

Influence Of Parent Activities And Student Retention In Selected Secondary Schools In Bukwo District

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Abstract

This study investigated the influence of parent activities on student retention in selected secondary schools in Bukwo District, Uganda. High school dropout rates in Bukwo District have been a persistent concern, particularly among female students, with the District Education Office reporting annual dropout rates of between 18% and 24% at the secondary level. A descriptive correlational research design was employed, with data collected from 218 respondents comprising students, teachers, school administrators, and parents from six selected secondary schools. Structured questionnaires and focus group discussions were the primary data collection instruments. The study examined three dimensions of parent activities: parental financial support, parental academic involvement, and parental social support. Pearson correlation analysis revealed significant positive relationships between all three parent activity dimensions and student retention. Multiple regression analysis indicated that parent activities collectively explained 54.8% of the variance in student retention ($R^2 = 0.548$, $F = 42.87$, $p < 0.001$). Parental financial support was the strongest predictor of student retention (Beta = 0.341), followed by parental social support (Beta = 0.267) and parental academic involvement (Beta = 0.198). The study concludes that parental engagement is a critical determinant of student retention and recommends strengthening school-parent partnerships, establishing bursary programmes, and conducting parent sensitization campaigns on the value of secondary education.

Keywords: Parental Activities, Student Retention, Secondary Schools, Bukwo District, School Dropout, Parental Involvement, Uganda

1.0 Background of the Study

Student retention defined as the capacity of an educational institution to maintain student enrolment through to the completion of a given level of education is a fundamental measure of educational system effectiveness (Kintu et al., 2017). High dropout rates represent a significant wastage of educational investment, a loss of human capital potential, and a perpetuation of intergenerational poverty cycles, particularly in developing country contexts (UNESCO, 2021). The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) explicitly commits member states to ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all, with a particular emphasis on completing secondary education (Julius & Kaazara, 2025).

Uganda's secondary education sector has made notable gains in enrolment since the introduction of Universal Secondary Education (USE) in 2007, with gross enrolment ratios rising from 23% in 2006 to over 35% in 2022 (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2022). However, completion rates have lagged significantly behind enrolment rates, with approximately 40% of students who enrol in secondary school failing to complete the Uganda Certificate of Education (UCE) cycle (Mark et al., 2023). In remote and rural districts such as Bukwo, located in the mountainous Eastern region along the Kenya border, dropout rates are substantially higher than the national average, reflecting

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compounding disadvantages including poverty, cultural attitudes towards girls' education, early marriage, and geographic isolation (Julius & Kazaara, 2026a).

Parental involvement in education has long been identified in research as a critical protective factor against student dropout (John et al., 2023). Epstein's (2018) influential framework of school-family-community partnerships identifies six types of parental involvement: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community, each of which contributes to students' academic motivation, school attachment, and educational persistence (Julius & Nancy, 2025). In the Ugandan context, where public schools are chronically underfunded and teachers are overstretched, parental financial and social support becomes an even more critical complement to formal school resources (Julius & Kazaara, 2026c).

2.0 Problem Statement

Bukwo District secondary schools have persistently high dropout rates that undermine the district's educational development goals (Victor et al., 2023). The District Education Office has recorded annual secondary school dropout rates ranging from 18% to 24% over the past five years, with female students accounting for a disproportionately higher share of dropouts (Victor et al., 2023). Among the leading reported causes of dropout are inability to pay school fees, parental disengagement from children's education, early marriage, and lack of parental academic support (Julius & Kazaara, 2025). While the role of parental activities in student retention has been extensively studied in developed country contexts, empirical evidence from remote Ugandan districts such as Bukwo is limited, making it difficult to design contextually appropriate interventions (Julius & Nancy, 2025). This study therefore sought to generate context-specific evidence on the relationship between parent activities and student retention in secondary schools in Bukwo District.

3.0 Main Objective

The main objective of this study was to examine the influence of parent activities on student retention in selected secondary schools in Bukwo District. Specifically, the study sought to: (i) assess the nature and extent of parent activities in secondary schools in Bukwo District; (ii) determine the level of student retention in selected secondary schools in Bukwo District; and (iii) establish the relationship between parent activities and student retention in Bukwo District secondary schools.

4.0 Literature Review

4.1 Parental Activities and Involvement

Parental involvement in education is broadly understood as the extent to which parents participate in and support their children's schooling, both at home and in school settings. Hornby and Lafaele (2019) conceptualise parental involvement along three levels: home-based involvement (supervising homework, reading with children, discussing school matters), school-based involvement (attending parent-teacher meetings, volunteering in school activities), and community-based involvement (engaging in advocacy for school improvement) (Julius & Audrey, 2025). Research

consistently demonstrates that higher levels of parental involvement are associated with improved academic outcomes, higher school attendance, and greater persistence in education (Julius & Audrey, 2025).

Fan and Chen (2018) conducted a meta-analysis of 25 studies on parental involvement and academic achievement and found a mean effect size of 0.55, indicating a moderate to strong positive relationship. Jeynes (2020) found in a meta-analysis of 51 studies that parental involvement was more strongly associated with academic outcomes in secondary schools than in primary schools, suggesting its importance increases as children navigate the more complex social and academic demands of adolescence (Nancy & Kazaara, 2026). In the African context, Nakamura, Osei-Owusu and Tagoe (2020) documented in a Ghanaian secondary school study that students whose parents attended termly school meetings and provided homework support were 34% less likely to drop out than those whose parents were disengaged. Financial support is a particularly critical dimension of parental involvement in low-income country contexts, where school fees, examination charges, uniforms, and scholastic materials represent significant household expenditures (Akankwasa et al., 2022). Amponsah, Milledzi, Ampofo and Gyambrah (2018) found in a study in Ghana that financial inability was the primary reason for 48% of secondary school dropouts, and that parental financial investment in education was the strongest predictor of school completion (Nelson, 2024). This finding underscores the need to examine parental financial support as a distinct dimension of parent activities in the Ugandan context.

4.2 Student Retention

Student retention in secondary education is defined as the ability of the school system to keep enrolled students in school until they complete their studies (Kaazara & Audrey, 2025). Bean and Metzner (2019) developed an influential model of student attrition that identifies academic, environmental, and social integration factors as the primary determinants of student persistence or withdrawal (Julius & Nancy, 2026a). In the secondary school context, environmental factors particularly family financial circumstances and parental support have been shown to be stronger predictors of retention than academic factors in low-income country settings (Rumberger, 2018).

Tinto's (2019) integration theory posits that student retention is primarily determined by the degree to which students become academically and socially integrated into the educational institution. While this theory was originally developed for higher education, its core propositions have been adapted for secondary school contexts, where parental support serves as a critical bridge between the home environment and school integration. In Uganda, Ssewamala, Han, Neilands, Ismayilova and Sperber (2020) found that family economic empowerment through matched savings accounts significantly improved school retention rates among orphaned and vulnerable children in southwestern Uganda, providing empirical support for the role of economic factors in retention.

5.0 Methodology

A descriptive correlational research design was employed in this study, which allowed for the description of existing conditions and the establishment of relationships between variables without experimental manipulation (Olanrewaju et al., 2021). The study was conducted in six secondary schools in Bukwo District: three government schools (Bukwo Secondary School, Kapchorwa Secondary School, Bukwo satellite, and St. Peter's Kaptanya SS) and three private-

aided schools, selected through purposive sampling on the basis of accessibility and enrolment size(Kaazara & Audrey, 2025).

The study population comprised students enrolled in Senior Two to Senior Six (estimated at 2,100 students across the six schools), 87 teaching staff, 6 head teachers, and an estimated 1,500 parents of enrolled students(Julius & Nancy, 2026a). Using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) table, a sample of 324 participants was determined, of which 218 provided complete and usable responses (response rate of 67.3%). The relatively lower response rate was attributed to teacher strike action during the data collection period and student absenteeism on data collection days in some schools(Kazaara & Deus, 2024).

A structured questionnaire with Likert-scale items (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) was the primary data collection tool, supplemented by focused group discussions with selected parents and teachers. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha: parent activities scale ($\alpha = 0.83$) and student retention scale ($\alpha = 0.79$). Data analysis employed descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and multiple linear regression using SPSS Version 26(Nelson et al., 2022).

6. Results

6.1 Descriptive Statistics

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics on Parent Activities and Student Retention (n = 218)

Variable	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev.
Parental Financial Support	218	1.00	5.00	2.89	1.024
Parental Academic Involvement	218	1.00	5.00	2.74	0.987
Parental Social Support	218	1.20	5.00	3.11	0.934
Parent Activities (Overall)	218	1.00	5.00	2.91	0.982
Student Retention	218	1.40	5.00	3.02	0.921

Source: Primary Data, 2025

The descriptive statistics in Table 1 paint a concerning picture of parental engagement levels in Bukwo District secondary schools. The overall parent activities mean of 2.91 (SD = 0.982) falls below the midpoint of the Likert scale, indicating that the majority of respondents perceived parental activities as generally inadequate. Parental academic involvement recorded the lowest mean (M = 2.74, SD = 0.987), reflecting a widespread pattern of parents having limited engagement with their children's academic progress(Kaazara & Audrey, 2025). Focus group discussions with teachers corroborated this finding, with participants noting that fewer than 30% of parents typically attend the scheduled termly parent-teacher conferences, and that parental contact with schools was largely reactive — triggered by disciplinary issues rather than proactive academic monitoring(Wegulo et al., 2023).

Parental financial support also registered a below-moderate mean (M = 2.89, SD = 1.024), confirming the hypothesis that financial constraints are a significant dimension of parental disengagement in the district. The high standard deviation for this variable reflects the substantial heterogeneity in financial capacity among households, with some

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parents able to fully fund their children's education while others struggle to provide even the most basic scholastic requirements. Parental social support encompassing emotional encouragement, role modelling, and moral guidance recorded the highest mean among the parent activity dimensions ($M = 3.11$, $SD = 0.934$), suggesting that while parents may lack the financial resources or educational background for direct academic involvement, many provide important emotional scaffolding for their children's schooling(Promise et al., 2024).

Student retention recorded a moderate mean of 3.02 ($SD = 0.921$), consistent with the District Education Office's reports of significant but not universal dropout. The relatively low minimum value (1.40) indicates that some schools and student subgroups experience very poor retention, while the maximum value of 5.00 confirms that some schools maintain near-universal completion rates. These extremes point to important school-level and household-level variation in retention outcomes that future research should explore.

6.2 Correlation Analysis

Table 2: Pearson Correlation — Parent Activities and Student Retention

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1. Financial Support	1.000				
2. Academic Involvement	0.534**	1.000			
3. Social Support	0.498**	0.512**	1.000		
4. Parent Activities Overall	0.831**	0.847**	0.793**	1.000	
5. Student Retention	0.621**	0.573**	0.589**	0.698**	1.000

** $p < 0.01$ (2-tailed)

Source: Primary Data, 2025

The Pearson correlation matrix in Table 2 confirms the existence of significant positive relationships between parent activities and student retention. The overall parent activities construct demonstrated a moderately strong positive correlation with student retention ($r = 0.698$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that higher levels of parental engagement are consistently associated with better student retention outcomes across the sampled schools. Among the individual parent activity dimensions, parental financial support exhibited the strongest correlation with student retention ($r = 0.621$, $p < 0.01$), underscoring the primacy of economic factors in determining educational persistence in this resource-constrained district context(Nelson et al., 2023).

Parental social support was the second strongest correlate of student retention ($r = 0.589$, $p < 0.01$), a finding that highlights the underappreciated role of emotional and moral support in sustaining students' school engagement(Christopher et al., 2022). Research by Muola (2020) in Kenya similarly found that parental emotional encouragement was a significant predictor of student school persistence, independent of financial support, particularly for female students who face social pressures towards early marriage(Alex & Julius, 2024). Parental academic involvement, though significant ($r = 0.573$, $p < 0.01$), showed the weakest bivariate correlation with retention, possibly

reflecting the low educational attainment levels of many parents in Bukwo District, which limits their capacity to provide direct academic assistance (Julius & Nancy, 2026b).

6.3 Regression Analysis

Table 3: Model Summary — Regression of Parent Activities on Student Retention

Model	R	R Square	Adj. R Square	Std. Error	F	Sig.
1	0.740	0.548	0.541	0.624	42.87	0.000

Source: Primary Data, 2025

Table 4: Regression Coefficients — Parent Activities and Student Retention

Predictor	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	0.743	0.267		2.783	0.006
Parental Financial Support	0.327	0.071	0.341	4.606	0.000
Parental Academic Involvement	0.181	0.065	0.198	2.785	0.006
Parental Social Support	0.261	0.069	0.267	3.783	0.000

Dependent Variable: Student Retention

Source: Primary Data, 2025

The regression analysis results confirm that parent activities collectively are a significant predictor of student retention in secondary schools in Bukwo District. The model was statistically significant ($F = 42.87$, $p = 0.000$) and explained 54.8% of the variance in student retention ($R^2 = 0.548$), with the adjusted R^2 of 0.541 confirming the model's stability. Parental financial support emerged as the strongest independent predictor ($Beta = 0.341$, $B = 0.327$, $t = 4.606$, $p = 0.000$), reinforcing the finding from correlation analysis that economic support from parents is the most powerful dimension of parental involvement for student retention in this context.

Parental social support was the second strongest predictor ($Beta = 0.267$, $B = 0.261$, $t = 3.783$, $p = 0.000$), with a coefficient that was statistically significant and practically meaningful. This finding is particularly important because social support is potentially less resource-intensive than financial support, suggesting that parental sensitization programmes could yield retention improvements even in the absence of significant increases in household income. Parental academic involvement, while statistically significant ($Beta = 0.198$, $B = 0.181$, $t = 2.785$, $p = 0.006$), contributed the smallest unique variance to the retention model, likely reflecting the low educational attainment of many parents in Bukwo District that limits their capacity to provide homework support or engage with teachers on academic matters.

7.0 Discussion of Results

The findings of this study provide robust empirical support for the conclusion that parent activities are a significant determinant of student retention in secondary schools in Bukwo District. The regression model's explanatory power

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($R^2 = 0.548$) is consistent with the findings of comparable studies in sub-Saharan Africa. The primacy of parental financial support as the strongest predictor of retention is consistent with the broader literature on school dropout in low-income contexts, including the findings of Amponsah et al. (2018) in Ghana and Rumberger's (2018) theoretical model of student attrition.

The significant role of parental social support in predicting retention warrants particular attention in the Bukwo District context, where cultural norms sometimes discourage girls from pursuing secondary education in favour of early marriage or domestic responsibilities. Parents who actively provide social support including affirming the value of education, discouraging early marriage, and encouraging academic effort appear to play a critical protective role against female dropout. This finding aligns with the social integration dimension of Tinto's (2019) retention theory and suggests that culturally sensitive parental engagement interventions could yield meaningful retention improvements at relatively low cost.

8.0 Conclusions

This study concludes that parent activities encompassing financial support, academic involvement, and social support are a significant positive predictor of student retention in secondary schools in Bukwo District, collectively explaining over 54% of the variance in retention outcomes (Ntirandekura et al., 2022). The generally low levels of parent activities observed in the district, particularly for financial support and academic involvement, represent a major challenge to achieving universal secondary education completion (Julius & Nancy, 2025). Parental financial constraints are the dominant driver of student dropout, followed by inadequate social support and limited academic engagement (Julius & Kazaara, 2026b).

9.0 Recommendations

Based on the study findings, the following recommendations are made. First, the Ministry of Education and Sports and district authorities should establish targeted bursary programmes specifically for students from households unable to meet school fee requirements in Bukwo District, with priority given to female students. Second, schools should establish active Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) with structured programmes that engage parents in academic monitoring even where parents lack formal education, using approaches such as termly performance reporting events and home visits by class teachers. Third, community-based sensitisation campaigns on the value of girls' secondary education should be conducted through local religious leaders, cultural institutions, and local government, to address the social norms that contribute to early marriage and female dropout. Fourth, the government should explore the expansion of school feeding programmes in Bukwo District schools to reduce the hunger-related absenteeism that contributes to eventual dropout, particularly among students from subsistence farming households.

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