



## East African Journal of Arts and Social Sciences

[eajass.eanso.org](http://eajass.eanso.org)

Volume 8, Issue 3, 2025

Print ISSN: 2707-4277 | Online ISSN: 2707-4285

Title DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37284/2707-4285>



EAST AFRICAN  
NATURE &  
SCIENCE  
ORGANIZATION

Original Article

### The Effect of the Different Recruitment Methods on the Enrolment of Learners in Private Secondary Schools in Mitooma District

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Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37284/eajass.8.3.3560>

Date Published: ABSTRACT

27 August 2025

#### Keywords:

*Different  
Recruitment  
Methods,  
Enrolment of  
Learners,  
Private Secondary  
Schools.*

This study examined the effect of the different recruitment methods on the enrolment of learners in private secondary schools in Mitooma District. A descriptive research design was used, targeting 108 teachers, 5 headteachers, and 1 District Education Officer (DEO). A sample of 114 respondents was selected. Data were collected through focus group discussions and interviews. Qualitative data were analysed thematically. Results indicated that private secondary schools in Mitooma District employ a combination of traditional and modern recruitment methods, including advertising, word-of-mouth recommendations, social media, and school visits. The rate of learner enrolment in private secondary schools in Mitooma District is influenced by factors such as financial aid, scholarships, school reputation, and parental decision-making. Various recruitment methods, including advertising, word-of-mouth recommendations, scholarships, and school reputation, significantly impact enrolment in private secondary schools in Mitooma District. In conclusion, a combination of traditional and modern recruitment strategies, including advertising, word-of-mouth recommendations, social media, and school visits, is effective in increasing enrolment. Financial aid, scholarships, school reputation, and parental decision-making are also significant factors influencing enrolment. Overall, the findings suggest that private secondary schools in Mitooma District can improve their enrolment by adopting an integrated approach to recruitment. It is recommended that school inspectors evaluate the impact of different recruitment methods and recommend adjustments to improve enrollment outcomes.

#### APA CITATION

Bainomugisha, E., Balimuttajjo, S. & Aheisibwe, A. (2025). The Effect of the Different Recruitment Methods on the Enrolment of Learners in Private Secondary Schools in Mitooma District. *East African Journal of Arts and Social Sciences*, 8(3), 321-331. <https://doi.org/10.37284/eajass.8.3.3560>

#### CHICAGO CITATION

Bainomugisha, Emmanuel, Sudi Balimuttajjo and Irene Aheisibwe. 2025. "The Effect of the Different Recruitment Methods on the Enrolment of Learners in Private Secondary Schools in Mitooma District." *East African Journal of Arts and Social Sciences* 8 (3), 321-331. <https://doi.org/10.37284/eajass.8.3.3560>.

#### HARVARD CITATION

Bainomugisha, E., Balimuttajjo, S. & Aheisibwe, A. (2025), "The Effect of the Different Recruitment Methods on the Enrolment of Learners in Private Secondary Schools in Mitooma District", *East African Journal of Arts and Social Sciences*, 8(3), pp. 321-331. doi: 10.37284/eajass.8.3.3560.

#### IEEE CITATION

E., Bainomugisha, S., Balimuttajjo & A., Aheisibwe "The Effect of the Different Recruitment Methods on the Enrolment of Learners in Private Secondary Schools in Mitooma District", *EAJASS*, vol. 8, no. 3, pp. 321-331, Aug. 2025.

#### MLA CITATION

Bainomugisha, Emmanuel, Sudi Balimuttajjo & Irene Aheisibwe. "The Effect of the Different Recruitment Methods on the Enrolment of Learners in Private Secondary Schools in Mitooma District". *East African Journal of Arts and Social Sciences*, Vol. 8, no. 3, Aug. 2025, pp. 321-331, doi:10.37284/eajass.8.3.3560

## INTRODUCTION

Globally, the methods for recruiting and enrolling students in secondary schools have undergone considerable transformation over time (Beech, 2020). In the past, education tended to cater primarily to the privileged few, with limited opportunities for the wider population. Yet, with the advancement of societies, the significance of education has gained broader acknowledgement, prompting extensive initiatives to boost enrolment and enhance recruitment techniques (Moerchen et al., 2018). Additionally, the global nature of education has fostered the sharing of insights and effective approaches in recruitment and enrolment strategies across nations (Crawford et al., 2020).

Across Africa, the educational landscape claims experiences that vary greatly across different regions and historical periods (Reid, 2020). Pre-colonial times saw education primarily taking shape through informal channels within local communities, emphasising practical skills, traditions, and cultural heritage. The advent of colonial rule ushered in formal education systems, frequently designed to prepare indigenous populations for administrative functions within the colonial structure. Following independence, African countries embarked on substantial educational overhauls, striving to ensure education was accessible to all.

In Kenya, the evolution of education intertwines indigenous educational customs with the impact of colonial rule (Wane & Munene, 2018). Before British colonisation, education among Kenya's

diverse ethnic communities revolved mainly around oral traditions, passing down cultural knowledge and practical skills through generations. The British colonial administration introduced formal education, primarily to further colonial interests and missionary endeavours. Following independence in 1963, Kenya pursued extensive educational reforms with the goal of broadening access to education across all levels.

In Uganda, the history of education follows a pattern similar to that of many other African nations, blending indigenous traditions with colonial influences (Ezeanya-Esiobu, 2019). Indigenous education in Uganda was predominantly informal and rooted in community practices, emphasising practical skills and cultural heritage. The advent of European missionaries and colonial rulers brought formal education systems, though access remained restricted for most of the population. Upon gaining independence in 1962, Uganda initiated educational reforms with the aim of ensuring education was accessible to all citizens.

Mitooma District, located in southwestern Uganda, has an educational landscape shaped by its history (MoES, 2020). Historically, access to education in Mitooma District has been limited by factors such as distance to schools, poverty, cultural beliefs, and gender disparities. However, efforts by the Ugandan government have led to the establishment of secondary schools in the district, aiming to improve access to education for its residents. Recruitment methods and enrolment processes in secondary schools in Mitooma District likely reflect a combination of government policies, community

initiatives, and local circumstances, with a focus on increasing enrolment and addressing barriers to access.

Private secondary schools should attract and maintain a steady flow of student enrollment through effective recruitment methods. These schools are expected to provide quality education, modern facilities, and diverse learning opportunities, making them competitive alternatives to public institutions. With well-structured recruitment strategies, private schools should experience stable or increasing enrollment, ensuring financial sustainability and continuous academic excellence.

However, in Mitooma District, private secondary schools are facing declining student enrollment despite efforts to recruit learners. According to recent statistics, enrollment in private secondary schools in the district has been declining over the past few years. For example, in 2022, private schools in Mitooma District recorded an average enrollment rate of 58%, compared to 65% in 2021, indicating a worrying trend. Factors such as high tuition fees, limited financial aid, competition from public schools, and ineffective recruitment strategies have contributed to this decline (Mitooma DEO's Report 2022/2023).

If this problem persists, private schools may struggle financially, leading to staff layoffs, inadequate learning resources, and, in extreme cases, school closures. This will negatively impact educational opportunities for students who rely on private institutions for quality learning. Therefore, this study seeks to examine the effectiveness of recruitment methods in private secondary schools in Mitooma District and their impact on student enrollment, with the aim of identifying solutions to improve recruitment strategies and increase enrollment.

## Purpose of the Study

To investigate whether learner recruitment methods influence enrolment in private Secondary Schools in Mitooma District.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Vrioni (2023) found that centralised admissions systems led to higher enrolment by improving transparency, fairness, and efficiency in the recruitment process, making it easier for students to secure placements in secondary schools. Similarly, Machado and Szerman (2021) showed that such systems helped bridge gaps in access to education by providing equal opportunities for students from all backgrounds, resulting in increased enrolment, particularly among marginalised groups. Sattin-Bajaj and Jennings (2020) highlighted that parents valued the fairness and reliability of these systems, influencing their enrolment decisions. However, these findings may not directly apply to Mitooma District, where local cultural, economic, and educational factors could affect the system's effectiveness. Furthermore, Gottfredson et al. (2020) revealed that schools hosting open days saw a noticeable increase in enrolment, as these events allowed prospective students and their families to interact with staff and get a feel for the school environment. Yet, Schumann (2018) argued that open days, while effective in raising awareness, might not always directly result in increased enrolment. These studies provide insights into how recruitment methods like centralised systems and open days influence enrolment, but lack a deeper exploration of how these methods resonate within the unique context of Mitooma District.

Crowne (2022) suggests that schools offering merit-based scholarships tend to attract more academically talented students, which significantly boosts enrolment. Similarly, Phillips (2018) highlighted that need-based scholarships are crucial for increasing enrolment, particularly among students from low-income backgrounds, thereby enhancing access to education for disadvantaged

groups. Lambrechts (2020) further supported this by noting that schools providing bursaries experience higher enrolment, especially among economically disadvantaged students. However, while these studies address economic disadvantage, they do not explore how scholarships impact enrolment among students from diverse backgrounds, including gender, ethnicity, or those with disabilities. On another note, Halim et al. (2018) found that personal recommendations from family, friends, or acquaintances significantly influence parents' decisions, leading to increased enrolment in schools. Rehman et al. (2022) similarly emphasised the role of word-of-mouth referrals, with endorsements from current students or alumni fostering trust and credibility. Despite these insights, both studies lack a comparison with other recruitment methods to gauge the overall effectiveness of personal recommendations against more formal strategies.

Vrontis et al. (2018) found that schools utilising targeted social media campaigns experienced a significant increase in student enrolment compared to those relying solely on traditional methods like flyers and newspaper advertisements. This highlights the growing importance of digital platforms in reaching a wider audience and attracting potential students. Avery et al. (2021) further revealed that personalised communication, such as tailored emails or phone calls, significantly increased the likelihood of enrollment, as it established a stronger connection with prospective students. However, while digital campaigns have proven effective, the cost-effectiveness of these methods compared to traditional approaches remains underexplored. Secore (2018) demonstrated that hosting open house events, which allowed prospective students and their families to tour school facilities and interact with teachers, also led to higher enrolment numbers. Similarly, alumni referrals were found to positively impact enrolment (Geiger et al., 2018), underscoring the value of leveraging alumni networks in recruitment.

Alexander and Walton (2022) confirmed that schools employing personalised recruitment strategies, such as targeting students based on academic interests and performance, saw higher enrolment than those using traditional mass recruitment methods. Despite these findings, the studies lack quantitative data to robustly support the effectiveness of these recruitment strategies. Statistical evidence would provide a more solid foundation for evaluating the true impact of these methods on enrolment.

Bentley-Steyn (2019) found that schools actively engaging prospective students through social media platforms like Instagram and Facebook experienced a significant increase in enrolment numbers, highlighting the effectiveness of digital recruitment tools in attracting potential students. Soule (2020) similarly observed that schools that fostered strong partnerships with parents, involving them in school tours, open houses, and information sessions, saw higher enrolment. This increase was attributed to the trust and confidence parents developed through direct engagement with the school. While Soule's study employed both quantitative (questionnaires) and qualitative (interviews) methods, it primarily focused on quantitative data. A deeper exploration of qualitative insights, such as students' narratives and counsellors' observations, could provide a richer understanding of the recruitment process and its impact on enrolment decisions.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Approach

A qualitative research approach was adopted to examine learner recruitment methods and enrolment in private secondary schools in Mitooma District. This method was selected for its ability to capture the experiences, insights, and perspectives of key stakeholders, including school administrators, teachers, parents, and students. It provided valuable context-specific information on how recruitment strategies influence enrolment.

## Research Design

The study utilised a descriptive research design to examine learner recruitment methods and enrolment in private secondary schools in Mitooma District. This design is effective for providing a detailed account of characteristics, behaviours, and experiences within a specific population.

## Target Population

The study will census all 5 headteachers and the DEO due to their small numbers and key role in recruitment, while 84 teachers will be selected through stratified random sampling with proportional allocation across the 5 schools. Headteachers participated in the study because they were responsible for implementing and monitoring

school programs. The DEO participated in the study because he was responsible for implementing policies for effective recruitment methods and the enrollment of learners in secondary schools. Secondary school teachers participated in the study because they were responsible for teaching and, at times, participated in the recruitment of learners.

## Sample Size

A sample in this case is a subset of the population (Lakens, 2022). The study sample size comprised 114 respondents, including 5 headteachers, 108 teachers, and 1 DEO. This was determined using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sampling technique. This sample size enabled the researcher to detect significant differences or associations between variables.

**Table 1: Showing Sample Size and Sampling Techniques**

Category	Population size	Sample size	Sampling technique
DEO	1	1	Purposive sampling
Head Teachers	5	5	Purposive sampling
Teachers	150	108	Simple random sampling
<b>Total</b>	<b>311</b>	<b>114</b>	

## Research Instruments

### *Focus Discussion Guide*

The Focus Discussion Guide is a structured tool used to facilitate discussions and ensure alignment with the study's objectives. This research focused on exploring learner recruitment methods, assessing enrolment, and examining how recruitment strategies affect enrolment in private secondary schools in Mitooma District. The guide included open-ended questions that encouraged participants to share in-depth insights on the recruitment processes, challenges, and their impact on enrolment. This approach provided valuable, consistent, and detailed data, helping the researcher achieve the study's objectives while maintaining focus and clarity during the discussions.

### *Interview Guide*

Personal interviews, conducted face-to-face using structured questions, were employed to collect primary data from headteachers and the District Education Officer (DEO). This method enabled the researcher to obtain first-hand and reliable information while allowing for adequate probing to capture detailed insights into the different recruitment methods and their effect on learner enrolment. In total, six interviews were carried out—five with headteachers and one with the DEO—conducted at the respective school premises and the district education office. The interviews were scheduled during working hours, specifically between 10:00 am and 2:00 pm, when participants were more available and less likely to be interrupted by their official duties.

The interview questions focused on identifying the recruitment methods used to attract learners,



assessing the effectiveness of these methods in improving enrolment, exploring challenges encountered in implementing recruitment strategies, evaluating how success is measured, and soliciting suggestions on ways to enhance learner enrolment. These interviews allowed for rapport-building and the use of personal skills by the researcher to overcome resistance, ensuring the collection of relevant and in-depth information for the study.

Ethical considerations were observed throughout the data collection process. Informed consent was obtained from all respondents after explaining the purpose of the study, its voluntary nature, and their right to withdraw at any point. To ensure privacy and confidentiality, responses were anonymised and used strictly for academic purposes. Additionally, the researcher sought permission and clearance from relevant district education authorities before engaging participants, further upholding ethical standards in the study.

### Data Analysis

The data were analysed using thematic analysis to identify, analyse, and report patterns within the qualitative responses. The process began with familiarisation with the interview transcripts, followed by systematic coding of the data to highlight key issues related to recruitment methods and learner enrolment. Coding and theme development were facilitated using Atlas.ti software, which supported efficient organisation, retrieval, and categorisation of data segments. The codes were then grouped into broader themes, which were interpreted to address the research questions. To enhance accuracy and reliability, the findings were validated through member checking with participants and peer debriefing with colleagues.

### RESULTS

#### Summary of Qualitative Data Concerning the Effect of the Different Recruitment Methods on the Enrolment of Learners

Theme	Subtheme	Category
The Effect of Recruitment Methods on Enrolment	Positive Impact of Advertising Methods	Effective advertising strategies (local radio, posters, social media campaigns) have a significant impact on increasing enrolment.
	Role of Word-of-Mouth in Recruitment	Word-of-mouth and peer recommendations have a strong influence on enrolment, especially in local communities.
	Influence of Scholarships and Discounts	Scholarships, financial aid, and flexible payment plans encourage higher enrollment, especially in areas with lower-income households.
	Impact of School Reputation and Facilities	Schools known for strong academic results and superior infrastructure see higher enrolment. Extracurricular offerings such as sports and clubs also attract students.
	Barriers to Enrolment	High school fees, poor infrastructure, and limited spaces in schools act as barriers to enrolment despite strong recruitment efforts.

It was revealed that various recruitment methods significantly influenced the enrolment of students. Different strategies had distinct effects, with some contributing positively to increasing enrolment,

while others presented challenges that hindered the growth potential.

### Positive Impact of Advertising Methods

Teachers recognised the significant role of advertising in increasing enrolment. Schools that implemented advertising strategies such as local radio, posters, and social media campaigns witnessed a noticeable rise in student applications. One teacher explained,

*“Our school’s enrolment numbers grew after we started promoting our school through local radio and social media. It has been an effective way to reach out to potential students and their parents who may not have otherwise known about us.”* Another teacher commented, *“Using posters and radio ads has helped get the word out, and we’ve received many more inquiries as a result.”*

These methods were especially effective in raising awareness and attracting new students, many of whom were unfamiliar with the school (FGD 1 from school A).

### Role of Word-of-Mouth in Recruitment

Word-of-mouth proved to be an especially influential tool in recruitment, particularly in local communities. Teachers reported that past and current students, as well as their parents, were essential in spreading the word about the school. One teacher shared,

*“When people talk positively about their experiences, it plays a significant role in attracting new students. Many learners come because they’ve heard good things from those they trust.”* Another teacher added, *“Parents and former students play a big role in recommending the school to others. It’s often the reason behind a lot of our new enrolments.”*

This form of social influence within tight-knit communities appeared to be one of the most effective ways to increase student intake (FGD from school B).

### Influence of Scholarships and Discounts

The availability of scholarships, financial aid, and fee discounts was another major factor that affected enrolment. Teachers pointed out that such financial assistance enabled many students, particularly from low-income families, to access education. One teacher noted,

*“When we offer scholarships or discounts, we see a significant increase in enrolments. Many students who wouldn’t have been able to afford the fees can join because of these financial aids.”* Another teacher stated, *“Offering scholarships and flexible payment plans helps break down the financial barriers for many families, which shows that we’re dedicated to making education accessible to everyone.”*

These initiatives allowed schools to appeal to a wider range of students, especially those from less privileged backgrounds (FGD 2 from school D).

### Impact of School Reputation and Facilities

The reputation of a school and the quality of its facilities were also crucial in attracting new students. Teachers mentioned that schools known for their academic excellence and well-developed facilities saw higher enrolment numbers. One teacher commented,

*“Our school’s reputation for producing good academic results and having excellent extracurricular activities has contributed to our high enrolment. Parents want their children to succeed and engage in sports and other activities.”*

Another teacher added,

*“When a school has a solid reputation and offers good facilities, parents are more inclined to send their children there. It shows that the school provides quality education and a supportive learning environment.”*

These factors helped maintain steady enrolment at these schools, as many parents valued both academic success and opportunities for extracurricular involvement (FGD 1 from school E).

### Barriers to Enrolment

Despite the efforts to recruit more students, several barriers were identified that limited enrollment. Teachers noted that high school fees, inadequate facilities, and limited space often acted as significant challenges. One teacher explained,

*“Even though we try to attract more students, the high fees prevent some families from enrolling their children. Some students want to come but simply can’t afford the costs.”*

Another teacher highlighted,

*“Our school’s facilities, though good, are not sufficient to accommodate all the students who wish to enrol. This shortage of space forces us to turn away potential learners.”*

These barriers prevented the full realisation of the benefits of recruitment efforts, as financial constraints and infrastructural limitations limited the number of students who could be accepted (FGD 1 from school C).

This implies that various recruitment strategies, such as advertising, word-of-mouth, scholarships, and a strong school reputation, had a significant positive impact on enrolment in private secondary schools in Mitooma District. However, challenges such as high school fees, limited space, and inadequate infrastructure acted as barriers that hindered potential growth. Schools could further increase enrolment by continuing to implement effective recruitment strategies while addressing the existing barriers.

### DISCUSSION

The study revealed that various recruitment methods significantly impacted enrolment in private secondary schools in Mitooma District. This finding

aligns with Vrontis et al.'s (2018) study, which emphasised that schools effectively combine traditional and digital methods to reach a wider audience and subsequently increase enrolment. Vrontis et al. highlighted that integrating these methods allows schools to maintain visibility and adapt to changing communication trends, thereby attracting a broader demographic of potential students.

The effectiveness of advertising strategies such as local radio, posters, and social media campaigns in attracting new students aligns with Avery et al.'s (2021) study. Avery et al. found that targeted marketing efforts are particularly effective in reaching potential students because they leverage specific demographics and interests. These strategies enable schools to communicate their unique value propositions directly to parents and students who are most likely to enrol.

Word-of-mouth recommendations have proven to be highly effective in attracting new students, a finding supported by Halim et al.'s (2018) study. Halim et al. highlighted the power of personal recommendations in influencing parents' decisions, noting that testimonials from trusted sources such as family, friends, and current students carry more weight than formal advertising. This form of informal marketing not only enhances credibility but also fosters a sense of community and trust in the school's reputation.

The impact of scholarships, financial aid, and flexible payment plans on increasing enrolment, particularly among low-income families, is well-documented. Crowne's (2022) study found that merit-based scholarships significantly boost enrolment by rewarding academic excellence and reducing the financial burden on families. Similarly, Phillips' (2018) research highlighted the importance of need-based scholarships in increasing enrolment among students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Phillips argued that financial support mechanisms ensure that education remains



accessible to a wider population, thereby promoting equity in educational opportunities.

The influence of a school's reputation for academic success and good facilities on enrolment is another crucial factor. This aligns with Lambrechts' (2020) findings, which revealed that schools offering bursaries and maintaining high academic standards experience higher enrolment, particularly among economically disadvantaged students. Lambrechts emphasised that parents are drawn to schools that provide not only quality education but also a conducive learning environment with well-maintained facilities.

However, the study also highlights several challenges faced by private secondary schools in Mitooma District, including high school fees, limited space, and inadequate infrastructure. These issues pose significant barriers to further growth in enrolment. This is consistent with Nwosu and Ataguba's (2019) study, which identified poverty, gender, and geographical location as critical barriers to secondary education. Nwosu and Ataguba noted that even when schools offer financial aid, socio-economic and geographical challenges often persist, limiting the overall impact on enrolment. Addressing these barriers requires holistic interventions that go beyond financial support to include improvements in infrastructure and policy adjustments to enhance accessibility.

## CONCLUSIONS

Private secondary schools in Mitooma District use both traditional and modern recruitment methods. Advertising via radio, posters, and social media boosts visibility, while word-of-mouth from students, alumni, and parents is highly influential. School visits, open days, and collaboration with local leaders enhance recruitment, with educational fairs further increasing visibility.

Enrolment is influenced by financial aid, school reputation, and parental preferences. High enrolment occurs at the start of the year as parents prioritise reputable schools. Scholarships help low-

income families access education. However, financial challenges and competition often cause dropouts, indicating the need for ongoing support.

Recruitment methods greatly impact enrolment. Advertising, word-of-mouth, and financial incentives boost enrolment, while strong reputations and good facilities attract more students. However, high fees, limited space, and poor infrastructure remain major barriers. Addressing these issues could improve enrolment.

## Recommendations

The government should support infrastructure development to address space and facility limitations in private schools. The inspector of schools should evaluate the impact of different recruitment methods and recommend adjustments to improve enrolment outcomes. Headteachers should focus on improving the school's reputation by enhancing academic performance and extracurricular activities. Teachers should highlight positive school experiences to attract more enrolments through word-of-mouth recommendations.

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