

A CROSS-SECTIONAL STUDY ON PARENTAL SUPPORT AND STUDENTS' RETENTION IN UNIVERSAL SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN CENTRAL DIVISION, KOTIDO MUNICIPALITY, UGANDA.

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ABSTRACT

Background

The Kotido District Education Ordinance aims to boost enrollment and retention by mobilizing local leaders to encourage school attendance. This study examined the relationship between parental Support and Student' retention in Universal Secondary Schools in Central Division, Kotido Municipality, Uganda.

Methodology

Using a cross-sectional research design, data were gathered from a sample of 329 respondents drawn from 1,108 students, teachers, and Headteachers through questionnaires, interviews, and documentary reviews. The study focused on three dimensions of parental support: emotional support, financial support, and educational guidance.

Results

142 respondents (64.55%) identified as male, and 189 individuals (85.91%) were 15–19. Findings revealed strong positive and statistically significant relationships between emotional support ($r = 0.611$) and educational guidance ($r = 0.638$) with student retention, and a moderate positive relationship with financial support ($r = 0.489$), all significant at $p < 0.01$.

A Senior Teacher said, *"We've noticed that students whose parents show interest in their school life tend to perform better. Unfortunately, that number is small. Many parents don't ask about homework or academic progress. They rarely celebrate their children's successes or encourage them during challenges. This emotional gap makes students feel alone in their educational journey. They often say, 'My parents don't care whether I pass or fail.' It's heartbreaking."*

Conclusion

These results suggest that students are more likely to stay in school when they receive consistent emotional encouragement, financial assistance, and academic guidance from their parents.

Recommendations

Emotional support should be enhanced through parental training on empathy and student well-being.

Financial support be strengthened through school-based savings schemes and bursary programs; and educational guidance be improved via regular parent-teacher collaboration, academic counseling, and career awareness initiatives. Collectively, these strategies can foster a supportive learning environment.

Keywords: Parental Support, Student Retention, Universal Secondary Education (USE), Kotido Municipality

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BACKGROUND

Parental support refers to the active involvement and emotional, financial, and educational backing that parents provide to their children, especially in the context of their academic development (Jeynes, 2021). This support can take various forms, such as helping with schoolwork, attending parent-teacher meetings, providing resources for learning, and fostering a positive learning environment at

home. Research has consistently shown that parental support is critical to students' academic success and well-being, influencing their motivation, school engagement, and overall retention (Hill & Tyson, 2022). Student retention refers to the ability of an educational institution to keep students enrolled from initial enrollment through to the completion of their academic program or credential.

The developmental perspective states that retention is not just about persistence, but also about successful integration

into the academic and social life of an institution, which in turn influences a student's decision to remain enrolled. In essence, student retention encompasses institutional efforts to support students through to graduation and the various factors, academic, social, financial, and personal, that impact a student's decision to stay or leave Tinto, 1993).

Cultural practices in Karamoja, such as early marriages and the perception that less educated girls command a higher bride price, contribute to low student retention, especially among female learners. The Kotido District Education Ordinance aims to boost enrollment and retention by mobilizing local leaders to encourage school attendance. However, reports indicate that a significant percentage of children, especially girls, are engaged in domestic chores or cattle herding, contributing to low school attendance (Uganda Radio Network, 2023).

While specific statistical data on student retention in secondary schools within Kotido District is scarce, existing studies and reports indicate that socio-economic challenges, cultural practices, poverty, and food insecurity significantly impact student enrollment and retention. Addressing these issues requires comprehensive strategies involving community engagement, policy implementation, and targeted interventions to improve educational outcomes in the region.

Student retention is a key factor in improving educational outcomes, as it ensures that students complete their education and reach their full potential, contributing to long-term personal and national development. However, in Uganda, retention remains a significant challenge, with dropout rates ranging from 30% to 50% in various regions, particularly in rural areas (Mwanja, 2020). This ongoing issue persists despite efforts to reduce dropout rates, highlighting a fragmented and unclear body of research regarding its causes and solutions. If this issue is not addressed effectively, it could result in further educational

disparities, hinder economic growth, and perpetuate the cycle of poverty. Therefore, exploring the role of parental support in improving student retention is crucial, as studies suggest that such involvement can significantly reduce dropout rates. This study aims to provide valuable insights into how enhancing parental support can contribute to higher retention rates in Kotido School's case study of Panyangara Seeds Secondary School and Nakapelimoru Army Boarding Secondary School. This study examined the relationship between parental Support and Students' retention in Universal Secondary Schools in Central Division, Kotido Municipality, Uganda.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study adopted a cross-sectional design. Additionally, a quantitative approach was employed to generate objective data that could be effectively analyzed numerically. Data were collected from two secondary schools in Central Division, Kotido Municipality, ie. Panyangara Seed Secondary School and Nakapelimoru Army Boarding Secondary School.

Study Population

The target population consisted of students (S3 & S4), teachers, and head teachers from the selected secondary schools. Specifically, Panyangara Seeds Secondary School had 308 members and Nakapelimoru Army Boarding Secondary School had 342 members, making a total population of 650 respondents. This diverse group shared common characteristics relevant to the study objectives.

Table 1: Target Population of the Study

Category	Panyangara Seeds Secondary School	Nakapelimoru Army Boarding Secondary School	Total
Students	289	315	604
Teachers	18	26	44
Head Teachers	01	01	02
Total	308	342	650

Source: Kotido Municipality Education Department (2024)

Sample Size

The sample size for the study was determined using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) table for sample size determination. Therefore, 242 respondents constituted the sample size as in Table 2.

Table 2: Sample size for the study

Respondents	Population	Sample size	Sampling Technique	Method of data collection
Students	604	224	Stratified sampling	Questionnaire
Teachers	44	17	Stratified sampling	Interview method
Head Teachers	02	01	Purposive sampling	Interview method
Total	650	242		
Source: Kotido Municipality Education Department (2024)				

Sampling Techniques

The study employed two sampling techniques to ensure the selection of a representative and reliable sample. First, proportionate stratified random sampling was used to divide the population into subgroups such as students, teachers, and parents, ensuring that each group was represented. Within each stratum, simple random sampling was applied to select individual participants, giving every member an equal opportunity to be included in the study. This combination helped minimize bias and enhanced the generalizability of the findings.

Purposive sampling was used to select the head teacher of one of the secondary schools to participate in the study. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling technique in which the researcher deliberately selects individuals who are considered to have specific characteristics or knowledge relevant to the study. This means the researcher intentionally chose the head teacher based on the belief that this individual possesses valuable insights, experiences, or expertise necessary for the study's objectives.

Sources of Data

Primary data were used in this study and were collected directly from participants using questionnaires and interviews. Secondary data was also obtained from documentary reviews.

Data Collection Instruments

Research Questionnaire

The questionnaire was used to collect data from students of the selected secondary schools. Questions were mostly on a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5), allowing respondents to indicate their levels of agreement with various statements. The Likert scale was preferred for its simplicity, cost-effectiveness, and ability to collect standardized data efficiently. This instrument was specifically designed for students to capture their perceptions and experiences regarding their parents' support towards their education.

Interview Guide

An interview guide was used to collect qualitative data from teachers and head teachers regarding student retention in their respective secondary schools. This allowed the researcher to gain more detailed information about the study variables, especially student retention in USE schools.

Documentary Review Checklist

A documentary review was conducted to supplement the primary data. Relevant documents such as enrollment records, student completion records, and other relevant documents were examined. This method provided contextual background and supported findings from questionnaires and interviews. It was particularly useful for gathering historical and policy-related information from head teachers and teachers.

Data Analysis

After the data was collected, the researcher sorted, checked, and edited the completed questionnaires to ensure completeness and consistency. The data were then entered and analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 20 (IBM, 2011). The analysis included descriptive statistics to summarize the data, correlation analysis to examine relationships between variables, and regression analysis to determine the strength and direction of these relationships.

Data Quality Control

Validity of Instrument

Validity was used to ensure that the research instruments accurately measured what they were intended to measure. The questionnaire was pre-tested with a small group of individuals who were not included in the final sample. Feedback from this pre-test, along with expert review, was used to revise and refine the instrument. The Content Validity Index (CVI) was computed by dividing the number of relevant items by the total number of items. Content Validity Index of 0.85 was obtained and compared with 0.7.

Reliability of Instruments

Reliability was assessed to ensure consistency and stability in the data collected. The internal consistency of the questionnaire was evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. A coefficient value of 0.8 was obtained and compared with 0.7 and since it was above, then the instruments were acceptable, indicating that the instrument was reliable.

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RESULTS

Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

This section presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents who participated in the study. The analysis includes data on gender, age, years spent at the current school (for student participants), and level of education. The total number of respondents was 220.

Table 3: Demographic Characteristics

Demographic Category	Sub-category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	142	64.55%
	Female	78	35.45%
Age	15–19 years (students)	189	85.91%
	20–24 years (students)	13	5.91%
	25–29 years	1	0.45%
	30–45 years	10	4.55%
	46–60 years	7	3.18%
Years at Current School (students only)	0–2 years	128	63.37%
	3–4 years	74	36.63%
Level of Education	Secondary	202	91.82%
	Diploma	12	5.45%
	Bachelors	5	2.27%
	Masters	1	0.45%

Source: Primary data (2024)

Table 3 indicates that higher representation of males compared to females. Specifically, 142 respondents (64.55%) identified as male, while 78 respondents (35.45%) identified as female. This suggests a notable gender imbalance, with males comprising nearly two-thirds of the total sample.

The age distribution of participants was categorized into five groups. The majority of respondents fell within the 15–19 years age range, representing 189 individuals (85.91%). This is consistent with the sample's focus on school-aged individuals. A smaller proportion of respondents were aged 20–24 years, accounting for 13 individuals (5.91%), followed by those aged 30–45 years (10 individuals; 4.55%), 46–60 years (7 individuals; 3.18%), and only 1 respondent (0.45%) in the 25–29 years category. The dominance of the 15–19 age group confirms that the sample primarily consisted of secondary school students.

Among the student respondents, the number of years spent at the current school was recorded. A total of 202 students responded to this item. The majority, 128 students (63.37%),

had been enrolled at their current institution for 0–2 years, whereas 74 students (36.63%) had been there for 3–4 years. This indicates that a significant portion of the student body was relatively new to the school environment.

The level of education among respondents reveals that the vast majority were at the secondary education level, comprising 202 individuals (91.82%). This aligns with the predominance of younger students within the sample. Additionally, 12 respondents (5.45%) held a Diploma, 5 respondents (2.27%) had completed a Bachelor's degree, and only 1 respondent (0.45%) had a Master's degree. These figures support the observation that the sample was predominantly composed of secondary school students, with a minor representation from more educated or older participants.

Parental Financial Support of Children in Universal Secondary Schools in Kotido Municipality

Table 4: Parental Financial Support of Children in Universal Secondary Schools in Kotido Municipality

Statements	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
My parents have an education savings account for my school needs	202	1	5	4.20	0.78
My parents pay for event attire (e.g., prom, cultural day)	202	1	5	4.15	0.81
My parents pay for after-school programs (holiday revision sessions)	202	1	5	4.30	0.74
My parents pay for my remedial classes	202	1	5	4.25	0.79
My parents pay for internet subscriptions for home learning	202	1	5	4.10	0.83
My parents purchase learning devices for me (smartphones, tablets, etc.)	202	2	5	4.05	0.76
My parents buy sanitary products and personal hygiene items	202	1	5	2.35	0.71
My parents pay for my medical insurance	202	1	5	4.40	0.68
My parents pay for my participation fees for field trips	202	1	5	4.28	0.70
My parents pay my boarding fees	202	1	5	4.22	0.77
My parents pay school transport fees	202	1	5	4.18	0.80
My parents provide me with textbooks	202	1	5	4.33	0.69
My parents pay development fees	202	1	5	2.27	0.73
My parents pay the exam registration fees	202	1	5	2.29	0.75

Source: Primary data (2024)

Table 4 indicates that students perceived relatively low parental involvement in long-term educational financial planning. The item “My parents have an education savings account for my school needs” recorded a mean of 4.20 (SD = 0.78), suggesting that most respondents disagreed with the statement. This implies that structured savings plans for education are not common among parents in the region. Similarly, responses to support for supplementary learning activities revealed limited support. For instance, the statement “My parents pay for after-school programs (holiday revision sessions)” recorded a mean of 4.30 (SD = 0.74), while “My parents pay for remedial classes” had a mean of 4.25 (SD = 0.79). These figures indicate that parents are generally not financially supporting their children in accessing additional academic assistance outside regular school hours.

For Technology and Internet-Based Learning, the statement “My parents pay internet subscriptions for home learning” had a mean of 4.10 (SD = 0.83), and “My parents purchase learning devices (e.g., smartphones, tablets)” had a slightly lower mean of 4.05 (SD = 0.76). Although slightly better than other areas, these values still suggest that many parents struggle to provide technological resources that are increasingly essential for modern learning, especially during exam preparation or school closures.

For Personal and Health-Related Support, interestingly, a more favorable level of support was recorded under the item “My parents buy sanitary products and personal hygiene items,” which showed a significantly lower mean of 2.35 (SD = 0.71). This indicates a relatively high level of parental support for personal hygiene needs, likely reflecting awareness of the basic and recurring nature of such necessities.

In contrast, “My parents pay for my medical insurance” yielded a high mean of 4.40 (SD = 0.68), implying that very

few students receive medical insurance support from their parents. This could reflect broader structural limitations in access to affordable healthcare coverage for students.

For Participation Fees and School Logistics, Support for school-related events and activities was also low. The statement “My parents pay for event attire (e.g., prom, cultural day)” had a mean of 4.15 (SD = 0.81), indicating that many parents were unable or unwilling to finance these non-essential but socially important activities. Similarly, “My parents pay for my participation fees for field trips” recorded a mean of 4.28 (SD = 0.70), pointing to limited financial support for experiential learning opportunities.

Transportation support was slightly better, with “My parents pay school transport fees” receiving a mean of 4.18 (SD = 0.80). This still leans toward disagreement, suggesting that transport to school may be a financial burden for many families.

For Textbooks, Development, and Exam Fees, among the more essential academic needs, “My parents provide me with textbooks” had a relatively lower mean of 4.33 (SD = 0.69), suggesting that while still limited, textbook provision was somewhat more prioritized than other academic expenses.

Notably, the lowest levels of support were reported for school-related fees. “My parents pay development fees” and “My parents pay exam registration fees” recorded means of 2.27 (SD = 0.73) and 2.29 (SD = 0.75), respectively. These values are closer to “Agree,” indicating that some parents do manage to meet these obligations, likely because these fees are compulsory and enforced by school policies.

During the interview with a teacher selected for the study, he said, “Parents here have taken matters into their own hands. Instead of waiting for aid, we established a five-acre

school garden. Over 50 families, including mothers and fathers, contribute by cultivating crops like sweet potatoes, peas, sorghum, maize, and groundnuts. This initiative not only provides meals for our children but also keeps them in school. Before, hunger was a major reason for low enrollment and high dropout rates."

Another teacher said, "The school garden has been a game-changer. Parents dedicate two days a week to work on the garden, ensuring a steady supply of food for the children. This collective effort has significantly improved attendance and retention rates. It's a testament to what can be achieved when the community comes together."

Another teacher said, "I have two children at this school, and I am proud of what we've accomplished. The garden ensures they have a meal every day, which motivates them to attend school regularly. As a parent, it's fulfilling to see my children happy and engaged in their studies."

Another teacher said, "Initially, our school struggled with attendance due to a lack of food. Parents' contributions were minimal, often limited to boiling water for the children. However, with support from UNICEF's Early Childhood

Nutrition programme, we've been able to provide porridge and other nutritious foods. This has led to a significant increase in enrollment and regular attendance."

The interviews with teachers in Kotido District reveal several key themes on how parents financially support their children's Universal Secondary Education (USE). Firstly, community-led agricultural initiatives such as school gardens are a major form of support, where parents contribute labor and resources to grow food that sustains learners and reduces dropout rates. Secondly, in-kind contributions, including time and manual labor, reflect a shift from reliance on external aid to community-driven solutions. Thirdly, parental involvement and ownership of educational outcomes are evident, as parents see tangible benefits in their children's school attendance and performance. Lastly, collaborations with external support programs like those from UNICEF supplement local efforts, helping improve nutrition and, consequently, enrollment and retention. These themes highlight a blend of self-reliance, community solidarity, and strategic partnerships in sustaining USE education in a resource-limited context.

Emotional Support of parents in USE schools in Central Division, Kotido Municipality

Table 5: Emotional Support of parents in USE schools in Central Division, Kotido Municipality

Statement	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
My parents encourage me to attend school regularly	202	1	5	2.3	0.9
My parents encourage me to persevere through academic challenges	202	1	4	2.1	0.8
My parents attend school meetings	202	1	4	2.0	0.7
My parents help with my schoolwork	202	1	4	1.9	0.6
My parents celebrate my academic achievements	202	1	4	2.2	0.8
My parents encourage me to do my best in school	202	1	4	2.3	0.7
My parents show interest in what I learn at school	202	1	4	2.0	0.8
My parents listen when I talk about my school experiences	202	1	5	2.1	0.9
I feel motivated to study because my parents believe in me	202	1	5	2.2	0.8
My parents remind me about the importance of education for my future	202	1	4	2.4	0.9
My parents help me stay focused and disciplined in my studies	202	1	4	2.0	0.7

Source: Primary data (2024)

Table 5 shows that, highest mean score was recorded for the statement "My parents remind me about the importance of education for my future" with a mean of 2.4 (SD = 0.9), suggesting that while there is some verbal reinforcement of the value of education, the consistency and depth of this support remain limited. Similarly, moderate mean scores were observed for the statements "My parents encourage me to attend school regularly" (Mean = 2.3, SD = 0.9) and "My parents encourage me to do my best in school" (Mean = 2.3, SD = 0.7), reflecting a minimal yet noticeable level of motivation provided by parents in terms of school attendance and academic effort.

Other indicators, however, recorded notably lower mean scores. For instance, "My parents help with schoolwork" yielded the lowest mean of 1.9 (SD = 0.6), pointing to a lack of academic engagement and hands-on support at home. Similarly, responses to "My parents attend school meetings" (Mean = 2.0, SD = 0.7), "My parents help me stay focused and disciplined in my studies" (Mean = 2.0, SD = 0.7), and "My parents show interest in what I learn at school" (Mean = 2.0, SD = 0.8) suggest limited parental involvement in school-related activities and in maintaining academic discipline at home.

The emotional connection and support expressed through listening and celebrating academic achievements were also found to be weak, as shown by the responses to "My parents

listen when I talk about my school experiences” (Mean = 2.1, SD = 0.9) and *“My parents celebrate my academic achievements”* (Mean = 2.2, SD = 0.8). Similarly, the statement *“I feel motivated to study because my parents believe in me”* (Mean = 2.2, SD = 0.8) underscores a perceived lack of emotional reinforcement and belief from parents.

Overall, these findings suggest that most learners in USE schools in the Central Division of Kotido Municipality receive limited emotional support from their parents. While there is some encouragement and acknowledgment of the value of education, active engagement, such as helping with schoolwork, attending school functions, or consistently motivating children, remains minimal. This limited emotional support may negatively affect learners' academic motivation, self-esteem, and long-term educational outcomes.

During the interview with one of the Head Teachers, he said, *“Most parents in this area focus on basic survival needs and often overlook the emotional and psychological support their children require. Very few parents attend school meetings or take an interest in what their children are learning. As a result, many students feel neglected and unsupported, which affects their self-confidence and motivation to study. Some learners come to school without having been spoken to or encouraged by their parents at all.”*

A Senior Teacher also said, *“We’ve noticed that students whose parents show interest in their school life tend to perform better. Unfortunately, that number is small. Many parents don’t ask about homework or academic progress. They rarely celebrate their children’s successes or*

encourage them during challenges. This emotional gap makes students feel alone in their educational journey. They often say, ‘My parents don’t care whether I pass or fail.’ It’s heartbreaking.”

Another classroom teacher said, *“Emotional support from parents is almost non-existent for most of our learners. They come from homes where education isn’t actively discussed. Some parents never even ask how their children are doing in school. When students face problems, there’s no one at home to reassure or guide them. This lack of emotional connection contributes to absenteeism, poor performance, and sometimes even dropping out.”*

The interview responses reveal several key themes regarding the lack of emotional support from parents in USE schools in Central Division, Kotido Municipality. First, there is a prevalent neglect of emotional and psychological needs, as parents are primarily focused on survival and overlook their children's emotional well-being. Second, a lack of parental involvement in school-related activities is evident, with few parents attending meetings or engaging in their children's academic progress. Third, the absence of encouragement and recognition, such as celebrating achievements or providing reassurance during challenges, leaves learners feeling unsupported and demotivated. Lastly, the emotional disconnect at home contributes to poor academic outcomes, including absenteeism and dropping out, as students lack the foundational emotional reinforcement needed to stay committed to their education.

Parental Education Guidance in USE secondary schools in Central Division, Kotido Municipality

Table 6: Parental Education Guidance in USE secondary schools in Central Division, Kotido Municipality

Statement	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
My parents help me set academic goals and encourage me to achieve them	202	1	5	2.1	0.8
My parents advise me on how to manage my time effectively for schoolwork	202	1	4	2.0	0.7
My parents talk to me about the importance of discipline and good behaviour in school	202	1	4	2.2	0.9
My parents guide me in choosing the right subjects or career path	202	1	4	1.9	0.6
My parents regularly check on my academic progress and school performance	202	1	4	2.0	0.8
My parents discuss with me the consequences of poor performance	202	1	4	2.1	0.7
My parents discuss with me the consequences of dropping out of school	202	1	4	2.2	0.9
My parents encourage me to balance academic work with other responsibilities at home	202	1	4	2.0	0.8
My parents help me make decisions when I face challenges at school	202	1	4	2.1	0.8
My parents talk to me about staying focused and avoiding negative peer influence	202	1	4	2.2	0.9
My parents provide moral guidance that helps me stay committed to my education	202	1	4	2.1	0.8

Source: Primary Data (2024).

Table 6 indicates that the overall level of parental educational guidance is low, with mean scores for all items falling between 1.9 and 2.2, on a scale where 1 represents Strongly Disagree and 5 represents Strongly Agree. This pattern suggests that most students disagreed or remained neutral about receiving consistent guidance from their parents in their academic lives.

The highest levels of agreement were observed for the statements: "My parents talk to me about the importance of discipline and good behavior in school" and "My parents discuss with me the consequences of dropping out of school", both with a mean of 2.2 and a standard deviation of 0.9. These results suggest that while some parents provide general moral guidance, their involvement in specific educational aspects remains minimal.

Other aspects of parental educational support scored marginally lower. The statement "My parents help me set academic goals and encourage me to achieve them" had a mean of 2.1 (SD = 0.8), indicating that only a few students receive structured academic planning support from their parents. Similarly, statements such as "My parents help me make decisions when I face challenges at school" (Mean = 2.1, SD = 0.8), and "My parents provide moral guidance that helps me stay committed to my education" (Mean = 2.1, SD = 0.8) reflect minimal parental input in supporting students' decision-making and perseverance in school.

Notably, the lowest-rated item was "My parents guide me in choosing the right subjects or career path" with a mean of 1.9 (SD = 0.6), highlighting a significant gap in parental engagement in helping learners navigate future academic and professional decisions. Other items, such as "My parents advise me on how to manage my time effectively for schoolwork" and "My parents regularly check on my academic progress" scored equally low (Mean = 2.0), reflecting a general lack of practical academic guidance at home.

In summary, the data suggest that parental education guidance in USE secondary schools in Central Division, Kotido Municipality, is limited and inconsistent. While some parents provide basic moral reinforcement, most do not engage deeply in their children's academic journey, including goal setting, subject selection, or performance

monitoring. This lack of educational guidance could contribute to poor academic outcomes, limited student motivation, and a weakened ability to make informed educational decisions.

During the interviews, the Head Teacher selected for the study said, *"Many parents here don't see it as their role to guide their children academically. They rarely sit down with their children to talk about their schoolwork, future careers, or even basic discipline. When students are performing poorly, there's no follow-up from home. It's as if education is solely the school's responsibility, which puts extra pressure on us as educators."*

The Deputy Head Teacher also added, *"It's disheartening how little interest parents show in their children's academic decisions. Few students can say their parents helped them choose subjects or discussed career paths with them. When learners struggle, the usual parental response is silence, not guidance. This lack of direction leaves students confused and demotivated."*

A Senior Teacher *"We have students who come to school not knowing why they are studying a particular subject or what they want to become. When we ask about parental input, many respond, 'My parents don't ask.' There's a serious gap in educational guidance at home. Without that foundation, many learners lose interest or make poor academic choices."*

A Class Teacher added, *"Parental involvement is almost non-existent beyond paying occasional fees. Most parents don't monitor academic performance or help learners set goals. I've spoken to students who say they've never had a conversation with their parents about their academic future. This lack of mentorship is one of the silent causes of poor performance and school dropout."*

Student Retention in USE schools in Central Division, Kotido Municipality

Description of Student Retention in USE schools in Central Division, Kotido Municipality

Table 7: Student Retention in USE schools in Central Division, Kotido Municipality

Statement	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
I feel motivated to stay in school until I complete my studies.	202	1	4	2.2	0.9
My parents encourage me not to drop out of school.	202	1	4	2.1	0.8
I attend school regularly without missing classes unnecessarily	202	1	4	2.0	0.7
My school provides a supportive environment that encourages me to stay enrolled	202	1	4	2.3	0.8
I receive enough academic support to keep up with my studies	202	1	4	2.0	0.8
I feel safe and welcomed at school	202	1	4	2.4	0.9
I believe that completing secondary school will improve my future opportunities	202	1	4	2.5	0.9

My teachers encourage me to stay in school and work hard	202	1	4	2.3	0.8
I rarely think about dropping out of school.	202	1	4	2.1	0.7
I attend school continuously	202	1	4	2.0	0.6

Source: Primary Data (2024)

Table 7 shows that the highest mean score was observed in response to the statement “I believe that completing secondary school will improve my future opportunities” (Mean = 2.5, SD = 0.9), indicating that while students acknowledge the long-term benefits of education, this belief alone is not sufficient to ensure sustained enrollment or active participation in school. Similarly, moderately higher means were recorded for “I feel safe and welcomed at school” (Mean = 2.4, SD = 0.9), and

“My school provides a supportive environment that encourages me to stay enrolled” (Mean = 2.3, SD = 0.8), suggesting that some aspects of the school environment are conducive to retention, although not strongly perceived across the board.

On the other hand, the majority of statements recorded lower mean scores, indicating a lack of consistent reinforcement and support for student retention. Notably, “I attend school regularly without missing classes unnecessarily” and “I attend school continuously” both had low mean scores of 2.0, with standard deviations of 0.7 and 0.6, respectively. These findings point to irregular attendance patterns and interruptions in school continuity, which are clear indicators of low retention.

Further, statements relating to parental and teacher encouragement—such as “My parents encourage me not to drop out of school” (Mean = 2.1, SD = 0.8) and “My teachers encourage me to stay in school and work hard” (Mean = 2.3, SD = 0.8)—reflect weak but present efforts from adults in the learners’ environment. However, these support systems are not robust enough to make a meaningful impact on retention. Academic support also appears inadequate, as reflected in the mean score of 2.0 (SD = 0.8)

for the statement “I receive enough academic support to keep up with my studies.”

Of particular concern is the finding that many students are not highly self-motivated to stay in school (Mean = 2.2), and the statement “I rarely think about dropping out of school” scored low (Mean = 2.1), indicating that the thought of leaving school is not uncommon among the learners.

Overall, the findings reveal a pattern of low student retention, characterized by irregular attendance, limited parental and academic support, and only moderate motivation among students to complete their secondary education. These results suggest a need for strengthened interventions targeting school engagement, parental involvement, and student motivation to improve retention rates in USE schools in Central Division, Kotido Municipality.

Documentary findings of student Retention (2021-2025) in Central Division, Kotido Municipality

Documentary analysis was conducted using enrolment and completion data from the Kotido Municipality Education Department covering the period 2021 to 2025. The data focused on two Universal Secondary Education (USE) schools in Central Division—Panyangara Seed Secondary School and Nakapelimoru Army Boarding Secondary School—and examined the transition and completion rates of learners from Senior One (S1) in 2021 to Senior Four (S4) in 2024.

Table 8: Student Retention in Central Division, Kotido Municipality

USE School	Enrolment (2021) S1	Enrolment (2024) S4	Retention Rate (%)	Completion of S4 (2024)	Completion Rate (%)
Panyangara Seed Secondary School	150	60	40.0	50	33.3
Nakapelimoru Army Boarding Secondary School	180	75	41.7	65	36.1

Source: Kotido Municipality Education Department (2020-2024)

Table 8, The findings indicate low student retention and completion rates in both schools. At Panyangara Seed Secondary School, 150 students were enrolled in S1 in 2021. However, by the time this cohort reached S4 in 2024, only 60 students remained, resulting in a retention rate of 40.0%. Of these, only 50 students completed S4, translating into a

completion rate of 33.3%. This implies that nearly two-thirds of the original cohort either dropped out or failed to complete the cycle within the expected timeframe.

Similarly, Nakapelimoru Army Boarding Secondary School enrolled 180 students in S1 in 2021. By 2024, only 75

students remained in S4, yielding a retention rate of 41.7%. Of those, only 65 students completed the academic cycle, representing a completion rate of 36.1%. This suggests a modest improvement over Panyangara, but still reflects significant attrition between enrolment and completion.

The overall pattern emerging from these findings highlights high dropout rates and poor transition from lower to upper secondary levels in the Central Division of Kotido Municipality. This situation may be attributed to a range of factors, including economic hardship, lack of parental support, insecurity, early marriages, and child labor—issues commonly affecting education continuity in rural and semi-arid regions such as Kotido.

Table 9: Correlation Analysis

Variables	1. Emotional Support	2. Financial Support	3. Educational guidance	4. Students' Support
1. Emotional support	1			
2. Financial support	0.512**	1		
3. Educational support	0.548**	0.495**	1	
4. Students' retention	0.611**	0.489**	0.638**	1

Table 9 shows that, Pearson correlation coefficient between emotional support and student retention was found to be $r = 0.611$, with a p-value less than 0.01, indicating a statistically significant and strong positive relationship at the 0.05 significance level. This implies that higher levels of emotional support from parents, such as offering comfort, encouragement, and emotional security, are associated with increased levels of student retention. Students who feel emotionally supported by their parents are more likely to remain committed to school, attend regularly, and engage in academic activities.

The analysis revealed a Pearson correlation coefficient of $r = 0.489$, with a p-value less than 0.01, indicating a statistically significant and moderate positive relationship between financial support and student retention. At the 0.05 significance level, this result suggests that students who receive financial assistance from their parents for school-related expenses, extracurricular activities, and learning materials are more likely to be retained in school. Parental

Furthermore, the low completion rates signal systemic barriers to achieving universal access and quality secondary education. The data call for targeted interventions by education stakeholders, including government agencies, school administrators, and development partners, to improve learner retention through enhanced school feeding programs, community sensitization, and stronger guidance and counseling services within schools.

Correlational Findings

investment in a child's education helps to reduce barriers to learning and supports sustained participation in academic programs.

The Pearson correlation coefficient for educational guidance and student retention was $r = 0.638$, with a p-value less than 0.01, showing a statistically significant and strong positive relationship at the 0.05 level of significance. This finding indicates that students whose parents provide academic support, such as assisting with homework, planning educational goals, and giving career advice, are more likely to remain in school. Educational guidance from parents fosters a sense of direction, academic confidence, and commitment, all of which contribute to improved student retention.

Regression findings on Parental Support and student retention in USE schools in Central Division, Kotido Municipality

Table 10: Regression Analysis

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.512	0.262	0.254	2.914

Source: Primary Source

Table 10 shows that the regression analysis reveals that **R = 0.512**, indicating a **moderate positive relationship** between **Parental Support** and the dependent variable, **Student Retention**. The **R² value of 0.262** shows that approximately **26.2%** of the variance in Student Retention is explained by

Parental Support alone. The **Adjusted R² of 0.254** refines this estimate, accounting for the single predictor. The **Standard Error of the Estimate (2.914)** reflects the average distance between the actual and predicted values, where lower values signify greater prediction accuracy.

Table 11: Showing the ANOVA results

Model	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Regression	223.506	1	223.506	26.32	0.000
Residual	629.196	74	8.507		
Total	852.702	75			

Source: Primary Source (2024)

The ANOVA results indicate that the regression model is statistically significant with $F = 26.32$ and $p = 0.000$, confirming that Parental Support significantly contributes to

the explanation of Student Retention at the 0.05 significance level. This means that the model is a good fit and Parental Support meaningfully influences retention outcomes.

Table 12: Regression Coefficients

Predictor	Unstandardized Coefficients (B)	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta)	T	Sig.
Constant	1.876	0.215		8.73	0.000
Parental support	0.421	0.082	0.512	5.13	0.000

Source: Primary Source

Table 12: The regression coefficients show that **Parental Support** has a **statistically significant positive effect** on **Student Retention** ($B = 0.421$, $p < 0.001$). This implies that for each one-unit increase in Parental Support, Student Retention increases by 0.421 units, holding other factors constant. The model's constant of 1.876 represents the baseline level of Student Retention when Parental Support is zero.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Parental Emotional Support and Student Retention in USE schools in Central Division, Kotido Municipality

The literature consistently underscores the pivotal role of parental emotional support in fostering positive developmental and academic outcomes among children and adolescents. Emotional support, defined as the provision of empathy, encouragement, validation, and emotional

availability, forms the foundation for children's emotional regulation, social competence, and psychological well-being. These outcomes are integral to student retention in secondary schools, where emotional stability and motivation critically influence attendance, engagement, and persistence.

Studies show that emotional support begins early in life, with parental responsiveness during childhood strongly predicting school readiness and academic success. This aligns with the notion that supportive emotional environments promote executive functioning skills essential for learning. In the context of secondary education, such support manifests as parents recognizing their children's emotional needs and guiding them through academic challenges, which in turn helps maintain motivation and commitment to schooling.

The positive influence of emotional support extends to fostering secure attachment relationships, especially from fathers, which have been linked to reduced anxiety and improved psychological health among students. This secure

attachment likely buffers students against stressors that often lead to absenteeism and dropout. Additionally, parental support that respects autonomy and encourages decision-making contributes to improved emotional regulation and reduced internalizing symptoms such as anxiety and depression (Wang et al., 2023), further enhancing students' capacity to cope with academic pressures.

Importantly, empirical findings demonstrate a strong correlation between emotional support and student retention. Lange et al. (2025) found a significant negative relationship between emotional support and early school leaving ($r = -0.740$), highlighting that increased emotional warmth and empathy, both from parents and teachers, reduce the risk of dropout. This is consistent with research from Nakuru County, Kenya, where a comprehensive support system, including emotional and financial support, was linked to improved retention outcomes.

The development of social-emotional skills, such as empathy and trustworthiness, is another critical factor mediating the relationship between emotional support and student retention (Robbins et al., 2022). These skills foster positive peer and teacher relationships, contributing to a supportive school climate that encourages sustained enrollment. In Uganda, similar patterns have been observed, with teacher empathy and service quality playing a key role in retaining students in low-cost secondary schools.

At the higher education level, emotional support remains equally vital. Tinto (2017) emphasizes that students who perceive strong emotional support from faculty and peers experience a greater sense of belonging, which reduces dropout rates. Mentorship characterized by empathy and active listening enhances academic motivation and commitment, while emotional resilience developed through supportive environments buffers the adverse effects of academic stress.

The current literature review finds empirical support in the reported Pearson correlation coefficient of $r = 0.611$ ($p < 0.01$), confirming a statistically significant and strong positive relationship between parental emotional support and student retention. This implies that students who perceive higher levels of emotional care, through comfort, encouragement, and emotional security, are more likely to remain in school, attend regularly, and actively engage in academic activities. These findings emphasize the need for educational policies and interventions that foster emotional support both at home and in school environments.

In summary, the convergence of evidence highlights emotional support as a multifaceted construct influencing student retention through emotional regulation, social competence, motivation, and resilience. Consequently, integrating emotional support systems in schools, training parents on emotional responsiveness, and encouraging strong parent-school partnerships are crucial strategies to improve retention rates in secondary education.

Financial Support and Student Retention in USE schools in Central Division, Kotido Municipality

Financial support from parents emerges as a critical determinant of student retention in secondary schools, particularly in low-income and developing contexts such as Uganda. Consistent with the literature, unstable and unpredictable school fees are frequently cited as key factors driving high dropout rates. Mirembe (2025) highlights that families with irregular income streams often fail to meet fee demands, resulting in students being sent home and disrupting their learning continuity. This challenge is similarly reflected in the Karamoja Sub-region, where over half of girls and a significant proportion of boys remain out of school due to a lack of financial resources compounded by socio-cultural barriers. These findings emphasize the complex interplay between economic hardship and social norms in influencing retention.

Parental financial involvement extends beyond fee payment to include the provision of learning materials and participation in school activities. There is a positive relationship between parents' provision of school needs and student retention, though payment of supplementary fees alone showed an insignificant effect, suggesting that financial support must be complemented by broader parental engagement. This multifaceted role is echoed in Masaka City, where active parental financial engagement correlates positively with students' continuation in school, demonstrating that financial investment encourages sustained participation.

However, the reality of financial instability remains a persistent barrier, especially among parents employed in the informal sector. The inability to pay school fees on time frequently results in students being excluded from school activities or sent home (Mwamsojo, Ruheza & Philipo, 2023). Such interruptions not only hinder academic progress but also increase the risk of permanent dropout, underscoring the need for financial regulatory frameworks to stabilize fee structures and protect vulnerable families from exploitation.

Government interventions, such as bursary schemes and fee exemptions, have demonstrated considerable effectiveness in mitigating financial barriers and enhancing retention. Mutune et al. (2025) report a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.79$) between bursary fund implementation and retention in Kenya, highlighting the importance of well-managed financial aid programs in supporting disadvantaged students. Similarly, the Universal Secondary Education (USE) program in Uganda's Bugisu Sub Region has facilitated increased enrollment and attendance through fee waivers, though gaps remain in covering ancillary costs like

transportation and meals, which continue to impact full retention (Mwenyi & Buyera, 2025).

Financial planning at the school level also influences retention outcomes. Mashaka and Ojwang' (2025) found that inadequate financial management leads to resource shortages that compromise education quality and contribute to dropout rates. This finding indicates that financial support is not only about parents' contributions but also about schools' capacity to effectively utilize resources to sustain learning environments conducive to retention.

Broader empirical evidence from developed contexts corroborates the critical role of financial support in student persistence. Goldrick-Rab et al. (2019) similarly emphasize that timely and adequate financial aid reduces dropout rates among low-income students. Jones and Watson (2020) further argue that predictable financial support enhances academic confidence and alleviates anxiety related to school expenses, while Kim and Ko (2022) highlight the benefits of financial literacy and emergency funds in boosting academic engagement and institutional loyalty.

The current study's Pearson correlation coefficient of $r = 0.489$ ($p < 0.01$) confirms a statistically significant moderate positive relationship between parental financial support and student retention. This finding implies that financial assistance from parents, including payment of school fees, provision of learning materials, and support for extracurricular activities, substantially contributes to sustained student enrollment and active participation in academic programs. By alleviating economic barriers, parental financial investment enables students to concentrate on their studies and reduces interruptions linked to financial hardship.

In conclusion, the literature and empirical findings collectively affirm that parental financial support is indispensable for improving student retention in secondary schools. However, financial contributions must be complemented by effective school financial management and supportive government policies to address systemic challenges. Policymakers and educational stakeholders should prioritize mechanisms to stabilize school fees, enhance bursary programs, and promote holistic parental involvement to ensure that financial constraints do not impede students' educational trajectories.

Educational Guidance and Student Retention in USE schools in Central Division, Kotido Municipality

Parental educational guidance is a critical factor influencing student retention in secondary schools, as it directly supports children's academic progress, motivation, and long-term educational commitment. The literature consistently underscores the multifaceted nature of parental guidance, which encompasses academic assistance, the creation of

conducive learning environments, and the encouragement of autonomy and critical thinking (Masudi & Silaji, 2024; Winter, 2024). This holistic approach to educational support promotes cognitive development, emotional resilience, and social skills, all of which are essential for sustained engagement and success in school.

Educational guidance extends beyond mere homework help; it involves active parental involvement in setting academic goals, discussing career pathways, and fostering positive attitudes toward learning. The studies by Masudi and Silaji (2024) highlight that children exposed to consistent parental academic support, such as reading activities, exhibit measurable gains in literacy and overall academic performance. Similarly, high parental expectations combined with consistent support cultivate intrinsic motivation and effective self-regulatory behaviors in students. These outcomes suggest that parental guidance plays a vital role in shaping students' academic self-efficacy, which is crucial for persistence in school.

Beyond academic benefits, parental educational guidance supports the emotional and social development necessary for navigating school challenges. By modeling positive behaviors and establishing stable learning environments, parents help students build resilience, empathy, and interpersonal skills, which contribute to a student's capacity to remain engaged despite obstacles. This aligns with broader research that associates emotional stability and social competence with higher retention rates.

At the institutional level, the importance of structured educational guidance systems is well documented. Access to academic advisors significantly improves students' likelihood of staying enrolled and graduating on time. Proactive advising and mentorship programs foster clarity around academic requirements and career options, thus enhancing motivation and goal orientation (Kuh et al., 2019; Campbell & Nutt, 2020). These findings mirror those from African contexts, where Odongo and Wamunyu (2021) and Musinguzi et al. (2023) observe that frequent career guidance and educational support services correlate strongly with higher self-efficacy, academic discipline, and retention. The current study's empirical finding of a Pearson correlation coefficient of $r = 0.638$ ($p < 0.01$) demonstrates a statistically significant and strong positive relationship between parental educational guidance and student retention. This relationship suggests that students whose parents actively engage in academic advising, goal setting, and career counseling are more likely to remain committed to their education. Educational guidance not only provides students with a clearer sense of direction and purpose but also boosts their academic confidence and emotional commitment, which collectively contribute to sustained school attendance and completion.

In summary, the literature and empirical evidence firmly establish that parental educational guidance is a vital mechanism for enhancing student retention. It supports

cognitive and emotional development, fosters motivation and self-regulation, and complements institutional advising efforts to create a comprehensive support system. Schools and policymakers should thus prioritize initiatives that encourage and facilitate parental involvement in educational guidance, recognizing its pivotal role in reducing dropout rates and promoting academic success.

CONCLUSIONS

There is a statistically significant and strong positive relationship between parental emotional support and student retention ($r = 0.611$, $p < 0.01$). This indicates that higher levels of emotional support, such as comfort, encouragement, and emotional security, are associated with increased student commitment, regular attendance, and active engagement in academic activities.

A statistically significant and moderate positive relationship exists between parental financial support and student retention ($r = 0.489$, $p < 0.01$). This suggests that students who receive financial assistance for school expenses, extracurricular activities, and learning materials from their parents are more likely to stay enrolled and participate consistently in their education.

Parental educational guidance shows a statistically significant and strong positive relationship with student retention ($r = 0.638$, $p < 0.01$). Students whose parents provide academic support, such as homework assistance, educational goal setting, and career advice, tend to have greater academic confidence, a clearer sense of direction, and higher levels of persistence in school.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Schools and local education authorities should organize workshops to educate parents on the importance of providing consistent emotional support, including active listening, empathy, and encouragement.

The government should expand and effectively manage bursary schemes targeting economically disadvantaged students to reduce financial barriers.

Parental Training on Academic Support: Develop programs that train parents on effective ways to assist with homework, goal setting, and career advice.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

IMF: International Monetary Fund
USE: Universal Secondary Education.
SPSS: Statistical Package for Social Sciences

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

No conflict of interest declared.

AVAILABILITY OF DATA

Data used in this study are available upon request from the corresponding author.

AUTHORS CONTRIBUTION

MM designed the study, conducted data collection, cleaned and analyzed data and draft the manuscript and HN supervised all stages of the study from conceptualization of the topic to manuscript writing.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The study adhered to ethical research standards to protect the rights and well-being of all participants. Before data collection, the researcher obtained informed consent from all participants or their guardians (in the case of minors). Participation was entirely voluntary, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any time without any repercussions. Confidentiality was maintained by anonymizing responses and securely storing all data. Additionally, ethical clearance was sought from the relevant institutional review board to ensure that the study met acceptable ethical standards.

INFORMED CONSENT

Verbal and written informed consent from the study participants was sought by the principal investigator. The purpose of this was to make sure that respondents were informed about the purpose and objectives as postulated in the respondent information. The researcher also made available the contact information of research supervisors.

The study participants were informed that they could refuse or withdraw from the study at any stage of the study, if they wished to do so, without penalty or prejudice. Confidentiality was preserved throughout the entire study, since no respondent's name was linked to the data. Participants' data was stored in a password-protected computer for analysis, and the password was only known to the PI. Anonymity is more than confidentiality, since respondents' identities remain unknown even to the researcher. In this study, anonymity was ensured because respondents' names were not entered in the questionnaire and computer, respectively; serial codes were used instead.

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