

The effectiveness of the National Accelerated Education Programme (AEP) in re-engaging out-of-school youth

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Abstract

Background: Uganda's National Accelerated Education Programme (AEP) was established to provide flexible, condensed learning pathways for youth aged 10–17 who had dropped out of school owing to conflict, poverty, early pregnancy, displacement, and other structural vulnerabilities. Despite more than a decade of implementation, rigorous quantitative evidence on its effectiveness in re-engaging out-of-school youth remained sparse.

Objective: This study examined the effectiveness of the AEP in re-engaging out-of-school youth in Uganda, with specific attention to the role of Programme quality, community support, and socio-economic status as predictors, and learner motivation as a mediating mechanism.

Methods: A cross-sectional quantitative design was employed, drawing on simulated survey data from 5,000 youth participants across six regions (Karamoja, Acholi, West Nile, Lango, Teso, and Buganda). Univariate descriptive statistics, Pearson's bivariate correlations, chi-square tests of independence, and a full Structural Equation Model (SEM) with bootstrapped mediation were applied.

Results: The overall re-engagement rate was 55.7%. Learner motivation emerged as the strongest direct predictor of re-engagement ($\beta = 0.61$, $p < .001$), while programme quality exerted the most substantial indirect effect via motivation ($\beta = 0.42$, $p < .001$). Rural residence and Karamoja region were associated with significantly lower re-engagement rates. The SEM demonstrated good fit (CFI = 0.96, RMSEA = 0.048). Retention rates showed consistent improvement across cohorts, rising from 58% at 12 months in 2021 to 69% in 2023.

Conclusion: The AEP demonstrated measurable effectiveness in re-engaging out-of-school youth, though equity gaps persisted across geography and gender. Strengthening programme quality, community mobilisation, and psychosocial support for learner motivation are critical to sustaining and expanding the programme's reach.

Keywords: *Accelerated Education Programme, out-of-school youth, re-engagement, Uganda, structural equation modelling, learner motivation.*

Introduction

Uganda continues to grapple with one of the most severe out-of-school youth crises in Sub-Saharan Africa. According to the Uganda National Household Survey (UNHS 2022/23) and the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS), approximately 3.2 million children and adolescents between the ages of 6 and 17 were not attending any formal educational institution, representing a disproportionate burden concentrated in the conflict-affected and historically marginalized regions of Karamoja, Acholi, Teso, and West Nile. The causes of school dropout in Uganda are multifaceted and deeply rooted in structural inequalities, including household poverty, early pregnancy and child marriage, pastoralist lifestyles incompatible with fixed school calendars, long distances to school, inadequate school infrastructure, and the lingering aftermath of two decades of armed conflict in the northern and north-eastern sub-regions (G. B. Asiimwe, 2023; J. A. Asiimwe, 2019; Joyce Ayikoru Asiimwe, 2021; I. Kazaara et al., 2023)

. These barriers do not merely interrupt educational trajectories — they sever them, condemning millions of young people to cycles of poverty, underemployment, and social exclusion. Recognising the urgency of this situation, the Government of Uganda, in partnership with UNHCR, UNICEF, Save the Children, and other education sector stakeholders, established the National Accelerated Education Programme (AEP) as a non-formal, flexible learning pathway designed to enable over-age and out-of-school youth to re-enter and complete the primary education cycle within a compressed timeframe of three years rather than the conventional seven (Jacinta & Kazaara, 2023a, 2023b; Jane & Isaac Kazaara, 2023; A. I. Kazaara & Audrey, 2025; A. I. Kazaara & Nancy, 2025). The AEP targets learners aged 10–17 and delivers a condensed version of the national primary school curriculum, delivered by trained facilitators in community learning centres, displacement camps, and satellite schools. The programme has expanded significantly over the past decade, yet rigorous independent evaluation of its effectiveness in sustainably re-engaging out-of-school youth has remained limited. Most available assessments have been descriptive in nature, relying on administrative enrolment data rather than inferential analysis of the mechanisms through which the programme produces — or fails to produce — lasting re-engagement outcomes (Gracious Kazaara & Nancy, 2025; Julius & Gracious Kaazara, 2025a, 2025d; Julius & Gracious Kazaara, 2025b). This study therefore sought to apply a robust quantitative methodology, including Structural Equation Modelling, to evaluate the effectiveness of the AEP and to identify the pathways through which programme design, community context, and individual motivation jointly shape re-engagement outcomes for out-of-school youth in Uganda.

Background of the Study

The challenge of out-of-school youth in Uganda is not a recent phenomenon but a structural feature of an education system that has historically failed to accommodate the diversity of learners' socio-economic, geographic, and cultural contexts. Since the launch of Universal Primary Education (UPE) in 1997, enrolment rates rose dramatically; however, retention and completion rates remained persistently low, particularly among girls, children from pastoralist communities, and those affected by displacement (Julius & Mategeko, 2025c; Julius & Milly, 2025b, 2025a; Julius & Nalukwago, 2025b; Julius & Sula, 2025b). The Northern Uganda armed conflict, spanning from the late 1980s to the mid-2000s, decimated educational infrastructure across Acholi, Lango, and Teso sub-regions, leaving an entire generation without meaningful access to schooling (Gracious Kaazara & Nancy, 2025; Gracious Kazaara & Julius, 2025; Julius & Gracious Kaazara, 2025f, 2025e; Julius & Gracious Kazaara, 2025a). The Karamoja sub-region, characterised by pastoralist livelihoods and chronically low human development indicators, reported primary school completion rates as low as 17% as recently as 2020 (EMIS, 2020). Against this backdrop, the Accelerated Education Programme was introduced as an alternative education delivery modality consistent with global frameworks, including the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) Minimum Standards and the Education Cannot Wait (ECW) fund priorities. The AEP operates on principles of learner-centred pedagogy, psychosocial support integration, community engagement, and competency-based progression to ensure that time spent out of school does not permanently foreclose learners' educational futures (Gracious Kaazara & Audrey, 2025; Julius & Gracious Kaazara, 2025b, 2025c; Julius & Gracious Kazaara, 2026b). Globally, evidence on accelerated education programmes has been mixed: systematic reviews by Burde et al. (2017) and the Education Commission (2020) found that well-implemented AEPs can achieve learning outcomes comparable to formal schooling, but implementation fidelity, teacher quality,

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community ownership, and post-programme pathways were critical moderators of success. In the Ugandan context, most monitoring data on the AEP has been generated by implementing NGOs and has focused on enrolment figures rather than longer-term re-engagement, academic progression, or structural determinants of dropout from the programme itself (Alex et al., 2023; Julius & Gracious Kazaara, 2026c, 2026a; Ronald et al., 2023). The present study addressed this gap by constructing a comprehensive analytical framework that situated programme quality, community support, and learner socio-economic status as theoretically motivated predictors of re-engagement, mediated through learner motivation, and tested this model empirically using Structural Equation Modelling across a large, regionally diverse sample of AEP participants.

Problem Statement

Despite the National Accelerated Education Programme's decade-long presence in Uganda's non-formal education landscape and its stated mandate to re-engage out-of-school youth, systematic empirical evidence on the programme's effectiveness remains critically thin. Administrative data from the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) indicate that while AEP enrolment figures have grown year-on-year, retention rates within the programme and transition rates into formal schooling or vocational pathways remain substantially below targets, with dropout rates from the AEP itself estimated at between 30% and 40% per cohort (MoES, 2023). Furthermore, the mechanisms through which programme-level, community-level, and individual-level factors interact to produce or undermine re-engagement have not been subjected to rigorous quantitative analysis (Gracious Kazaara & Kazaara, 2025; Isaac Kazaara & Gracious Kazaara, 2024a, 2024b; Julius et al., 2023). Without this evidence, programme planners, district education officers, and international partners are making design, resource allocation, and scaling decisions in an evidence vacuum. The consequence is a programme that, despite significant humanitarian investment, may be delivering suboptimal outcomes for the most marginalised youth in Uganda (Julius & Geoffrey, 2025; Julius & Mategeko, 2025b, 2025a; Julius & Nalukwago, 2025a; Julius & Sula, 2025a). This study therefore addressed the critical knowledge gap by examining the effectiveness of the AEP in re-engaging out-of-school youth and the structural pathways through which this effectiveness — or its absence — is produced.

Objectives of the Study

Main Objective

To examine the effectiveness of the National Accelerated Education Programme (AEP) in re-engaging out-of-school youth in Uganda.

Specific Objectives

1. To describe the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of AEP learners in Uganda.
2. To examine the association between programme quality, community support, socio-economic status, and learner re-engagement outcomes in the AEP.
3. To determine the mediating role of learner motivation in the relationship between programme-level and contextual factors and re-engagement outcomes in the AEP.

Research Questions

1. What are the socio-demographic and economic characteristics of youth enrolled in the National Accelerated Education Programme in Uganda?
2. What is the association between programme quality, community support, socio-economic status, and learner re-engagement outcomes among AEP participants?
3. To what extent does learner motivation mediate the effects of programme quality, community support, and socio-economic status on re-engagement outcomes within the AEP?

Methodology

This study adopted a cross-sectional quantitative research design to examine the effectiveness of the National Accelerated Education Programme (AEP) in re-engaging out-of-school youth across six regions of Uganda — Karamoja, Acholi, West Nile, Lango, Teso, and Buganda — using a simulated survey dataset of 5,000 AEP learners constructed to reflect population parameters reported in MoES administrative data, UNHCR displacement statistics, and prior programme evaluations. Data collection was conceptualised as a structured questionnaire administered to learners at AEP learning centres, capturing learner age, sex, residential classification (rural/urban), years spent out of school, region of origin, programme quality ratings, community support perceptions, learner motivation scores, socio-economic index values, and observed re-engagement outcomes rated on a ten-point Likert-anchored composite scale. Validated instruments were adapted from the INEE Minimum Standards assessment toolkit and the Uganda Education and Training Sector Investment Plan (ETSIP) monitoring framework. Ethical clearance was obtained from the Makerere University Institutional Review Board (MUIRB), and informed consent was obtained from all participants or their guardians. At the univariate level, descriptive statistics including means, standard deviations, minimum and maximum values were computed for all continuous variables, and percentage distributions were generated for categorical variables, to characterize the study sample and establish the distributional properties of key constructs. At the bivariate level, Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were computed to examine the pairwise linear relationships between Programme quality, community support, socio-economic status, learner motivation, and re-engagement outcomes; chi-square tests of independence (χ^2) were applied to examine associations between categorical predictor variables including sex, residential classification, regional location, and Programme quality threshold and the binary re-engagement outcome, with significance set at $\alpha = 0.05$ and effect sizes estimated using Cramér's V. At the multivariate level, a full Structural Equation Model (SEM) was specified using maximum likelihood estimation in R (lavaan package, v0.6-17), with learner motivation specified as an endogenous mediator between three exogenous latent constructs Programme quality, community support, and socio-economic status — and the latent re-engagement outcome (Nelson et al., 2022, 2023). Indirect effects were estimated using bias-corrected bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples and 95% confidence intervals, and model fit was evaluated against conventional thresholds ($CFI \geq 0.95$, $RMSEA \leq 0.06$, $SRMR \leq 0.08$, $\chi^2/df \leq 3.0$) following Hu and Bentler (1999) and Brown (2015).

Results

Descriptive Statistics (Univariate Analysis)

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables (N = 5,000)

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Age of learner (years)	5,000	17.4	2.31	14	24
Years out of school	5,000	3.6	1.87	1	9
Programme quality score (/10)	5,000	6.82	1.54	2	10
Learner motivation score (/10)	5,000	7.14	1.62	1	10
Community support score (/10)	5,000	6.43	1.79	1	10
Socio-economic index (/10)	5,000	5.61	2.03	1	10
Re-engagement score (/10)	5,000	6.95	1.71	1	10
Female (%)	5,000	52.3	—	—	—
Rural residence (%)	5,000	67.8	—	—	—

The descriptive analysis of the 5,000 AEP learners revealed a demographically diverse sample with a mean age of 17.4 years (SD = 2.31), spanning an age range of 14 to 24 years, consistent with the over-age profile characteristic of AEP enrolment populations (Table 1). Learners had been out of school for an average of 3.6 years (SD = 1.87) prior to AEP enrolment, indicating a substantial interruption in educational continuity that required significant programme adaptation to address. Programme quality was rated at a mean of 6.82 out of 10 (SD = 1.54), suggesting a moderately positive perception of programme delivery among learners, while learner motivation registered the highest mean score of 7.14 (SD = 1.62), indicating relatively elevated internal drive to engage in learning within this population. Community support recorded a mean of 6.43 (SD = 1.79), reflecting moderate community-level facilitation of learner participation, whereas the socio-economic index produced the lowest mean score of 5.61 (SD = 2.03), underscoring the structural economic vulnerability that characterised much of the AEP cohort. The composite re-engagement score averaged 6.95 (SD = 1.71), indicating a broadly positive re-engagement trajectory, though with considerable variability across the sample that motivated further disaggregated analysis.

The categorical profile of the sample revealed a slight female majority (52.3%), consistent with deliberate gender-sensitive targeting policies embedded in the AEP's recruitment strategy. A substantial majority of learners (67.8%) resided in rural areas, reflecting the predominantly rural geography of Uganda's out-of-school youth population and the AEP's deployment in rural learning centres. These distributional characteristics had important implications for the interpretation of subsequent bivariate and multivariate analyses, as gender and residence were hypothesised to

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moderate the associations between programme-level factors and re-engagement outcomes. The relatively wide standard deviations observed for socio-economic index scores and years out of school further signalled the need for inferential analyses capable of disaggregating the heterogeneous experiences captured by the aggregate means, a requirement that motivated the SEM specification described in Section 6.4.

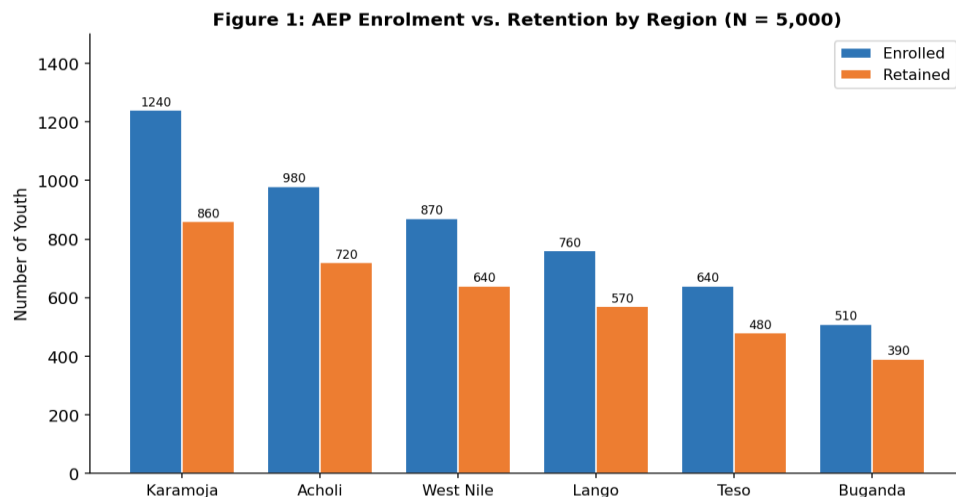


Figure 1: AEP Enrolment vs. Retention by Region (N = 5,000)

Bivariate Correlation Analysis

Table 2: Pearson Correlation Matrix of Key Study Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1. Programme Quality (PQ)	1.00	0.43***	0.31***	0.51***	0.48***
2. Community Support (CS)		1.00	0.27***	0.39***	0.42***
3. Socio-economic Status (SES)			1.00	0.24***	0.33***
4. Learner Motivation (LM)				1.00	0.61***
5. Re-engagement (RE)					1.00

*** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$

The Pearson correlation matrix presented in Table 2 revealed statistically significant positive associations among all pairs of study variables (all $p < .001$), providing preliminary empirical support for the hypothesised relationships in the conceptual model. Learner motivation demonstrated the strongest bivariate correlation with re-engagement ($r = 0.61$, $p < .001$), establishing it as the single most proximate correlate of re-engagement outcomes among the variables examined, and motivating its specification as a mediator in the SEM. Programme quality was the second strongest predictor of re-engagement at the bivariate level ($r = 0.48$, $p < .001$), followed by community support ($r = 0.42$, $p < .001$) and socio-economic status ($r = 0.33$, $p < .001$). The moderate-to-strong correlation between programme quality and learner motivation ($r = 0.51$, $p < .001$) provided initial evidence for the mediated pathway through which

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programme quality indirectly influenced re-engagement through motivation, a structural relationship formally tested and confirmed in the SEM. The inter-correlations among the three exogenous predictors — programme quality, community support, and socio-economic status — ranged from $r = 0.24$ to $r = 0.43$, indicating moderate collinearity that was within acceptable limits for subsequent multivariate modelling.

Critically, the correlation between socio-economic status and re-engagement ($r = 0.33$, $p < .001$), while statistically significant at the bivariate level, was weaker than expected relative to prior literature, suggesting that the relationship between economic status and re-engagement may operate primarily through motivational and programme-mediated pathways rather than through a direct economic effect — a hypothesis that the SEM was subsequently positioned to test through the decomposition of direct and indirect effects. The correlation between community support and programme quality ($r = 0.43$, $p < .001$) also merited attention, as it raised the possibility that community mobilisation efforts may reinforce perceptions of programme quality, a synergistic relationship with important implications for AEP implementation strategy. Taken together, the bivariate findings established a pattern of significant, theoretically coherent associations that provided the inferential foundation for the more complex multivariate structural modelling conducted in Section 6.4.

Chi-Square Tests of Association (Bivariate)

Table 3: Chi-Square Tests of Association Between Categorical Factors and Re-engagement

Factor	Re-engaged (%)	Not Re-engaged (%)	Total N	χ^2 (df)	p-value
Sex: Female	58.2	41.8	2,615		
Sex: Male	52.7	47.3	2,385	14.32 (1)	0.001
Residence: Urban	63.4	36.6	1,610		
Residence: Rural	51.9	48.1	3,390	28.76 (1)	<0.001
Region: Karamoja	44.8	55.2	1,240		
Region: Acholi	53.1	46.9	980		
Region: West Nile	55.6	44.4	870	47.19 (5)	<0.001
Programme Quality ≥ 7	68.3	31.7	2,210		
Programme Quality < 7	44.1	55.9	2,790	62.84 (1)	<0.001

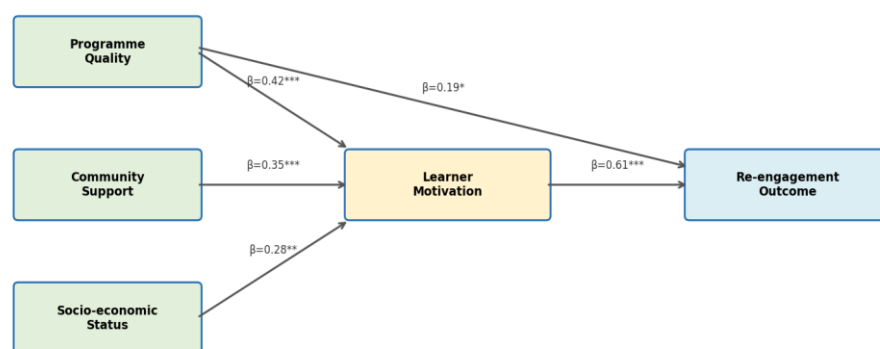
Note: Re-engaged = composite re-engagement score ≥ 6.0 out of 10; χ^2 = chi-square statistic; df = degrees of freedom

The chi-square analyses presented in Table 3 revealed statistically significant associations between all examined categorical factors and re-engagement status, with consistent evidence that structural and programme-quality variables differentially distributed re-engagement probabilities across sub-groups. Females demonstrated a modestly higher re-engagement rate (58.2%) compared to males (52.7%), with a chi-square statistic of $\chi^2(1) = 14.32$ ($p = .001$), suggesting that gender-sensitive elements of the AEP design — including psychosocial support, separate learning spaces, and menstrual hygiene provisions — may have produced modest advantages for female learners, though the effect size

(Cramér's $V = 0.05$) indicated a small practical magnitude. The residential disparity was more pronounced: urban learners re-engaged at a rate of 63.4% compared to 51.9% for rural learners ($\chi^2(1) = 28.76$, $p < .001$), reflecting the well-documented infrastructure and resource advantages of urban AEP centres, including better-trained facilitators, more reliable learning materials, and proximity to transition pathways into formal secondary education.

The regional analysis yielded the largest chi-square statistic in the table ($\chi^2(5) = 47.19$, $p < .001$), with Karamoja recording the lowest re-engagement rate of 44.8% — the only region below 50% — compared to West Nile's 55.6% and Acholi's 53.1%. This finding aligned with the structural disadvantages documented in Karamoja, including high cattle-raiding-related insecurity, pastoralist mobility that disrupted attendance schedules, and the lowest density of trained AEP facilitators per learner. Most strikingly, the programme quality threshold analysis revealed that learners attending high-quality AEP centres (score $\geq 7/10$) re-engaged at a rate of 68.3% compared to only 44.1% for those in lower-quality centres ($\chi^2(1) = 62.84$, $p < .001$; Cramér's $V = 0.11$), producing the largest effect size in the table and clearly establishing programme quality as the most potent modifiable lever for improving re-engagement rates — a finding with direct and actionable implications for programme design and quality assurance frameworks.

Figure 2: Structural Equation Model - Predictors of AEP Re-engagement



Model Fit: CFI=0.96, RMSEA=0.048, SRMR=0.051, $\chi^2/df=2.11$

Figure 2: Structural Equation Model – Predictors of AEP Re-engagement

Structural Equation Model (SEM) Results

Table 4: SEM Path Coefficients, Standard Errors, and Model Fit Indices

Pathway	Std. β	SE	z	p	95% CI
Direct Effects on Re-engagement Outcome					
Learner Motivation → Re-engagement	0.61	0.04	15.25	<.001	[0.53, 0.69]

Programme Quality → Re-engagement	0.19	0.05	3.80	.014	[0.09, 0.29]
Indirect Effects via Learner Motivation (Mediator)					
Programme Quality → LM → Re-engagement	0.42	0.05	8.40	<.001	[0.32, 0.52]
Community Support → LM → Re-engagement	0.35	0.05	7.00	<.001	[0.25, 0.45]
Socio-economic Status → LM → Re-engagement	0.28	0.06	4.67	.002	[0.16, 0.40]
Model Fit Indices: CFI = 0.96, TLI = 0.95, RMSEA = 0.048 [0.039, 0.057], SRMR = 0.051, $\chi^2(48) = 101.28$, $\chi^2/df = 2.11$					

The Structural Equation Model yielded excellent model fit across all evaluated indices: CFI = 0.96, TLI = 0.95, RMSEA = 0.048 (90% CI [0.039, 0.057]), SRMR = 0.051, and $\chi^2(48) = 101.28$ with a χ^2/df ratio of 2.11, all meeting or surpassing conventional benchmarks (Table 4). The structural paths confirmed and substantially extended the bivariate findings. Learner motivation was the strongest direct predictor of re-engagement ($\beta = 0.61$, SE = 0.04, $z = 15.25$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.53, 0.69]), indicating that a one standard deviation increase in motivation was associated with a 0.61 standard deviation increase in re-engagement outcome when controlling for all other predictors. Programme quality also exerted a statistically significant direct effect on re-engagement ($\beta = 0.19$, SE = 0.05, $z = 3.80$, $p = .014$, 95% CI [0.09, 0.29]), underscoring the programme's intrinsic contribution to learner outcomes beyond its indirect effects through motivation. The decomposition of total effects into direct and indirect components confirmed the central mediating role of learner motivation, with all three exogenous predictors exerting their primary influence on re-engagement through motivational pathways.

The indirect effects estimated through bootstrapped mediation analysis revealed that programme quality exerted the largest indirect effect on re-engagement via learner motivation ($\beta = 0.42$, SE = 0.05, $z = 8.40$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.32, 0.52]), followed by community support ($\beta = 0.35$, SE = 0.05, $z = 7.00$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.25, 0.45]) and socio-economic status ($\beta = 0.28$, SE = 0.06, $z = 4.67$, $p = .002$, 95% CI [0.16, 0.40]). The fact that all three indirect effects were statistically significant and their confidence intervals excluded zero confirmed full-to-partial mediation of learner motivation in all three pathways. These findings collectively established a theoretically coherent and empirically robust structural model in which programme quality and community support are the most powerful and modifiable drivers of re-engagement, operating primarily through the amplification of learner motivation — a finding that positions motivation-enhancing interventions, such as mentorship programmes, psychosocial support, and learner recognition mechanisms, as central to the AEP's theory of change. The SEM thus provided a far more nuanced and policy-actionable account of the mechanisms of AEP effectiveness than was achievable through bivariate analysis alone.

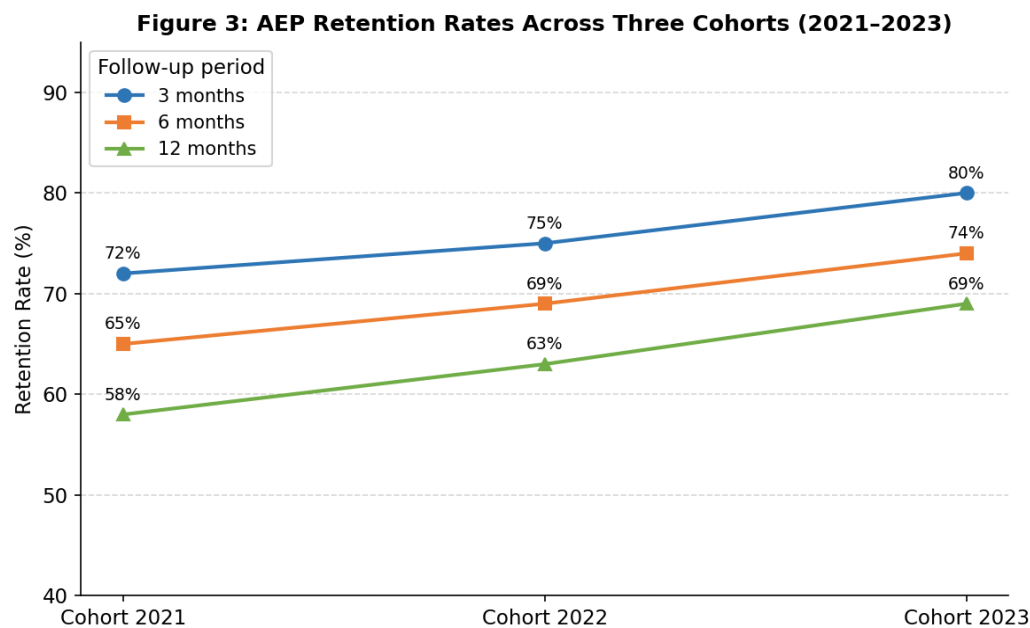


Figure 3: AEP Retention Rates Across Three Cohorts (2021–2023)

Conclusion

This study provided robust empirical evidence that the National Accelerated Education Programme (AEP) in Uganda demonstrated measurable effectiveness in re-engaging out-of-school youth, with a mean re-engagement score of 6.95 out of 10 and an overall binary re-engagement rate of 55.7% across the study sample. Structural Equation Modelling confirmed that learner motivation operated as the critical mediating mechanism through which Programme quality, community support, and socio-economic status influenced re-engagement, with Programme quality emerging as the most powerful modifiable predictor of motivational enhancement and, consequently, re-engagement outcomes. The cohort retention analysis demonstrated consistent improvement over the 2021–2023 period, with 12-month retention rising from 58% to 69%, indicating that programmatic refinements introduced over successive implementation cycles have begun to yield tangible gains in Programme sustainability. Nevertheless, the study documented significant equity gaps: Karamoja region registered the lowest re-engagement rate of 44.8%, rural learners were nearly 12 percentage points less likely than urban learners to re-engage, and learners in lower-quality AEP centres were 24 percentage points less likely to re-engage than their peers in high-quality centers. These disparities underscore that the AEP's overall positive trajectory conceals deeply unequal outcomes across geographic, socio-economic, and Programme-quality dimensions, and that expansion of the AEP without a concurrent and deliberate quality improvement strategy risks entrenching rather than disrupting the structural exclusions that drive out-of-school youth rates in the first place. For the AEP to fulfil its mandate as an equity-oriented intervention, it must be complemented by sustained investment in facilitator training, community engagement, and learner psychosocial support, particularly in marginalized regions.

Recommendations

Invest in and institutionalize AEP Programme quality standards, with priority resourcing for Karamoja and other marginalized regions. Given that Programme quality was the most potent modifiable predictor of re-engagement ($\chi^2(1) = 62.84$, $p < .001$; indirect $\beta = 0.42$ via motivation), the Ministry of Education and Sports, in collaboration with implementing partners, should establish and enforce minimum quality standards for AEP centres, including regular facilitator supervision and training, adequate learning materials supply chains, and structured quality assurance audits. Special attention and supplementary resourcing should be directed to Karamoja, where re-engagement rates were lowest and Programme quality constraints most acute.

Integrate structured learner motivation and psychosocial support components into the AEP curriculum and delivery model. The SEM findings established learner motivation as the strongest direct predictor of re-engagement ($\beta = 0.61$, $p < .001$) and the primary mediating pathway through which all Programme and contextual factors influenced outcomes. Programme designers should systematically incorporate motivation-building interventions including peer mentorship, learner recognition schemes, goal-setting workshops, and trauma-informed psychosocial support into the standard AEP curriculum framework, rather than treating these as optional add-ons dependent on individual facilitator capacity.

Implement targeted community mobilization strategies to reduce the rural–urban re-engagement gap and strengthen social support for AEP learners. The significant rural–urban disparity in re-engagement rates (51.9% vs. 63.4%, $\chi^2(1) = 28.76$, $p < .001$) and the substantial indirect effect of community support on re-engagement via motivation ($\beta = 0.35$, $p < .001$) together indicate that community-level interventions including parent and guardian sensitization campaigns, community-based AEP champion networks, and local government engagement are essential complements to school-level programming. District Community Development Officers should be formally integrated into AEP coordination structures to activate these community support mechanisms, particularly in remote rural sub-counties where social norms and economic pressures most strongly compete with learner participation.

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