

## **Perceived Need for Autonomy Satisfaction as A Predictor of Transition Among Form two Students in Kisii County, Kenya**

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DOI: 10.46609/IJSSER.2024.v09i11.040 URL: <https://doi.org/10.46609/IJSSER.2024.v09i11.040>

Received: 20 October 2024 / Accepted: 25 November 2024 / Published: 5 December 2024

### **ABSTRACT**

*Poor transition may affect greatly learners especially as they move from primary to secondary school subsequently achieving low academic outcome. This in turn might affect their life career paths within and after school. The study focused on one psychological factor namely; Autonomy need for satisfaction ( ANFS) among learners in secondary schools. The purpose therefore was to examine the relationship between students' need for autonomy satisfaction and transition among students in Kisii County. The study was guided by Deci and Ryan (2002) Psychological needs Satisfaction theory of Psychological Needs Satisfaction. Using a predictive Correlational research design the study population was 12462 Form two students across public secondary schools in Kisii County. The sample population was 405 students (167 male) (238 female) selected from 135 schools through purposive sampling, proportionate sampling, stratified sampling and simple random sampling techniques. A five-subscale questionnaire with a reliability coefficient of  $\alpha = .96$  was employed to gather participants' data The test-retest technique was adopted to test for the reliability of the instruments, where the instruments were administered twice to the same participants, allowing a two-week interval between the two administrations. To establish the internal reliability of the instruments, the researcher used the Cronbach alpha coefficient ( $\alpha$ ). Data analysis was done using SPSS and descriptive statistics, using means and standard deviations. Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was adopted to obtain the link between psychological needs satisfaction Autonomy and students' transition. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was adopted to obtain the means and standard deviations of transition and psychological needs satisfaction. Multiple regression was used to analyze the relationship between psychological needs satisfaction and transition. Central measures of tendency, frequent counts and distributions variability were utilized as descriptive statistics and correlation coefficient statistics as inferential statistics. Results indicated that there is a relationship between students' autonomy and transition. ( $r(403) = 0.40, p < .05$ ). The study*

*recommended need for school administrators to strengthen school programmes that would build students' autonomy need satisfaction. The study further recommended the need for parents to inculcate autonomy among students right from childhood.*

**Key words:** Autonomy Need Satisfaction, Predictor, Transition

## **1. Introduction**

Transitions are part of the human experience. While some transitions are predictable, others are not. Moreover, in some transitions, people have choices, while in others people have no say (Dray et al., 2014; Anderman & Midgley 1997). Further, Areba et al. (2013) asserts that psychological and developmental transition is one of the human aspects that advance over time. While different human beings handle change in different ways, it is evident that during human growth and development stages, transitions from childhood to adolescence often give rise to conflicting feelings and stress among adolescents who are usually in High school (WHO, 2017). Contrary to popular belief, adolescents are not always resistant and susceptible to "raging hormones"; for some, the transition goes relatively smoothly. This successful emotional and psychological transition offers this group of adolescents greater opportunity and excitement (Gutman & Eccles, 2007).

Childhood to adolescence transition coincides with a time when adolescents are also transitioning to secondary education (Hanewald, 2013). Therefore, school administrators, parents and teachers must approach the transition positively by providing information and inducting students into their new environment. In addition, teachers should arrange common activities between old students and teachers to foster closer relationships between the parties.

In education, there are typically three major points at which transition occurs: from nursery to elementary or primary school, from primary to secondary school, and from secondary school to tertiary or college education. While the impact of transition during their educational journey is varied, students often experience significant educational, social, emotional, physical, and developmental challenges that may adversely affect their academic performance. Therefore, to cope in secondary school, students must be physically and psychologically mature. The two aspects are indicators of proper preparedness and signify apt induction into school life (Sigei, 2013).

The transition from primary to secondary school affects adolescents in four basic ways: it coincides with the onset of puberty, likely to worsen stress experienced during this critical stage of life increases academic responsibility, social, and emotional spheres. Adolescents with severe mental health issues face developmental changes associated with puberty, such as creating an identity and becoming more autonomous (Pfeifer & Berkman, 2018). In addition to primarily

caused by these problems (WHO, 2021). Difficulties in school and risk-taking behaviors, teens with mental health concerns are more vulnerable to physical diseases, human rights violations, social isolation, discrimination, and stigma (which may affect their willingness to seek help). For people between the ages of 15 and 19, suicide is the fourth most common cause of death. Behavioral issues, anxiety, and depression are frequently the reason for suicide. According to Ainley and Allen (2010), primary school teaches students the fundamentals of reading, writing, and math by a small group of closely related teachers. Clark (2015) however, contends that the secondary school curriculum is subject-driven and that students must assume greater accountability for their education. Additionally, research indicates that the shift from primary to secondary school is a significant and difficult time for learners (Harris & Nowland, 2020). Apart from the heightened need, there are obstacles associated with the shift taking place in the early stages of adolescence, suggesting two distinct transitions: one from primary to secondary school and another from childhood to maturity. Puberty, a period marked by changes in one's body, mind, emotions, and social interactions, frequently coincides with this transition (Boyd, 2021).

From a global view, the transition from childhood to adolescence has been seen to be a major developmental milestone. While some go over it successfully, for others, it sometimes fails or threatens to fail. This is evident among the majority of boys and girls who engage in different forms of rebellion as they seek to establish a sense of autonomy and separate identity (Denny et al., 2014). This has seen more than half of students in high school engage in covert or open conflict with teachers and their parents. According to Henri et al. (2018), how students perceive secondary school life is closely related to their physical and psychological maturity level. Thus, students should mature regarding the need for autonomy as they progress in high school. Many researchers argue that students with fulfilled psychological needs for autonomy experience a sense of agency (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

In Africa, the reviewed literature shows that countries such as Kenya and Zimbabwe have attained high transitional rates despite hard economic conditions due to free secondary education and the one hundred per cent transition policy (Kibet, 2017). The concern, however, is that while many pupils join secondary school, the majority experience conflicting feelings, anxiety and stress (WHO, 2017). According to Burns (2013) most African countries rely on students' transition for their economic development. However, according to a report by the World Bank, students' transition from primary to junior secondary is affected by high rates of dropout cases (World Bank, 2008). In Nigeria, for example, Galton and McLellan (2017) found that if students' expectations are not met after transitioning to a new environment, they are likely to be frustrated. Other reviewed literature reveals that even with a 100 per cent transition, only 4% of children proceed to higher learning institutions in different African countries (Allen et al., 2013).

In Kenya, the Ministry of Education has facilitated secondary schools to have a well-equipped and working counselling department to address behavior problems which result from transition challenges. This is because, according to Galton et al. (2017), where there is good discipline, there is improved academic performance. This is meant to enable smooth developmental and educational transition. However, according to the National Plan of Action for Children (2015), cases of pre-adolescents and adolescents conflicting with the law between 2008 and 2018 have increased considerably. A further report by the United Nations Drug Control Program shows that 30% of secondary school students abuse drugs and other illegal substances, which may indicate a manifestation of difficulties in the transition into adolescence stage (Ondieki, 2018). This is greatly related with challenges associated with autonomy.

Indeed, it is during this stage that young boys and girls start examining their sexual orientation and establish who they are as people as well as struggle to establish their independence. Amidst all this growth and change, it has been recognized and acknowledged by various studies and theories that adolescence can be a time of great vulnerability with unfavorable developmental outcomes to some, while to others, it is a time of excitement, exploration and exploitation of the fullest, one's abilities and potentials (Gutman & Eccles, 2007). What occasions the great difference between adolescents who succeed and those who fail in life is a matter of grave concern to scholars, psychologists and counsellors.

### **Statement of the problem**

Students' transitions to secondary schools are a great concern worldwide and to most educational stakeholders. Poor transition generate to high levels of indiscipline, chronic absenteeism, poor academic performance, and general educational wastage. These problems are associated with poor transition. The large number of dropout and absenteeism cases at different times of the year is a great concern. These problems are manifestations of a lack of psychological readiness and adaptation among students Low learner turn out also indicate problems associated with autonomy among students.

Literature on students' autonomy need satisfaction as a predictor of transition among students in secondary school has not been sufficiently been done in Kenya. Most studies have concentrated on students transition from primary school to secondary school and from secondary school to university.

### **Objectives of the study**

The objective of the study was to establish the relationship between students' perceived need for autonomy satisfaction and transition.

## **Hypothesis**

The following hypothesis was used.

H<sub>a1</sub>: There is a significant relationship between learner autonomy and students' transition.

## **Theoretical framework**

The study was guided by Self Determination Theory (Deci and Ryan 2002). This theory describes how people's natural psychological needs and growth tendencies serve as the foundation for both the positive processes of self-motivation and personality integration and the environments that support them. Deci and Ryan proposed that for a person to have psychological wellness, they should have satisfaction in three psychological needs. One of these needs is autonomy. The theorists propose that people's autonomous choices help them to do whatever they choose to.

Furthermore students desire to be on their own to explore and maximize their abilities in the classroom and outside (Winga et al., 2011). This theory examines motivation, personality development, and social processes and how social contexts and individual differences facilitate different types of motivation, especially autonomous and controlled motivation. This theory also forecasts experience, performance, learning, and psychological well-being. The idea additionally aims to explain people's motivations for decisions they make free from outside intervention and influence (Deci & Ryan, 1985). The theory is centred on how self-motivated and self-determined a person is in their behaviour (Ryan & Deci, 2017). The main focus of the self-determination theory has been to clarify the seemingly opposing perspectives held by the developmental, behavioural, cognitive, and post-modern theories and the humanistic, psychoanalytic, and developmental theories that use an organismic meta-theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Stated differently, SDT offers a framework that unifies the phenomena revealed by these divergent perspectives, acknowledging that strong evidence supports human tendencies toward active engagement and development and numerous signs of fragmentation and conditioned responses (Ryan & Deci, 2002).

The justification behind employing this theory to guide the current investigation is that it addresses the components that inspire people to take action and govern their conduct across various areas of life.

Deci and Ryan Self Determination Theory posit that autonomy element is perceived to trigger people's inherent growth tendencies. Also, according to theorists, depending on how much this need has been met or avoided, personality variations arise between individuals (Deci & Ryan, 1995).

Mutweleli (2012) found out that there is a relationship between students' autonomy need satisfaction and transition. The manner and the level an individual was able to make personal choices influenced how they settled in school and realized positive academic outcome

## **2. Review of related literature**

In the recent past, transitioning to secondary school has attracted great interest among scholars, many of whom regard the change as a crucial and significant event in the life of young adolescents as they go through the education system (Alexander, 2010; Coelho & Kirera, 2013). Significant challenges children experience while transitioning affect them primarily in academics (Van Rens et al., 2018) and social and emotional dimensions. According to Akos et al. (2015), the interruption in students' academic growth during the transition to secondary education directly impacts academic success. The satisfying of fundamental psychological needs and how they relate to transition has been an area of scholarly interest.

For example, a study by Fisher (2018) found that autonomy is a process of transition in school among undergraduate students in Italy. The process enhances students' academic adjustment. Using a sample population of 388 students, the research established a high correlation between students' autonomy and academic adjustment, a construct of smooth transition. Further, academic adjustment was measured by document analysis.

Topping (2011) studied the obstacles Meru students face as they transition from primary to secondary education. A sample of 20 standard eight learners, 30 classroom teachers, 10 head teachers at primary schools, 10 head teachers of secondary schools, one area assistant chief, and one educational officer were involved in the research. The researcher employed student surveys and provided interview schedules to the chief of assistance and the education officer to identify the problems impeding the transition. Even though the study showed that internal inefficiency in school and social-cultural factors, motivation, and self-efficacy greatly contributed to low transition, the role played by psychological needs as a predictor for transition was not addressed. This forms the concern of the current study.

Little et al. (2020) conducted a study in China to establish if there exists a relationship between psychological needs satisfaction, anxiety, mental health, and physical activity. Using 254 Engineering students as a sample, the researchers concluded that there is interplay between psychological needs satisfaction, anxiety, mental health, and physical activity. However, the current study intended to establish if a similar relationship exists between psychological needs satisfaction and transition among students in secondary school.

Recently, Hallinan and Hallinan (1992) did a study in Germany to establish the role of psychological needs autonomy and relatedness on students' identity development in a school

setup. The researchers used a sample of grade 7 and 9 students. Results indicated that students' autonomy and a conducive environment with good teacher-student relationships helped them develop their identities. The current study intended to establish the predictive role of autonomy and relatedness to students' transition, an aspect that was ignored by the previous study.

Similarly, Saeki and Quick (2015) carried out a study at the University of Wilson on the role of students and how well they fit in school. Using a sample size of 83 students, the study established that having school programs is not enough to ensure students feel comfortable in school; rather, underlying psychological needs satisfaction plays a pivotal role in adolescents' emotional and behavioral functioning. Ikonen (2013) suggested that shifting towards autonomy-supportive education in institutional contexts can be challenging for learners. The researcher claimed that an institutional setting is suitable for fostering learner autonomy because foreign language instruction can naturally incorporate the various components of learner autonomy, such as interdependence, cooperation, technical skills, and autonomy-related willingness. However, the researcher used a small sample, which may have provided a partial representation of the population. The present study saw the need to use a large sample to ensure the validity of responses.

Research by Duineveld et al. (2017) reported that if children experienced high levels of autonomy support when they joined secondary school, they would experience lower levels of depression. This finding indicates that supportive parenting that encourages independence may protect children from developing mental health disorders during the transition to secondary education. Using a sample population of 1832 high school students, results indicated that autonomy-supportive parenting enhanced their children's self-esteem, which further necessitated successful transition in high schools. While parenting style plays an important role in enhancing their children's behavior, it may be interesting to study how individual psychological strengths such as autonomy satisfaction influence students' transition into secondary school, which is the focus of this study. In an earlier study by Tian and Huebner (2014), results revealed that psychological needs satisfaction, such as individual autonomy, played a big role in students' performance at school. The study concentrated on the Cross-legged structural equation to establish the findings. The current study sought to use regression analysis to find out if there is any predictive role of psychological needs satisfaction on student transition. Besides, Tian and Huebner (2014) found out that school programs played a major role in providing basic psychological needs, failing to focus on an individual's inner psychological needs satisfaction and how they assist in transition: an interest in the present study.

In another study, Evangelou et al. (2008) found out that parenting style greatly influenced adolescents' life goals and psychological aspirations, which indirectly influenced students' autonomy needs satisfaction. The study was carried out in South Africa. Using a cross-section

design with a sample of 853 students, the researcher administered Questionnaires, the Psychological Needs Scale, Aspiration Index, and Positive and Negative Affect Schedule to the respondents. Nevertheless, the study concentrated on parenting style and failed to focus on transition, which the present study saw as a gap. The current study looked at more leading factors such as autonomy, competence, and relatedness of adolescents and how they contribute to individuals' psychological needs satisfaction and students' transition.

Similarly, research was done by Pidgeon et al. (2014) on how psychological needs satisfaction enhanced student's self-control and school satisfaction. A sample of 1576 grade 10 -12 respondents was used. The researchers utilized structural equation modeling and robust bootstrap to establish their findings. The study concluded that autonomy need was highly correlated with transition ( $r_s = -0.07, p < .01$ ) and competence ( $r_s = -0.05, p < .05$ ). Regarding gender, using Spearman rho correlation, boys registered significantly higher scores in autonomy ( $M=4.6, SD=0.98$ ) than girls ( $M=3.90, SD=1.05$ ). On school transition, ( $r_s = 0.07, p < .01$ ) girls scored higher than boys with ( $M = 4.11, SD=0.096$ ) and ( $M=3.99, SD=0.096$ ). The study did not include students' relatedness as a predictor of transition. However, the manner in which students relate with their teachers and other students may determine transition, which is one of the concerns of the current study.

In Africa, research on students' autonomy, need satisfaction, and transition has received great attention. For example, Alrabai (2017) did a study in Saudi Arabia on how learners' level of autonomy related to their academic achievement among secondary school and university students, with academic achievement being an indicator of transition. The researcher used a T-test and descriptive analysis on a sample population of 630 students. Results showed that students' autonomy greatly influenced academic success, and since most students were not autonomous, their performance was negatively affected. The intention of the current study is to focus on secondary schools only and establish how autonomy need satisfaction predicts a transition.

In Egypt, Khalil and Ali (2018) carried out a study seeking to find out the extent to which teachers' and students' perceptions of students' autonomy contributed to transition. Using a sample population of 265 students of English language, results indicated that learner autonomy had an inverse relationship with transition. Nevertheless, the current research intends to find out if learner autonomy predicts transition.

Mutinda (2022) did a study on Autonomy, Attitude and Interest as predictors of academic success among secondary school students in Kitui County, Kenya. Using a correlation research design and a sample population of 420 Form three randomly selected students, results indicated a high correlation between students' academic success and autonomy, attitude, and interest.



Students' perceived autonomy as a psychological strength that may influence how individuals value and navigate through school life. However, it might also be necessary to find out if these psychological needs are useful for students as early as in form two.

**3. Materials and Methods**

**Participants**

The participants of the study consisted of Form Two students in Kisii County. There were 405 participants (238 ) boys and (168 )girls from 135 public secondary schools in Kisii County , Kenya.

**Measures**

Students’ psychological needs satisfaction was measured using PNS scale developed by Wilson et al. (2006). Nine items that measured autonomy were considered. To measure students’ autonomy, each item was measured at a five point likert scale. The scale ranged from 1-strongly agree to 5- strongly disagree. Scores on autonomy ranged from 1-9.

Students’ transition was measured using 17 item scale that rated on a five point scale The items adapted from Deci and Ryan scale (2003).

**4 . Results and Discussion**

The objective of the study was to establish the relationship between students’ perceived need for autonomy satisfaction and transition. In readiness for testing the hypothesis advanced on the relationship between the need for autonomy and perceived smooth transition scores, it was necessary first to subject the perceived transition scores to descriptive statistical analysis. This involved determining the measures of central tendency, dispersion, and shape of the distribution. The outcome of this analysis is given in Table 4.1

**Table 4.1: Descriptive Statistics for the Perceived Smooth Transition Scores**

N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic
					Std. Error	Std. Error

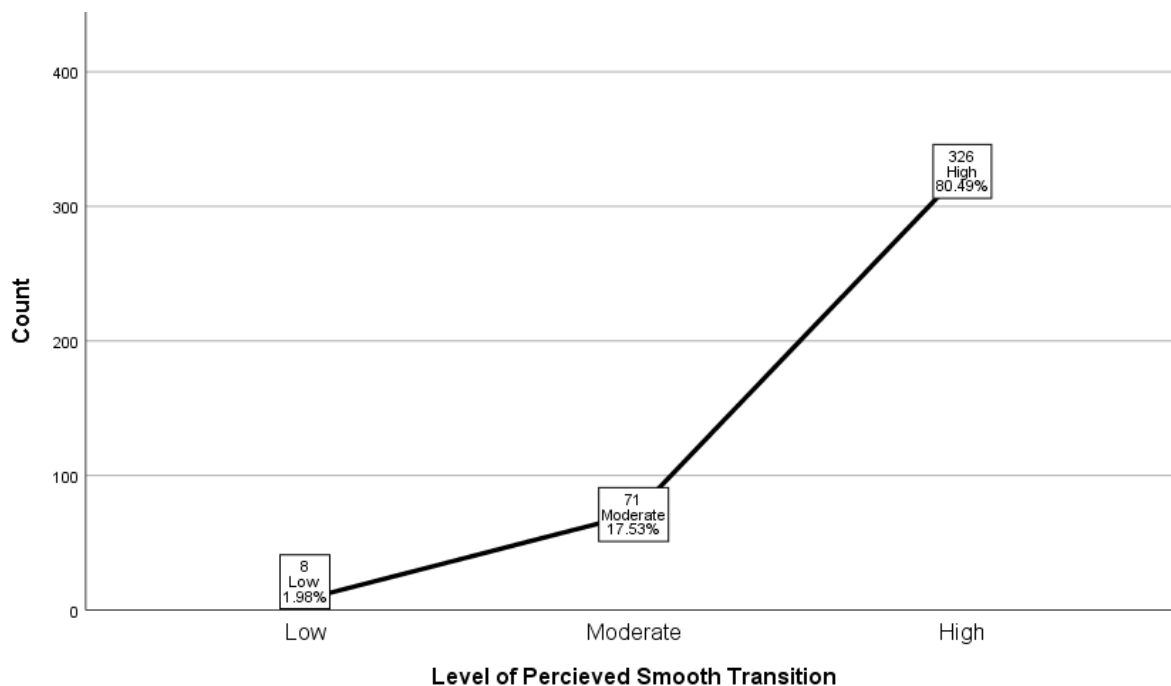
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Perceived	405	10.00	50.00	40.54	6.48	-2.05	.12	7.06	.24
Smooth									
Transition									
Score									

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Results in Table 4.1 show that the minimum and maximum scores for the perceived transition were 10 and 50, respectively, giving a range of 40 and a mean score of 40.54 ( $SD=6.48$ ). The distribution was negatively skewed ( $sk= -0.205$ ), indicating that most participants rated themselves highly on the transition scores. The transition was used to mean the ability to proceed to the next level. Hence, these results could imply that most participants valued the transition from one level to the next as important. Participants' levels of transition were also categorized as low, moderate and high as shown in figure 4.1

**Figure 4.1 on levels of participants' perceived Transition**



Results revealed Figure 4.1 reveals that 80.49% (326) of participants had a high level of perceived smooth transition, 17.53% (71) had a moderate level, and the fewest participants, 1.96% (8), were categorized as having a low level of perceived transition. This indicates that most participants felt that they were able to transition smoothly either because they had high

resilience or because they were assisted in handling challenges they faced related to the transition to secondary school

A cross-tabulation was done to show the mean and Standard Deviation for Need for Autonomy scores across levels of perceived transition. The results are given in Table 4.2.

**Table 4.2: Distribution of Need for Autonomy scores across levels of Perceived Smooth Transition**

Level of Perceived Smooth Transition		N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Low	Need For Autonomy Score	8	30.00	10.35
Moderate	Need For Autonomy Score	71	30.80	5.77
High	Need For Autonomy Score	326	35.32	5.04

From Table 4.2, it was evident that participants with a high level of perceived smooth transition had the highest need for autonomy mean score ( $M = 35.32, SD = 5.04$ ), followed by the participants with a moderate level ( $M= 30.80, SD= 5.77$ ). This could be interpreted to mean that for a student to be able to transit smoothly, one must have had high autonomy and need satisfaction. As participants continued transitioning from one level to the next in their academic endeavors, they also developed a stronger need for autonomy.

In line with the objective of the present study, which sought to establish a relationship between autonomy and transition, the first null hypothesis was stated as follows:

$H_{01}$ : There is no significant relationship between students’ need for autonomy and perceived smooth transition

The Pearson product moment correlation coefficient was used in a bivariate analysis of the data to test this hypothesis. Table 4.3 shows the findings.

**Table 4.3: Pearson r for Perceived Need for Autonomy and Smooth Transition**

	Perceived Smooth Transition Score	Need for Autonomy Score
Perceived Smooth Transition Score	1	.40**

Transition Score	Sig. (2-tailed)		.00
	N	405	405
Need for Autonomy Score	Pearson Correlation	.40**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.00	
	N	405	405

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 4.3 showed a significant and positive relationship between the need for autonomy and participants' transition ( $r(403) = 0.40, p < .05$ ). Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected. This leads to the conclusion that students' autonomy needs satisfaction is a high predictor of transition. Furthermore, it implied that autonomy satisfaction was among the individual's inherent characteristics necessary for academic transition in secondary school.

## 5. DISCUSSION

The present study's findings are consistent with earlier studies, especially by Wang'eri, Kimani, and Mutweleli (2012) on students transitioning to University, the findings indicated that students' autonomy played a key role in enabling them to transition smoothly to a higher level of learning. The study was comparable to the present study based on the level of education of the respondents, who were high school students. Wang'eri et al. used a sample comprising university students whereas the current study used students in high school. Thus, regardless of the level of the student, Autonomy need satisfaction was seen to play a great role in students' perceived transition.

The findings of present study agrees to some extent with those of Duineveld (2017), who found that students who experienced greater autonomy support before the transition to secondary school did not suffer many challenges, unlike their counterparts. Duineveld (2017) studied the extent to which supportive parenting enhance self-esteem of their children. There is a similarity in the two studies in that both conclude that students' autonomy is important for students to adjust in school.

The current finding on the relationship between students' autonomy and transition validates the findings by Fisher (2018) which reported that autonomy is a process of transition in secondary school. Fisher(2018) studied university students in Italy using a sample population of 388 students. The findings of current research corroborates with those of Fisher(2018) in that both

established that autonomy need satisfaction correlates with transition among secondary school students.

The current study's findings on relationship between autonomy and transition was is in consistent with those of Ratelle and Duchesne(2014). Using a six year longitudinal study and a sample population of 609 kid transitioning from elementary level to secondary level Ratelle and Duschesne (2014) established that students ' autonomy play a key role in students' adjustment in secondary school.

Finally, results of the present study agrees with those of Ertun et al.(2018) . Although Ertun et al. used a cross- cultural study results show that Adolescents basic psychological needs satisfaction determines transition irrespective of geographical factors. Findings support those found by Gichovi (2017) on effects of psychological needs satisfaction students' achievement of goals. Furthermore the findings of current study were in support of Petrides et al.(2004) postulation that psychological needs satisfaction strongly correlated students' transition.

## **6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

The study's objective was to establish the relationship between Autonomy and transition. The study findings revealed that there is a positive relationship between Autonomy need satisfaction and perceived smooth transition ( $r(403) = 0.40, p < .05$ ). These findings agreed with recent ones by Mutinda(2022). Although he considered attitude and performance he also highlighted that autonomy predicts academic achievement which correlates with transition. However, male students indicated higher autonomy need satisfaction than females. Parents and teachers should encourage learners to develop strong autonomy in and out of school. Schools should encourage outdoor tasks and include in learning activities that will enhance autonomy among students. This can be done through assigning duties to individuals in classroom activities and at home. This will encourage individual decision making.

The study focused on Form Two students in Kisii County. It focused on Psychological needs satisfaction as a predictor of transition. A similar study can be conducted outside Kisii in other Counties in the world and include other domains of transition like parenting styles as a predictor of transition.

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