successful it demands that activities in preschool be continuous into school. Therefore, boundary work involves teachers in preschool collaborating with teachers in school to ensure continuity in pedagogy, institutional activities, and processes between the two systems (Karila & Rantavuori, 2014; Rantavuori, 2018). In Hungary, boundary teaching involves activities such as the use of worksheets, parent-teacher meetings, and reaching out to both preschool and school connections. This ensures the continuity of teachers and children from preschool to school. One teacher works from morning to lunchtime in preschools, and then another teacher takes over in the evening session (Korintus, 2008). In each session, teaching assistants are provided, and each class has no more than 22 children (Józsa et al., 2018). Towards the end of preschool, the teacher initiates the child into school life through a child-friendly school atmosphere. The child is taught to follow rules, patience, endurance, and self-discipline. For children with special needs, continuous pedagogical work is carried out with the help of specialists. Before starting school the teacher ensures the child has achieved holistic development and met the following minimum requirements; mental, physical, and social maturity (Campbell-Barr et al., 2015). In general, preschool education teachers also hold several meetings with parents and facilitate specialized coaching for children who need support academically. Other activities include; health education programs, activity afternoons, trips, and parties (Bakonyi, 2016). However, during the choice of schools, parents seem to consult other parents rather than the pedagogues (Murray et al., 2018).

### 12. Power

Most public schools in rural areas in Kenya are managed by County Governments, and private schools by private individuals, especially in urban cities (Piper et al., 2018b). Each ECE centre is headed by a section head who manages daily activities in the preschool. The head is a liaison officer who establishes collaborations with the primary school(s) and other partners. The structure of the majority of private schools is headed by a director who manages the finances and a headteacher who is in charge of the daily running of the school. For county schools located within public schools, the primary school headteacher is the head of the preschool and primary school. This facilitates a seamless connection between preschool and primary school (Republic of Kenya, 2017b). In both preschool and school transitions, the learners have no power. The most powerful power source is the headteacher then teachers. However, for county schools, the director of early childhood liaises with headteachers in all public schools for a smooth transition under the Education Act of 2013.

Kindergartens in Hungary are part of the public education system, which runs up to grade 12. The power-building structure of the schools does not give room for solutions to young people's questions and so alternatives are sought outside the school system. However, recently,

the Decree on the National Core Programme of Kindergarten Education (363/2012. [XII.17] revised in 2021 by the parliament gave more power to children during preschool (Szent Galy & Kiss, 2022). This reduces the risk of transition to school. Although, Hungarian early childhood is governed by the Core Program; a short framework that gives power to Hungarian kindergartens to develop their programs to fit the existing educational needs and context is provided (Nagy et al., 2015). It also prescribes the functions of kindergartens: (1) the social function and the (2) the safeguarding function. In addition, Act CXC of 2011 provides direction for early childhood practices.

### 13. Policy

The Constitution of Kenya revised in 2010 placed ECE under the mandate of County Governments. The Basic Education Act of 2013, operationalized free and compulsory quality Basic Education to all children while the National Education Sector Plan (2013–2018), proposed the development of the National Pre-primary Education Policy (Republic of Kenya, 2017b). Amongst many other challenges, the policy identified a lack of smooth transition from pre-primary two to grade one due to disharmony between the two environments and emphasis on academic skills (Republic of Kenya, 2017b). Although the language policy in Kenya dictates that teaching and learning be done using the language of the catchment area in ECE, still many preschools recommend English and Swahili (Ng'asike, 2014; Wadende et al., 2016). In Kenya, policies have been drafted to address the transition to school to enable preschools and schools to implement their mandate (Republic of Kenya, 2017b).

In Hungary, the 2011 CXC Act on National Public Education defines whole-day schools where teaching and other classes follow each other in the morning and afternoon in proportion. This act stipulates that children attend preschool starting at age three until they reach compulsory school age (Act CXC of 2011 on National Public Education). Supervision must be provided by the institution until five o'clock in the evening. The Decree on the National Core Programme of Kindergarten Education (363/2012. [XII.17] Government Decree, 2021) formulates the current (age-appropriate) image of children and kindergartens, the basic principles of the pedagogical work and minimal requirements for Hungarian kindergartens. However, it does not stipulate the requirement for kindergarten to prepare children for schooling. No policy stipulates where a child will attend schooling, however, the greatest influence is the location (Murray et al., 2018).

#### 13.1. Aspects of the six recurrent concepts that changed from preschool to grade one in Kenya and Hungary?

To assess the potential risk of preschool-to-school transition we used the Ecological and Dynamic Model of Transition to determine whether the six recurrent concepts continued, discontinued, or remained constant between preschool and school (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000). The model posits that to reduce the risk of transition institutional activities and processes between the two systems should be continuous or similar. Table 3 shows the aspects that changed or remained constant between the two systems in Kenya and Hungary. In Kenya, there is a risk of transition regarding relationships, pedagogy, readiness, transition activities, and policy. In Hungary, there is a potential risk in pedagogy and power distribution among stakeholders in preschools and schools. In summary, there is more risk of transition in Kenya than in Hungary.

#### 13.2. Similarities and differences between Kenya and Hungary

Since this study was narrative research, we sought to establish related patterns in Kenya and Hungary from the six themes (Rozas & Klein, 2010). In the first thematic review of relationships, three differences emerged; parent-child and teacher-parent relationships are supported through government efforts in Hungary but not Kenya. In addition, relationships between preschools with their neighbourhood in Hungary are more feasible than in Kenya. However, one similarity emerged, parent-child relationships at preschool and school remained constant between Kenya and Hungary. Regarding pedagogical activities, four differences were noted; while the Hungarian curriculum emphasized personality development at preschool the Kenyan focused on content and integration of transversal skills. The integrated or thematic approach method of teaching is recommended in Kenya while the play-based and other methods of choice for a teacher are

**Table 3. Aspects of the six recurrent concepts that (dis)continued or remained constant, from preschool to grade one in Kenya and Hungary**

Recurrent Concepts	Kenya	Hungary
Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>discontinuous stronger relationship at preschool than at school</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continuous relationship from preschool to school</li> </ul>
Pedagogy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>discontinuous language of instruction,</li> <li>discontinuity in methods of instruction</li> <li>discontinuous number of learning areas and time allocation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>discontinuity in subjects and method of instruction,</li> <li>Language of instruction is constant,</li> <li>discontinuous number of learning areas and time allocation</li> </ul>
Readiness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Discontinuous since KSRAT was used in preschool, age 4-5, and not grade one</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continuous, results of DIFER are used for improvement programs for ages 4 to 8</li> </ul>
Transition activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continuity of teachers to grade in some schools</li> <li>Discontinuous in a majority of schools that preschool teacher is very different from grade one teacher</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continuity is provided through boundary teaching, trips, coaching, and parent teachers meeting</li> </ul>
Power	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Constant since power is vested in the teachers both at preschool and school</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Discontinuous More power is given to the pre-schoolers and curriculum than grade one</li> </ul>
Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Discontinuous policy on language dictates local vernacular but is not followed at preschool and grade one.</li> <li>Preschools are managed by County and schools by the Central government</li> <li>Policy on assessment at preschool and school not followed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Constant since the policies affecting pre-schoolers also affect grade one</li> </ul>

applied in Hungary. In addition, teachers have different qualifications. Also, the language of instruction in Hungary is majorly Hungarian while in Kenya is English. Hungarian preschools offer more transition activities than Kenya. Readiness assessments are also applied in both systems as opposed to Kenya. In terms of preschool and school administration, more power is placed on the head of the institution than the children, while in Hungary a law has been passed to give power to the child in transition activities. In both countries, policies apply to both systems (Table 4).

A major similarity is the pedagogical activities in preschool and grade one. Generally, there is a significant increase in subjects, time for instruction, and variety of teaching methods. The third thematic review addressed school readiness. In both countries established tools for assessment are available, KSRAT in Kenya and DIFER in Hungary for children but not other stakeholders like parents, teachers, schools, and the community. In addition, there are efforts to develop a game-based assessment of school readiness domain approaches to learning in both countries. Differences include the use of readiness assessment results. In Hungary, the DIFER is used both at preschool and school as a diagnostic tool while in Kenya, KSRAT is used to provide information

**Table 4. Comparison of Kenya and Hungary based on the recurrent aspects of preschool-to-school transition**

Recurrent concepts	Similarities	Differences
Relationships	parent-child at preschool and school that remained constant	parent-child, teacher-parent, preschools with their neighbourhood
Pedagogy	Increase in subjects, time for instruction, and variety of teaching methods	Curriculum Focus Teaching methods Teacher qualification Language of instruction
Readiness	tools for assessment parents, community, and schools not assessed for readiness	use of readiness assessment results
Transition activities	parent-teacher meetings	boundary teaching, trips, and fun during the transition period
Power	More power to the head of the institution	More power is given to children
Policy	Impact on Preschool and grade one	Impact on Preschool and grade one

to the grade one teacher alone. The content of DIFER addresses numeracy, literacy, thinking, and social and emotional skills while KSRAT is a major learning area. Regarding transition activities, Hungarian preschoolers have a close connection leading to grade one than Kenya. Differences include boundary teaching, parent-teacher meetings on transition activities, trips, and fun during the transition period. Although different policy documents are developed in both countries they serve the same function at preschool and school. First, they give power to the school to administer the curriculum within the context of the learners. Second, the policy documents stipulate the time and number of learning areas at preschool and grade one. The National Pre-school Policy (2017) gives power to the Director of Quality Assurance to carry out quality checks while the Hungarian Education Framework allows teachers to undertake self-assessment using the Self-Assessment Manual (2021) and audits from external professional authorized auditors. The County Government in Kenya is fully responsible for funding preschool education while elementary education belongs to the Central Government (Constitution of Kenya, 2010). Although the Ministry of Interior is in charge of Public Education, in Hungary, many preschools are funded by Churches and Municipalities using task-based financing (Kalmar, 2018).

#### 14. Discussion

This review aimed to assess the status of the six recurrent concepts in the theoretical perspectives of preschool-to-school transition: relationships, pedagogy, readiness, transition activities, power, and policy (Boyle et al., 2018) and how they changed from preschool to school to establish the potential risk (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000) in Kenya and Hungary. This is important because failure to successfully navigate the transition to school can have damaging effects on a child's long-term academic outcomes (Barrett et al., 2017, Józsa, 2016; Russo et al., 2019). In both countries, the recurrent concept of school readiness and relationships attracted the highest attention from researchers as indicated by the number of studies. Emerging evidence suggests school readiness influences educational, social, and opportunities for later life (Barrett et al., 2017; Hugo et al., 2018). For this reason, it has been the focus of many studies. In Kenya, many efforts have been put in place to develop a unified tool for school readiness assessment (KSRAT; Republic of Kenya, 2017a) and also in Hungary (DIFER; Nagy et al., 2004). Additionally, sometimes researchers also use the two terms, readiness, and transition interchangeably (Dockett et al., 2014). Similarly, relationships have been widely studied by the ecological theories of transition that are highly cited in transition studies (Boyle et al., 2018). According to Boyle's framework, the foundation for a successful transition is to forge a good relationship among and between all the stakeholders involved in the transition process: child, family, teachers, child's peers, and

community as advocated by the ecological model (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000). Nevertheless, the quality of relationships, transition activities, readiness assessment, pedagogy, and policies were higher in Hungarian than in Kenyan preschool-to-school transition. Consequently, the preschool-to-school risk is higher in Kenya than in Hungary due to discontinuity between the two systems (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000). This could be attributed to the administration and management of the two systems. As opposed to Hungary, in Kenya preschools are managed by County Government while schools are managed by the Central Government creating a disconnect between the two systems (Republic of Kenya, 2017b). Other researchers have pointed out that services and programs for children in LMICs are inadequate (Black et al., 2017; Piper et al., 2018a). Compared to Kenya, the transition to school in Hungary is more enhanced since five recurrent concepts are intentionally designed to be continuous from preschool and into school. Further, Hungarian preschool education is advanced due to a superior curriculum with a good assessment system, and improved childcare, all preschool teachers are graduates with a salary that is comparable to their peers in primary schools (Józsa et al., 2018). These are significant determinants of process quality of education while Kenya still focuses on putting up infrastructure, and structural quality (Amukune, 2021).

### 15. Implication and limitations

Despite the strengths of this review, it had several limitations. First, due to the paucity of research on this theme in Kenya and Hungary, we explored the grey literature to identify the relevant studies and policies. Additionally, since the search was limited to the English language, there is a possibility that maybe some more literature was published in the Hungarian language that was not available in this review. Future studies can explore this line too. Second, Hungary and Kenya have different economic levels and thus different national budgets for education. Different budgets have impacted early childhood programs differently. Due to the significance of the transition from preschool to school, more research is needed to address the assessment of school readiness of all stakeholders; families, schools, teachers, and the community. We adopted narrative research, other studies can focus on integrative or systematic literature review and focus on studies published after 2015 alone.

### 16. Conclusion

The objective of the present study was to analyze the potential risk of children during preschool to school transition based on six recurrent theoretical themes. School readiness and relationship attracted the highest number of studies in both countries indicating they are highly valued by researchers during transition studies. Nevertheless, Kenya compared poorly with Hungary and had a higher risk of transition to school based on the six recurrent concepts. This was attributed to advanced childcare in Hungary and the lack of research that favors child programs and policies in Kenya. It appears Hungary has significantly reduced the risk the child undergoes during preschool to school transition by ensuring most of the six recurrent concepts continue from preschool to school. Kenya requires to enhance relationships, school readiness assessment, boundary teaching and more transition activities.

#### Funding

The work was supported by the Scientific Foundations of Education Research Program -Hungarian Academy of Sciences; ICT and Societal Challenges Competence Centre of the Humanities and Social Sciences Cluster of the Centre of Excellence for Interdisciplinary Research, Development and Innovation of the University of Szeged.

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#### Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

#### Citation information

Cite this article as: Comparing Kenya and Hungary preschool to school transitions within the theoretical perspectives of transition, Stephen Amukune & Krisztián Józsa, *Cogent Education* (2023), 10: 2248843.



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