

Correlates of Girls' Transition to Lower Secondary School for Scholarship-Supported Education in Refugee-Hosting Districts in Uganda

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Abstract

Girls' transition from primary to secondary education, particularly for grant-aided schooling in the refugee communities in Uganda, cannot be overemphasised. This article investigates the correlates of girls' transition from primary to lower secondary schools for scholarship-supported education in refugee-hosting districts in Uganda. The findings generate evidence on contextualised procedures and targeting mechanisms for beneficiaries of social protection support. The study uses logistic regression analysis on cross-sectional data collected from 8,684 pupils registered for primary leaving examinations in 612 primary schools (both public and private) located in refugee-hosting communities in Uganda. The survey targeted mainly girls in Grade 7 preparing to sit for their end of Grade 7 cycle examinations. The results reveal that an increase in students' age reduces the odds of transition by 0.091. Moreover, having a mother or father alive significantly reduced the odds (at 1%) of transitioning to scholarship-supported education by 0.284 and 0.476, respectively. Ill health conditions and forms of disabilities significantly increased the odds by 0.901 and 0.316, respectively. Eligibility for transition to scholarship-supported education at secondary level takes into consideration socio-demographic, physical, and health well-being traits, and such contextualised targeting processes may be replicated in similar or related conditions of need for social protection initiatives.

Keywords: transition; lower secondary education; scholarship aided; refugee-hosting communities

JEL Codes: I21, I25, F22



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Background

The importance of girls' schooling, particularly the transition from primary school to lower secondary level for scholarship-supported education in the refugee communities in Uganda, cannot be overemphasised. Although transition is a known way of measuring the academic progression of learners, it can also become a fundamental obstacle to disrupt the overall educational trajectory of learners (Salem 2018). In this context, transition is defined as a movement from one educational level to another in order to receive scholarship support, after the learner successfully completes a cycle at a certain age. The transition from primary to secondary schooling is most commonly undertaken by learners (Mumford and Birchwood 2021; Symonds and Galton 2014). In Uganda's case, transition is when children move from one educational level, say at the end of seven years of the primary cycle to post-primary level, such as lower secondary or technical institutes, and this transition is often linked to changes in educational practices and expectations. These significant changes can be categorised as physical, pedagogical, social as well as independence changes (Galton and Mornson 2000). Transition itself has been described as a milestone event in a learner's life as it parallels the onset of adolescence in pupils' development changes (Curson, Wilson-Smith, and Holliman 2019; Jindal-Snape et al. 2023; Mumford and Birchwood 2021).

To support transition mechanisms, there have been several initiatives in developing countries to support the girl child to transition from the primary to secondary stage in their educational career, and these social protection interventions have been implemented with a clear set of eligibility requirements to target vulnerable but talented girl learners (Amenya, Churches, and Riggall 2023). Several studies have been conducted to assess the effectiveness of the various strategies to support the primary to secondary school transition of female learners, including children with disabilities and ill health conditions as well as those who are socially disadvantaged such as refugees, forced immigrants, and those receiving home schooling (Amenya, Churches, and Riggall 2023; Hanewald 2013; Hughes, Banks, and Terras 2013). The Sustainable Development Goals (2015–2030) view girls' education as a key measure of economic growth, reduced child mortality, and the overall development of a country. Moreover, girls' education is also considered as a mechanism to enhance human capital and thus reduce poverty through skills and knowledge development as prerequisites for economic returns. There is a strong link between skills acquisition and economic growth through improving human capital stock as well as the empowerment of a society (Mumford and Birchwood 2021; Walsh 2011).

This study is based on the premise that girls' education is a basic human right and is necessary for sustainable social and economic development (Zendeli 2017). At the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) held in Johannesburg in 2002, education was identified as a major avenue towards moving a country to sustainable development. It is critical to note that the education of the girl child is also an important determinant of a transformed society and prosperity. Globally, several international

instruments have been put in place to support all children, especially girls, to attend school, namely, (a) the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) of 1948, which under Article 26 makes education a fundamental human right; (b) the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO's) Convention against Discrimination in Education of 1960; (c) the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989 in force 1990); (d) the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) of 1966; and (e) the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006 in force in 2008). Further, at a global level, transition still stands at 85.1% from primary to secondary level, with disparities across gender and those constituting emergency communities such as forced immigrants or refugees (UNESCO 2023). In the Ugandan context, among the school-aged refugee population, about 353,000 children aged 3–17 are out of school, accounting for 57% of the total school-aged children in the refugee-hosting districts. Further, data shows that 19% and 25% of the enrolled primary and secondary school children, respectively, among the refugee population are over-aged. Overall, transition from primary to secondary schooling in Uganda stands at 69.3%. Ultimately, this explains why secondary education provision is limited in refugee-hosting districts in Uganda as the access to schooling in refugee communities remains as low as 11%, with only 33% of these being girls (MoES 2018).

The government of Uganda has adopted Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 whose aim is to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and to promote life-long learning opportunities for all. By embracing the Education for All strategy in 2008, several interventions have been put in place to achieve this strategy. As progress is being made regarding this strategy, it was revealed at the second Global Disability Summit held in 2022 that Uganda hosts approximately 1.1 million refugees, some of whom are persons with disabilities (Jote and Tekle 2022). Everyone has a right to education. Most of the refugees are from the neighbouring countries including South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Burundi, Somalia, Kenya, Sudan, and Ethiopia, and are therefore entitled to access education as a fundamental human right.

The strongest sustainability measure in Uganda has been programme continuity, especially for girls and vulnerable children receiving education. Under the Education Response Plan (ERP) of the government that was first launched in 2018 and later in 2022, there was a deliberate attempt to implement interventions to improve learning outcomes for children in refugee-hosting communities. Under the plan, the development partners mobilised up to 32% of the US\$389 million required to fund activities aligned with the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF). The continuation of interventions in the programme districts focuses on expanding the scope to new sub-counties and working through schools that increase saturation and the internalisation of new knowledge, practices, and attitudes among rights holders and duty bearers. As a result, there was a 5.4% increase in performance at the end of primary school cycle in 2022 and about 86% of the children transitioned to post-primary education (MoES 2024).

Despite these interventions, girl children still face specific barriers to fulfilling their fundamental human right to education, including financial barriers to education as well as other factors preventing retention, survival, completion of primary education, and their transition to secondary education level. The Ministry of Education and Sports, together with development partners, continues to implement programmes within the scope of broader efforts towards ensuring the attainment of inclusive and quality learning outcomes. Some of these interventions have direct links to remediation and learning assessment, increased access to learning materials, psychosocial support services, and skills development and empowerment of children, especially marginalised adolescent girls and young people, coupled with efforts to strengthen systems for better results achievement (MoES 2022).

Rationale for the Study

All children have a right to education and thus there is a need to remove the obstacles to the attainment of the desired education (such as lack of school grants, inadequate psychosocial support services, and lack of remediation and skills development to promote school retention and completion) (MoES 2022; Zendeli 2017). Such obstacles, especially as they concern girls, should be addressed to keep children in schools for longer. This calls for the need to protect them against all forms of violence such as discrimination against pregnant girls and adolescent mothers while at school (Ayiga, Akena Adyanga, and Akello 2024). By building strong partnerships and linkages with parents, school communities, public security systems, civil society organisations, and religious as well as traditional leaders, adolescent mothers can be protected from violence while at school, hence leading to progression from one school level to another (MGLSD 2022). The situation may be difficult to address and context-dependent across different emergency situations like the refugee-hosting communities where services are limited to support adolescent girls to progress in their schooling. Knowledge on the transition from primary to secondary level in order to access scholarship-supported education especially among girls in emergency situations remains somewhat limited. Therefore, the study set out to assess the possible correlates of transition to lower secondary level with a focus on scholarship-supported education in the refugee communities in Uganda. The study is thus guided by the research question: To what extent do socio-demographic factors, chronic illness and disability, caregiver economics as well as pupil motivation for further studies correlate with girls' transition to lower secondary school for scholarship-supported education?

The findings and their implications are essential for informed decision-making, programming, and the design of similar or related interventions in refugee contexts. Further, the analysis also tests the robustness of the data collected from various sources such as schools, students, and households while taking note of the limitations attributed to non-response as well as omitted bias.

Objectives of the Study

The study generally investigates the correlates of girls' transition to scholarship-supported secondary school education in refugee communities in Uganda, and specifically aims to:

1. Assess the correlation between socio-demographic factors at school, pupil, and caregiver levels and girls transition to scholarship-supported secondary education;
2. Evaluate the influence of chronic illness and disability-related factors on transition;
3. Evaluate the association between caregiver economic status and transition;
4. Assess the effect of pupils' motivation to pursue further studies on transition.

Review of the Empirical Literature on Transition

A review of the existing literature provides a snapshot of the theoretical and empirical understanding of the possible correlates of transition from primary school to secondary level of education within the context of a country such as Uganda. In addition, a review of previous research helps to identify the researchable gaps within the framework of transition. Thus, this section provides a review of the correlations between families' socio-economic status, chronic illness, various forms of disability factors, and learners' motivation and transition. The details of the reviewed literature are provided in the following sub-sections.

The Correlation between Family Socio-Demographic and Economic Factors and Transition

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child posits that children have the right to have a say in issues that affect their lives and participate freely within the society and communities accommodating them. The issues concern participants' own views and discussions around their particular life experiences, with the aim of advocating for children to have input into behavioural decisions and practices that affect them (UNICEF 2025). These could be school-going children or young adults accommodated in homes, schools, or any general communities. There is some documented evidence on the correlation between family factors and learners' ability to transition to another level in their schooling career. The extent to which such attributes influence transition vary significantly. A study that was conducted in Scottish schools on over 200 children largely revealed that learners faced difficulties adjusting to the conditions of the next level of education after transitioning to secondary education. This was attributed to individual attributes at the pupil level rather than the school environment (Hanewald 2013; West, Sweeting, and Young 2010). It was observed that learners with innate

ability as well as lower self-confidence were less likely to experience positive transition experiences.

According to Ayiga, Akena Adyanga, and Akello's (2024) study on innovative practices to promote girls' retention and transition to post-primary education, it was found that there are significant associations between marital status, the grade in which girls fall pregnant, and the age of the learner and transition. Differentials in marital status largely explain the roles and rights of the learners' choice to pursue further education. Moreover, low self-esteem is associated with orphanhood and low learner participation in school activities, which ultimately lead to low academic achievement coupled with physical depression. Successful transition is important for the psychological well-being of the learner in that children with specific learning difficulties (due to age, orphanhood, or low innate ability) perceive low levels of social support after transition. The anxiety among learners is also associated with peer victimisation and thus more depression that ultimately leads to anti-social behaviour (Hughes, Banks, and Terras 2013). Age is a factor that is key to influencing transition because it is linked to physical bodily changes, especially for girls. It is also argued that adolescents who were in the advanced stages of puberty experienced the transition in a more directly supervised environment, which was associated with more parental support (Laird and Marrero 2011).

Elsewhere, family relationships are regarded as a protective factor, and a change is observed in parental attitudes between primary and secondary school levels, with more autonomy given to learners in secondary than primary education. Older siblings were observed to provide practical strategies for the transition with perceived "lived experience" to offer anecdotal advice (Bagnall, Skipper, and Fox 2020; Curson, Wilson-Smith, and Holliman 2019). The community environment is also a source of influence on the transition, with some learners recognising a "community feel" in secondary rather than primary school, perhaps due to the desire to forge stronger relationships and seek belonging (Sancho and Cline 2012). The state of living with parents and parental support play a role in learners' ability to transition in order to receive a scholarship grant. The learner's attachment to their parents is a predictor of the material support they will receive to deal with emotional challenges in the transition process. For instance, learners living with both biological parents develop more secure attachment relationships and display fewer emotions such as fears, and ultimately transition more readily than their peers from single-parent or blended families (Hanewald 2013).

It can be argued that families where both parents are present are less exposed to socio-familial adversity and therefore have high quality interactions, thus predisposing learners to tolerate stressful events during the transition (Duchesne et al. 2009). Further, it was observed that Grade 9 learners anticipated increased independence in choosing their career trajectories (Smith et al. 2008). Intact parental families provide direct participation in academic encouragement and expectations of the attainment of the learners. The active parental involvement is effective in supporting low-achieving students in their school performance (Chen and Gregory 2009). In some cases, the

parents and learners are generally excited about the range of opportunities available post-primary level because students smoothly transition if their parents remain a constant source of support monitoring their learning activities and intervening appropriately (Hanewald 2013). However, in the absence of parental support, where students receive safety and support from other caregivers, it exposes the students to potential bottlenecks to their learning, and thus warrants other support initiatives. This study explores the possible eligibility requirements to transition to scholarship-supported secondary education.

Chronic Illness and Disability Factors and Their Effect on Transition

Some of the considerations for scholarship funding for education go beyond gender and other vulnerabilities to include aspects of forms of disabilities as well as chronic health issues the learners are exposed to or possess. Both the children and parents may be satisfied with their transition experience; it may largely depend on the type of disability and special provision children receive at the secondary level of education. A study by Maras and Aveling (2006) found that issues surrounding disability featured as an important influence on the attitudes and expectations of both parents and children for support at secondary education level. Some studies tend to show that support levels may vary for children with specific learning difficulties, and they may vary depending on the child's gender. Children with disabilities were found to receive more social rejection and were rated by teachers as having poor social skills. Further, the study revealed that children with disabilities had significantly more challenges internalising and externalising learning matter (Bryan, Burstein, and Ergul 2004). These were key measures for eligibility to receive scholarship funding.

Good mental and physical health is associated with enhanced quality of life and effective learning. Further, supporting learners' needs for autonomy and relatedness during their transition into secondary education provides the most likely way to enhance their quality of life (Gillison, Skevington, and Standage 2008; Hanewald 2013). Moreover, some studies found that mental health problems in learners can be averted with emotional support from the school environment, peers, and educators (De Wit et al. 2011). De Wit et al.'s (2011) study revealed that perceptions of declining peer and educator support are linked to increases in symptoms of depression and social anxiety in students. In addition, the scholarship package goes beyond a cash grant to include complimentary services (such as peer education and counselling support, among others) to support in the transition as well as the actual teaching/learning process.

Consistent with the previous findings, it was found that children with disabilities perceive lower levels of support and more peer victimisation. For instance, comparisons of males and females showed that perceptions of classmate support were particularly low for both genders. However, among learners with multiple disabilities, males perceived lower levels of close friend support, highlighting the need for the bursary to support them and help them cope with these challenges (Hughes, Banks, and Terras 2013). Thus, disabilities among learners may act as a direct risk to children's adjustment

that is associated with an inadequate social skills set, low self-esteem, and coping inadequacies that cause poor transition (Hughes, Banks, and Terras 2013; West, Sweeting, and Young 2010). According to Hanewald (2013), studies on the transition of children with disabilities and chronic ill health conditions largely reveal similar trends. Thus, the effectiveness of the various transition strategies implemented depends on the particular school settings.

Pupils' Sense of Belonging and Motivation to Pursue Further Studies and Transition

One important aspect in the decision to transition from one school level to another depends on the learners' sense of belonging and their level of well-being. For learners to transition, they have to perceive that fitting into the secondary school environment would give them a feeling of acceptance, leading to their belonging in that environment. For instance, the larger school setting provides a choice in terms of increased independence and freedom to exploit opportunities to develop student peer relations (Curson, Wilson-Smith, and Holliman 2019; Sancho and Cline 2012). At times, the confusion some children may face when trying to transition into a new school setting is concerned with image and status among peers, specifically becoming involved with "the bad characters" (Mumford and Birchwood 2021; Pratt and George 2005). Thus, the feeling of social connection may lead to higher motivation to transition to a new location of learning. The students with a low sense of belonging may feel alienated at the school environment, which in turn may cause poor learning and their eventually dropping out of school (Cueto et al. 2010).

Within the social context, some learners agitate for increased autonomy from parents to manage their own social challenges whilst others feel that parental support is needed to deal with a new school environment (Pratt and George 2005). This contrast highlights the challenge in balancing increased independence with the appropriate amount of parental care with development differences. Learners value the increased freedom in terms of the environment supporting interactions with peers both in and out of school settings and during lesson transitions. The envisioned freedom and sense of belonging are associated with the learner's "forward-looking attitude" in that following transition, there are feelings of excitement and enthusiasm linked to opportunities to make new friends and/or maintain existing friendships due to experiencing a sense of belonging (Bagnall, Skipper, and Fox 2020; Curson, Wilson-Smith, and Holliman 2019; Mumford and Birchwood 2021). Conversely, a sense of belonging could result in challenging emotional experiences such as feelings of loss of self-identity, loss of support from key adults, sadness, and loneliness. Moreover, transition stress could manifest in anxiety, nervousness, and worry about the new school environment. The impact of these emotions on learners varies significantly depending on the circumstances of transition. Some learners use repression as a way of protecting themselves and dealing with their own emotions and the need to mask their vulnerabilities (Curson, Wilson-Smith, and Holliman 2019; Pratt and George 2005).

It can be argued that young adults with prior high levels of social connection and high-quality friendships are likely to transition from primary to secondary school. Ultimately, peer relationships promote adjustment to the new environment. Teachers are also critical in promoting these peer social connections. The teachers who are more attuned to peer group affiliations promote more productive contexts to improve the views of the social school climate after the transition (Hamm et al. 2011).

Learner motivation to transition is associated with the role of their friendships during the challenging period of moving from primary to secondary school. Moreover, attendance at the local primary school increases the likelihood of a smoother transition into the local secondary school as peers move across the schools in the same age cohort (Weller 2007).

Multifaceted Framework on Transition

A successful transition may be attributed to multi-sectoral interventions that target overlapping vulnerabilities. There are several studies that recognise the implications and negative effects of conflict on educational attainment and transition, which pose a major impediment to meeting the right to equitable access to quality education (Burde et al. 2017; Salem 2018). New developments in emergency situations and conflicts and their impacts on children have resulted in increased awareness of this, making education and transition a key part of the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly equitable quality education for children living in conflict-affected communities (Salem 2018). Transition from one cycle/level of education to another is guided by the interlinked framework of processes and mechanisms (Amenya, Churches, and Riggall 2023). However, there is a somewhat limited scope of understanding and data in the field of emergency education on transitions from the end of a cycle, and this warrants further research (Burde and Linden 2013). Figure 1 presents the cycle of learning and achievement with a focus on successful transition to post-primary education. It also shows that the child's growth and education nurturing begin at home and/or in communities where they live.

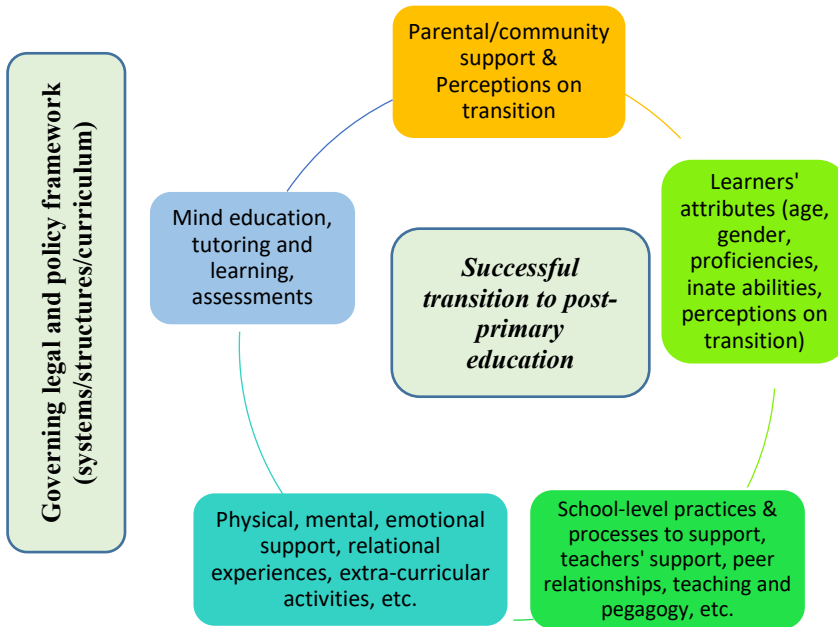


Figure 1: Multi-faceted framework on learning and successful transition to post-primary education. Source: The author based on Amenity, Churches, and Riggall (2023), Mumford and Birchwood (2021), and Curson, Wilson-Smith, and Holliman (2019)

Parenting has an influence on students' learning, mitigating learners' inabilities and ultimately supporting their transition. The learner's attributes, i.e. gender, disability status, and proficiencies, comprise a construct of child capability to attain education scores to support their transition. The education of the mind, tutoring, and learning assessments are processes and tools that are explored by the learner and later transformed into meaningful achievement beneficial to support transition. The importance of the innate ability of the learner cannot be overemphasised as it plays an integral part in building confidence and improving relationships within the school setting. The school-level practices and processes together with the teacher input support the execution of the curriculum, assessment mechanisms, extra-curricular activities as well as child emotions and mental health (Curson, Wilson-Smith, and Holliman 2019; Mumford and Birchwood 2021). Of course, tutoring, learning, and transition are all supported by the legal and policy frameworks comprising the systems and structures that catalyse the pedagogical activities within the school setting. Transition is therefore regarded as a "child bred" outcome arising from the interplay of a specific environment and set of conditions that embody the characteristics of teaching and learning support.

Empirical Model, Data, and Analysis

Because the dependent variable is the binary outcome, the study employed logistic regression analysis to assess the possible odds of the pupil transitioning to secondary school for scholarship education compared to not transitioning. The analysis also

considered interactions between the covariates to gain a deeper understanding of the interaction effects of the various attributes on transition. Thus, the analysis employed logistic regression on the cross-section data collected in November 2024 from 8,684 pupils registered in 612 primary schools (both public and private). The survey targeted mainly girls in Grade 7 preparing to sit for their end of Grade 7-cycle examinations.

The data collected included the pupil characteristics, caregiver attributes, school demographic factors, the pupils' study motivation after Grade 7, and the chronic illness conditions as well as the general disability-related factors of the pupils, among others. The data collected on learners was part of the Gender for Development in Uganda (G4DU) programme (2024–2027), and it was collected from seven districts that included Yumbe (1,593), Madi-Okollo (332), Adjumani (1,684), and Nebbi (514) districts from the West Nile, Lamwo (1,221) and Kitgum (1,559) districts in Acholi northern region, and Oyam (1,781) in Lira sub-region. The descriptive results as presented in Figure 2 reveal that overall, 6 pupils in every 10 did not transition to secondary level one (S1), which is in consonance with the finding that about 33% of the girls in refugee communities actually access secondary education (MoES 2018). There are noticeable variations in pupils' transition from primary school to secondary level across the study districts. For instance, in Oyam district, one quarter (23.1%) of them transitioned from primary seven to S1 compared to Yumbe district where about one half (49.4%) of the pupils joined secondary level education. A district that recorded above the national average is Lamwo, with a 43.5% transition that is largely because of the relatively high humanitarian support provided to girls' education in these porous border areas. The transition trends reflect the low innate pupil ability and inadequate system support to the learners to progress from primary to secondary level, especially in Oyam and Madi-Okollo districts.

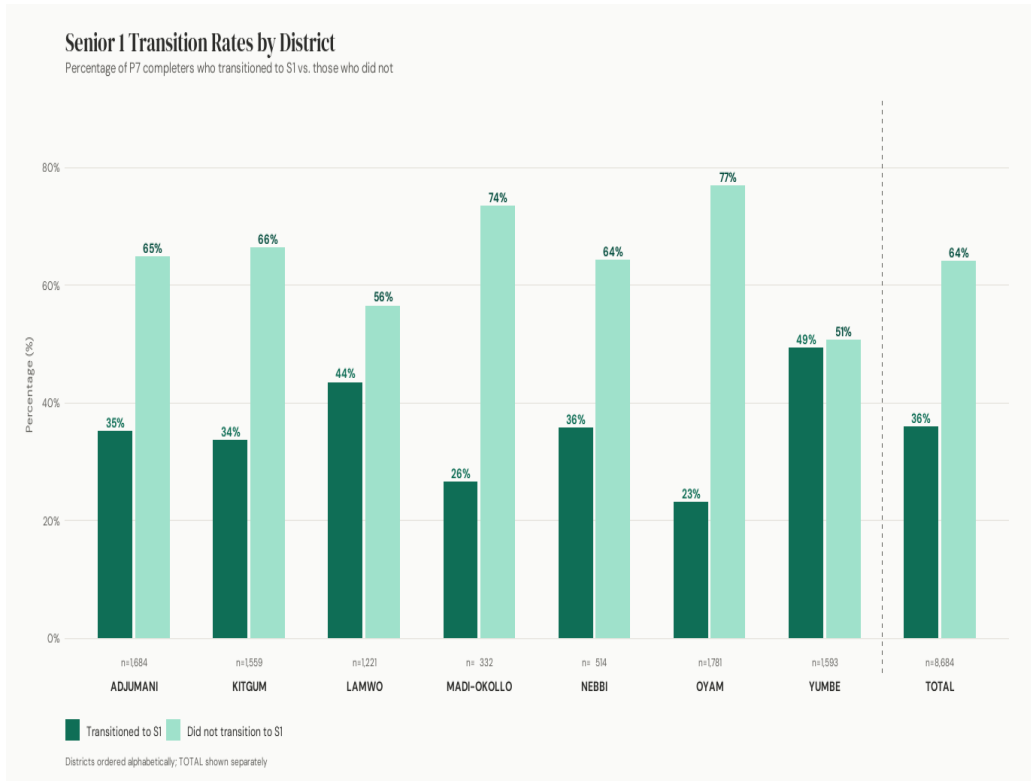


Figure 2: Percentage of learners that transitioned from primary 7 to S1 and those that did not by district. Source: Compiled based on primary sample (2024)

In terms of the steps and level of analysis that was conducted using the statistical software STATA version 17, data were subjected to the following. Firstly, the univariate level of analysis was performed to understand the general outlook and distribution of the sample of learners that transitioned and those that did not transition from primary to secondary level, in terms of students' average age, forms of disabilities, chronic illness conditions, orphanhood, sense of belonging, and the motivation to transition. Secondly, the bivariate analysis revealed the measures of association between the pupils' social, health, and family attributes and transition status; and thirdly, the logistic regression evaluated the correlates of the girls' transition from primary education to access scholarship-supported secondary education in refugee communities. The interaction effects analysis was also conducted to obtain a deeper understanding of the source of variations in effects of covariates on transition for scholarship-supported education.

The estimation of the logistic regression employs a maximum likelihood estimation (MLE) technique that establishes the best-fit coefficients by choosing the estimates that maximise the probability of observing the actual data (Cox and Snell 1989; Muya 2018). The logistic technique is a machine algorithm used for classification to predict the probability of an event occurring. The logistic function for M explanatory variables takes the form:

$$t = \log\left(\frac{p}{1-p}\right) = \sum_{m=0}^M \beta_m x_m = \boldsymbol{\beta} \cdot \mathbf{x},$$

and solving for the probability p_1 that *output says* $y = 1$ results in the form:

$$p(\mathbf{x}) = \frac{1}{1+e^{-(x-\mu)/s}} = \frac{1}{1+e^{-(\beta_0+\beta_1x+\dots)}}$$

where t is the log-odds, β_m is a vector of parameters to be estimated, μ is the location parameter; $\beta_0 = -\mu/s$ and $\beta_1 = 1/s$ are both parameters to be estimated. Thus, since the logistic is non-linear in parameters, determining the optimal values requires normalisation of maximising the log of likelihood function and also takes the derivatives with respect to the β_0 and β_1 . For estimation purposes, the operational logistic regression is stated as:

$$L_i = \beta_0 + \beta_{1i} \sum PUPIL_i + \beta_{2i} \sum HAD_j + \beta_3 MOT + \varepsilon$$

Where L_i is the logit or log-odds, *PUPIL* comprises a set of pupil socio-demographic and family factors such as age measured in complete years. Moreover, factors such as district location, whether or not the learner's mother/father is alive, and if the learner is living with a caregiver, all measured as dummies, for yes = 1 and 0 otherwise. *HAD* comprises the chronically ill health and forms of disability factor, all measured as dummies (for yes = 1 and 0 otherwise), while *MOT* is the pupil's self-sense of belonging and motivation to transition to secondary level for scholarship-supported education, also expressed as dummies for yes = 1 and 0 otherwise, respectively.

The interpretation of such a model is as follows: Holding all other variables constant, one unit increase say in *MOT* on average increases the estimated logit by β_3 . If we take the ant-log of β_3 , i.e. e^{β_3} , it results in the estimated odds of the student transitioning from primary school to secondary level compared to otherwise. As in a linear model, the slope coefficients of the logistic regression are partial coefficients and measure changes in the estimated logit for unit changes in the values of the regressors. We often use the z-test statistic to carry out the test on individual coefficients. Thus $z_k = t_k = \text{estimated } \beta - \beta_k^*/s_k$; where s_k is the standard error and β_k^* is the hypothesised value of β_k which need not be zero. Further, the goodness of fit in the binary limited dependent variable model often uses the McFadden R^2 which is a likelihood ratio index computed as $R^2 = [1 - \ln L / \ln L_0]$ where $\ln(L)$ is the maximised likelihood, and $\ln(L_0)$ is the maximised likelihood assuming all the slope coefficients are equal to zero.

Results, Interpretation, and Discussion

This section presents the analysis and discussion of the results. The findings are presented at univariate level to provide a general outlook of the characteristics of the sample; the bivariate analysis is provided to establish the associations between the two sets of variables, while the logistic regression presents results to indicate the likelihood of correlates of transition from primary school to secondary level education in refugee-hosting communities in Uganda.

Table 1: General characteristics of the sample

Indicator	N (=8,684)	Transitioned (3,119)	No transition (5,565)
Mean age (SD)	8,684 (100%)	15.8 (1.69)	16.1 (1.74)
Proportion of refugees to total	943 (10.9%)	373 (11.9%)	570 (10.2%)
Proportion with chronic illness	379 (4.4%)	197 (6.3%)	182 (3.3%)
Proportion of pupils with a desire to transition	8,553 (98.5%)	3,083 (99.0%)	5,470 (98.3%)
Proportion with forms of disability	549 (6.3%)	248 (8.0%)	301 (5.4%)
Proportion with no living mother	605 (7.0%)	310 (9.9%)	295 (5.3%)
Proportion with no living father	1,819 (20.9%)	904 (29.0%)	915 (16.4%)
Proportion that lives with caregiver rather than parent	1,279 (14.7%)	605 (19.4%)	674 (12.1%)

Source: Compiled based on primary sample (2024)

The study results are computed based on a sample of 8,684 girl pupils who registered for the end of primary (cycle) seven examinations in the seven districts hosting the refugees in the country (Table 1). Descriptive statistics reveal that of the pupils that registered to sit for end of primary cycle national examinations in November 2024, 3119 (35.9%) of them transitioned from primary to secondary schools in 2025 to access the scholarship-supported education, while 5,565 (64.1%) did not. The low transition level could be attributed to specific learning difficulties, to learners being over-aged, orphanhood, or low innate ability to progress beyond primary education. These are all associated with peer victimisation that may result in depression, leading to an inability to transition (Hughes, Banks, and Terras 2013; Laird and Marrero 2011). The average age of the learners who transitioned to access scholarship-supported education was 15.8 years with a minimal mean deviation of 1.69. Again, of those that transitioned, about 12% (=373) were refugee learners, 6.3% (=197) had chronic ill health conditions, 8.0% (=248) had forms of disabilities while about one tenth (=310) of them were mother orphaned. It is worth noting that the majority of the learners that did not transition were academically challenged, and ultimately could not transition. Some of the few learners who transitioned also accessed other avenues of support such as the traditional public and government aided secondary schools.

Table 2: Measures of association between specific attributes and transition

Indicator (sample size)	Transited (%)	No transition (%)	χ^2 (<i>p</i>-value)
Nationality of pupils (refugees) (943)	39.5	60.5	6.0830 (0.014)
Pupils with chronic illness (379)	52.0	48.0	46.20 (0.000)
Pupils' desire to transit to S1 (8,553)	36.1	63.9	0.0913 (0.763)
Pupils with forms disability (549)	45.2	54.8	21.26 (0.000)
Pupils with no mother alive (605)	51.2	48.8	71.4930 (0.000)
Pupils with no father alive (1,819)	49.7	50.3	198.03 (0.000)
Pupils who live with a caregiver rather than parent (1,279)	47.3	52.7	82.76 (0.000)
Overall across the districts (8,684)	35.9	64.1	299.36 (0.000)

Source: Compiled based on primary sample (2024)

Measures of association analysis were conducted on some key attributes using the chi-square correlation test to establish the extent of the relationship between transition to secondary education (or otherwise) and the attributes in question (Table 2). Overall, across the seven districts that were studied, there was a significant association with transition as reported by $\chi^2 = 6.083$ (p -value = 0.014), which implies location is a predictor of transition. Further, the analysis also showed a significant association between the nationality of the learners and transition to secondary education as evidenced by $\chi^2 = 299.36$ (p -value = 0.000). Some more significant associations are noted between the transition to access scholarship-supported education and pupils with chronic illness ($\chi^2 = 46.2$, p -value = 0.000), pupils with forms of disability ($\chi^2 = 21.26$, p -value = 0.000), pupils with no living mother ($\chi^2 = 71.49$, p -value = 0.000), and pupils that live with a caregiver rather than a parent ($\chi^2 = 82.76$, p -value = 0.000). These findings resonate with the study findings by Smith et al. (2008) and Chen and Gregory (2009) about the transition challenges attributed to ill health conditions, disability, and the socio-economic well-being of learners as well as the home-dwelling conditions of the caregivers. It is also argued that the presence of a disability or illness among learners may have a direct impact on their social skills, self-esteem, and coping inadequacies that are a source of poor academic achievement. Thus, in these circumstances, scholarship-supported education would be a suitable strategy to guarantee and support transition (West, Sweeting, and Young 2010).

Correlates of Girls' Transition to Secondary Level for Scholarship-Supported Education

The logistic model results, measuring direct partial effects, are presented in Table 3. Overall, it is observed that effect sizes and signs largely remain the same after controlling for heterogeneities attributed to the districts' differences.

Table 3: Correlates of girls' transition to secondary level for scholarship-supported education

Variable	Odds Ratio	Std. Err.	P>z	Odds Ratio	Std. Err.	P>z
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Non-national (yes=1)	0.917	0.068	0.245	1.085	0.088	0.314
Pupil motivation to transition (yes=1)	1.186	0.279	0.468	0.966	0.232	0.884
Age (years)	0.890	0.012	0.000	0.909	0.013	0.000
Mother alive (yes=1)	0.682	0.063	0.000	0.716	0.068	0.000
Father alive (yes=1)	0.519	0.029	0.000	0.524	0.030	0.000
Living with a parent (yes=1)	0.796	0.056	0.001	0.772	0.055	0.000
Pupil with ill health (yes=1)	1.939	0.209	0.000	1.901	0.210	0.000
Pupil with forms of disabilities (yes=1)	1.328	0.122	0.002	1.316	0.123	0.003
District dummies (Adjumani)						
Kitgum				1.021	0.082	0.797
Lamwo				1.503	0.123	0.000
Madi-Okollo				0.750	0.105	0.040
Nebbi				1.262	0.140	0.036
Oyam				0.633	0.052	0.000
Yumbe				1.906	0.145	0.000
Cons	8.996	3.109	0.000	5.852	2.073	0.000
N	8,640			8,640		
Likelihood Ratio χ^2	360.13			611.72		
Prob. χ^2	0.000			0.000		
Pseudo R ²	0.032			0.054		

Source: Compiled based on primary sample (2024)

For the purpose of deriving the implications of the model, interpretation will relate to results in columns (5) and (7), respectively. The overall model fit is reported by p -value = 0.000 of the chi-square test statistic, $\chi^2 = 611.7$, indicating the model is correctly specified, and with the explanatory power of the regressors as 5.4%. The age of the learner is a key influential factor on transition because it is linked to feminine character and bodily changes, especially for girls. The results of the partial slopes largely reveal that one year added to the student's age reduces the odds of transition by 0.091, which largely means the transition eligibility for scholarship-supported education was favourable to the appropriate age category of the learners. The finding is in keeping with the study by Ayiga, Akena Adyanga, and Akello (2024), which revealed that learner transition was associated with age, marital status, and to some extent the grade. Further, students whose mothers or fathers were alive had a reduction, by 1% significance level,

in the odds to transition for scholarship-supported education by 0.284 and 0.476, respectively. This implies that orphaned students were preferred for eligibility for the scholarship-supported education. This is linked to the fact that the orphanhood of a learner is associated with low self-esteem and physical depression that can result in changes in learning attitude and thus poor transition (Sancho and Cline 2012).

Conversely, students with ill health conditions as well as those who had forms of disabilities had significant, at 1%, increases in the odds of transitioning for grant-supported schooling in secondary education, at 0.901 and 0.316, respectively. Again, the eligibility seemed favourable to students who were disabled and suffered from chronically ill health in the target districts. The results also resonate with the finding that health problems in learners can be averted with the necessary support from the school environment, peers, and educators (De Wit et al. 2011). The results are further reinforced with the finding that ill health conditions and disability issues affect the learners' attitudes and expectations, and thus there is a need for support at secondary level education. Some studies point to the fact that support levels may vary depending on the severity of disability, as the severity of disability may pose challenges to internalise and externalise knowledge, behaviour, and emotion (Maras and Aveling 2006). There are notable disparities in correlates of transition for scholarship-supported education opportunities at secondary level as presented in Table 3. The findings reveal that compared to students in Adjumani district, learners from Lamwo, Nebbi, and Yumbe districts recorded significant (at 1% and 5%) increases in odds, by 0.503, 0.262, and 0.906, respectively, to transition for scholarship-supported schooling. Contrarily, the students from Madi-Okollo and Oyam districts recorded significant reduction in odds by 0.25 and 0.367, respectively. No significant changes in odds were noted between Adjumani and Kitgum districts, largely because the two districts registered nearly the same sample of learner candidates as well as nearly similar transition rates of 35.2% and 33.7%, respectively.

Table 4: Correlates of girls' transition with interaction effects

Variable	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	Odds Ratio	Std. Err.	Odds Ratio	Std. Err.	Odds Ratio	Std. Err.
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Non-national (yes=1)	0.811*	0.098	0.806*	0.097	0.792*	0.095
Pupil motivation to transition (yes=1)	0.957	0.229	0.960	0.230	0.952	0.228
Age (years)	0.909***	0.013	0.909***	0.013	0.909***	0.013
Mother alive (yes=1)	0.715***	0.068	0.713***	0.067	0.816	0.107
Father alive (yes=1)	0.342***	0.049	0.342***	0.049	0.531***	0.094
Living with a parent (yes=1)	0.768***	0.056	0.760***	0.056	1.758***	0.322
Pupil with ill health (yes=1)	1.714**	0.456	1.899***	0.210	1.883***	0.208
Pupil with forms of disabilities (yes=1)	1.311***	0.122	1.126	0.216	1.317***	0.123
District dummies (Adjumani)						
Kitgum	1.016	0.082	1.018	0.082	1.011	0.082
Lamwo	1.491***	0.122	1.494***	0.122	1.522***	0.125
Madi-Okollo	0.740**	0.103	0.743**	0.104	0.727**	0.102
Nebbi	1.247**	0.138	1.248**	0.138	1.246**	0.138
Oyam	0.629***	0.052	0.630***	0.052	0.634***	0.053
Yumbe	1.904***	0.145	1.904***	0.145	1.896***	0.145
Nationality*father alive	1.652***	0.254	1.655***	0.254	1.720***	0.265
Living with parent*Ill health	1.130	0.329				
Living with parent*disability			1.218	0.267		
Living with parent*mother alive					0.595***	0.114
Living with parent*father alive					0.529***	0.073
Constant	7.556***	2.743	7.670***	2.789	5.644***	2.073
N	8,640		8,640		8,640	
Likelihood Ratio χ^2	622.69		623.33		656.64	
Prob. χ^2	0.000		0.000		0.000	
Pseudo R ²	0.055		0.055		0.058	

Source: Compiled based on primary sample (2024)

Again, the results in Table 4 summarise the three models that measure both direct and interaction effects. Overall, the diagnostic tests for the three models reveal correct specification of the regressions with a predictive power averaging 5.5%. The interaction effects provide a deeper understanding of the source of correlations on the outcome. The interaction effect of the nationality of the student with the father alive is positive and significant (by 1%), implying significance in odds to transition by 0.652, 0.655, and

0.720 across the three models, respectively. Moreover, the interaction improves the significance of the direct effect of the nationality dummy to become significant at 10%, and thus non-national students are about 20% less likely to transition for scholarship-supported schooling compared to nationals (Models 1–3). This largely means the refugee students who stay with their fathers are less likely to transition for scholarship-supported education compared to nationals living with their father. Further, when both parents of students are alive, and when they also live with them, it significantly (at 1%) reduces the likelihood by 0.405 and 0.471 of transition as compared to those students staying with caregivers. It is worth noting that the interaction effect of having either parent alive and also living with them reduces the significance level of having a mother alive to make it insignificant (model 3). Conversely, the students staying with caregivers were favourable for eligibility for transition.

The interaction effect of disability and those living with a parent is positive but insignificant, which also affects the direct effect of forms of disability to become insignificant (model 2). Rather, the direct effects across the three models attributed to having a father alive, living with a parent rather than caregiver, and pupil ill health conditions maintain the same effect signs, with corresponding significance levels but with minimal deviations across the models. Likewise, the differential slopes attributed to district dummies of Lamwo, Nebbi, and Yumbe remain significant to increase the likelihood of transition, while Oyam and Madi-Okollo district slope coefficients also remain significant but reduce the odds of transitioning to scholarship-supported secondary education, respectively, as presented in Table 4. The results presented point to the fact that the state of living without parents and thus without parental support plays a role in the learners' ability to transition for scholarship-supported education. Largely, learners with no attachment to parents experience emotional challenges, feel less secure, more fear, and are therefore stressed during the learning experience. The scholarship was therefore a guarantee of their transition. Further, when a learner perceives that fitting into a secondary education environment would give her acceptance it is a predictor of successful transitioning. The larger school environment provides opportunities for learners to exploit and develop peer relations and improve forward-looking attitudes and excitement, thus improving a sense of belonging (Curson, Wilson-Smith, and Holliman 2019; Sancho and Cline 2012). In some contrary cases, learners with a low sense of belonging may feel alienated and this may result in poor learning, and ultimately they may drop out of school (Cueto et al. 2010).

Conclusion

This article aimed to assess the correlates of girls' transition to lower secondary school for scholarship-supported education in refugee-hosting districts in Uganda. The study generates evidence on the targeting mechanisms for social protection support and also demonstrates that targeting for eligibility is the fundamental process in project implementation. Even then, the scope of the targeting also matters. Some of the key indicators for eligibility were the age of the pupil, nationality, and the health and

disability status of the learner. Overall, there was a significant association between the transition to secondary education and the nationality of learners, pupils with chronic illness, and pupils with some forms of disability. The logistic results reveal that the age of the pupil, the orphanhood status of the student, and whether the learner's mother or father was alive are associated with transition for scholarship-supported education. All these indicators were favourably preferred for eligibility for scholarship-supported education. Thus, the eligibility criteria for transition to scholarship-supported education at secondary level takes into consideration socio-demographic factors as well as physical and health traits, and such contextualised targeting processes may be replicated in similar or related conditions of need for social protection initiatives.

Conflict of Interest Declaration

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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