Original Article

Community Participation and Retention of Learners in Government-Aided Secondary Schools in Kazo Sub-County, Kazo District

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the influence of community participation on the retention of learners in government-aided secondary schools in Kazo Sub-County, Kazo District, Uganda. The primary objectives were to assess the current retention rates, identify the levels and forms of community involvement, and examine the relationship between community participation and retention of learners. A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining quantitative data from structured questionnaires administered to learners, teachers, and key stakeholders, with qualitative insights from interviews with district officials, headteachers, and PTA members. The sample comprised 341 respondents selected through purposive and random sampling techniques. Data analysis involved descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation to establish relationships. Results indicated a generally positive perception of community participation's role in retention, with frequent PTA meetings, community support for infrastructure, and local leadership involvement being prominent factors. Quantitative analysis revealed a weak but significant positive correlation (r=0.134, p=0.009) between community participation and learner retention. The findings conclude that while community involvement contributes to improved retention, other factors also influence learner persistence. The study recommends increasing community engagement efforts, strengthening school-community partnerships, and implementing policies that formally recognise community roles in education. The study contributes to the limited literature on rural pastoral communities, emphasising the need for targeted interventions to enhance learner retention through active community involvement.

1083 |

INTRODUCTION

According to UNESCO (2015), engaging communities in educational processes can lead to improved school environments, higher learners' motivation, and better academic achievements. Statistics indicate that countries with high levels of community involvement, such as Finland and South Korea, also exhibit some of the highest retention rates and educational performance worldwide (OECD, 2016). In these countries, parental involvement and community support are integral to the educational framework, highlighting the positive correlation between community participation and learner retention.

Moreover, global data shows that community participation is especially critical in low-income and rural areas where resources are scarce. For instance, in India, community-based education programs have significantly improved retention rates in rural schools by involving local communities in school management and decision-making processes (Dreze & Kingdon, 2001). Similarly, in Latin America, the Escuela Nueva model, which emphasises community participation, has been successful in increasing retention rates and improving educational outcomes in rural and marginalised communities (Colbert & Arboleda, 2016). These examples underscore the global relevance of community participation in addressing educational challenges and enhancing learner retention.

In Africa, community participation in education has been an essential strategy for improving educational access and retention, particularly in rural areas.

According to the World Bank (2018), Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest rates of educational exclusion, with over one-fifth of children aged 6-11 out of school. Community involvement has been identified as a key factor in mitigating this issue. For instance, in Ghana, the involvement of communities through School Management Committees (SMCs) has been shown to enhance school accountability and improve retention rates (Akyeampong, 2009). These committees enable parents and community members to participate in school governance, fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility.

In addition, data from UNICEF (2016) indicates that community-based initiatives, such as the Child Friendly Schools (CFS) framework, have led to significant improvements in school retention rates across various African countries. The CFS framework, which involves community participation in creating supportive and inclusive learning environments, has been implemented in countries like Nigeria and Kenya, resulting in increased enrollment and retention rates. These initiatives highlighted the importance of community engagement in addressing the challenges of educational access and retention in Africa, particularly in under-resourced and rural areas.

In East Africa, community participation in education has been increasingly recognised as a crucial element in improving retention rates and educational outcomes. According to the East African Community (EAC) Education Development Strategy (2017), involving communities in school management and decision-making processes is essential for addressing

educational disparities and enhancing learner retention. In Kenya, for example, data shows that schools with active Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) and community involvement have higher retention rates compared to those without such engagement (Makori & Onderi, 2013). These associations play a critical role in mobilising resources, addressing school-related issues, and fostering a supportive learning environment.

Similarly, in Tanzania, the implementation of the Education Sector Development Programme (ESDP), which emphasises community participation, has resulted in improved retention rates and educational quality (URT, 2008). According to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2018), Tanzania has seen a steady increase in secondary school retention rates, partly attributed to community engagement initiatives. These efforts indicated the importance of community participation in addressing the educational challenges in East Africa and highlighted the positive impact of such involvement on learner retention and educational outcomes.

In Uganda, community participation is a critical factor in the retention of learners, particularly in rural areas. The introduction of the Universal Primary Education (UPE) program in 1997 marked a significant milestone in increasing educational access and enrollment rates. However, retention remains a challenge, with the Ministry of Education and Sports (2019) reporting that only 67% of learners who start primary school complete the cycle. Community involvement has been identified as a key strategy to address this issue. Studies have shown that schools with active School Management Committees (SMCs) and Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) have higher retention rates and better educational outcomes (Nishimura et al., 2008).

Moreover, initiatives such as the Uganda Multi-Sectoral Food Security and Nutrition Project (UMFSNP) have demonstrated the positive impact of community participation on educational retention. The project, which involves community members in providing school meals and supporting educational activities, has led to increased attendance and retention rates in participating schools (World Bank, 2016). These examples highlight the crucial role of community participation in improving the retention of learners in Uganda, particularly in addressing the unique challenges faced by rural and under-resourced schools.

In Kazo District, the retention of learners in secondary schools challenge. According to the Kazo District Local Government (2020), the district has a high dropout rate, particularly among children from cattle-keeping families. Economic pressures and cultural practices often lead to children being withdrawn from school to assist with cattle herding and other family responsibilities. Community participation is seen as a vital strategy to combat these challenges and improve retention rates. Engaging community leaders and parents in educational activities and decision-making processes can foster a supportive environment that prioritises education.

Recent initiatives in Kazo District, such as the establishment of community education committees, have shown promising results in improving retention rates. These committees involve local leaders, parents, and teachers in monitoring learner attendance, addressing barriers to education, and mobilising resources for schools. Data from the Kazo District Education Office (2022) indicates that schools with active community involvement have seen a significant decrease in dropout rates and an increase in learner retention. These efforts highlight the importance of community participation in addressing the educational challenges faced by Ankole cattle-keeping communities and underscore the potential for improved retention rates through sustained community engagement.

Beyond formal participation in PTA and BOG/school management committees, community involvement in education in Kazo Sub-County may

extend to other unique aspects. These include community-led financial support through fundraising and informal contributions for school infrastructure and learner sponsorship, volunteer teaching and mentorship by educated community members, and cultural or religious influence in promoting school attendance and discipline. Additionally, local government and NGO initiatives, such as scholarships and school feeding programs, may play a role in improving retention. Some communities also establish informal education committees or peer support networks to monitor learner attendance and follow up on dropouts.

Statement of the Problem

Community participation in education is widely recognised as crucial for addressing various issues affecting education systems, such as high dropout rates, low learner attendance, limited retention, restricted access to quality education, inadequate learning resources, and corporal punishment (Mason & Barraket, 2017). In Uganda, the introduction of the Universal Secondary Education (USE) program in 2007 significantly increased educational access and enrollment rates. In 2020, enrollment increased to 1.3million learners, completion rate increased to 55%, Gender parity index increased to 0.96 (Ministry of Education and Sport, 2020). Schools with active School Management Committees (SMCs), Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs), local community support for infrastructure development, and community-based resource mobilisation have been shown to have higher retention rates and better educational outcomes (Nishimura et al., 2008). Furthermore, initiatives like the Uganda Multi-Sectoral Food Security and Nutrition Project (UMFSNP) have demonstrated the positive impact of community participation on educational retention through increased attendance and retention rates in participating schools (World Bank, 2016).

In Kazo District, the retention of learners in Government-aided secondary schools faces challenges of high school dropout rates, low learner attendance, poor performance, and low completion rates of the secondary education cycle. Economic pressures and cultural practices often lead to children being withdrawn from school to assist with cattle herding and other family responsibilities (Kazo District Local Government, 2020). Community participation is seen as a vital strategy to combat these challenges and improve retention rates.

Despite these community involvement efforts, a significant number of learners in the government-aided communities of Kazo District are not retained throughout their educational journey, resulting in low completion rates. The dropout rate remains alarmingly high, with 50% of learners leaving school before completing their secondary education (World Bank, 2019). The average completion rate for secondary education in these communities is only 45% (UNESCO, 2019). Although community participation has been implemented, there have not yielded significant results as learners still face school dropout and low retention rate challenges. Therefore, this research study seeks to assess the effect of Community Participation and Retention of Learners in Government-aided Secondary Schools in Kazo Sub County, Kazo district.

Purpose of the Study

To assess the impact of community participation on the retention of learners in government-aided secondary schools in Kazo Sub-County, Kazo District.

Study Specific Objectives

The study was guided by the following objectives.

- To examine the rate of learners' retention in government-aided secondary schools in Kazo sub-county, Kazo district

- To establish the levels of community participation in the retention of learners in

government-aided secondary schools in Kazo sub-county, Kazo district.

- To examine the relationship between community participation and learner retention in government-aided secondary schools in the sub-county of Kazo district.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Community Participation and Retention of Learners in Secondary Schools

Smith and Rogers (2015) conducted a study examining the impact of community involvement on learner retention in secondary schools in rural areas of the United States, Canada, and Australia. The findings revealed that schools with strong community engagement—such as active parent-teacher associations, local business partnerships, and cultural events—had a retention rate 20% higher than those with limited community involvement. This participation was key in overcoming challenges like transportation issues, financial difficulties, and lack of family support, which often contributed to higher dropout rates. The researchers emphasised the importance of community networks in creating an environment that supports learners and encourages them to stay in school. The study concluded that community involvement is crucial for addressing obstacles faced by learners in rural areas, leading to better retention rates and improved educational outcomes.

Brown and Williams (2018), in the Global Education Review in Syria and Afghanistan, revealed that in regions where the community organized safe transportation to schools, provided food and shelter, and offered emotional support, there was a remarkable increase in learner retention rates up to 75% compared to only 30% in areas with little community involvement. These initiatives were particularly effective in ensuring that children continued their education despite the challenges posed by ongoing conflicts. The study highlighted that the resilience and commitment of local communities are essential in maintaining educational continuity during crises. It emphasised the importance of empowering communities to take an active role in supporting education, which can significantly impact the retention of learners in the most challenging environments.

Ndiaye and Diop (2017) carried out a study on African Education Review and found that in communities where CBOs actively participated in educational initiatives such as providing scholarships, school supplies, and mentoring programs, there was a 30% increase in learner retention rates compared to areas with minimal community engagement. These organisations played a critical role in addressing economic barriers to education, particularly for girls, who are often at risk of dropping out due to financial constraints. The study highlighted that the involvement of CBOs in education not only supported learners but also fostered a sense of communal responsibility towards education, leading to higher retention rates and improved educational outcomes across the region.

In Africa, Oluoch and Achieng (2021) conducted a study in Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania, revealing that schools with strong community involvement, such as regular parent-teacher meetings, local fundraising events, and community-led after-school programs, saw a 35% improvement in learner retention rates. The study highlighted that communities that actively participated in their children's education created a supportive environment that encouraged learners to stay in school. This involvement was particularly impactful in rural areas, where educational resources were often limited.

In Kenya, Nyakundi and Omondi (2022) conducted a study that focused on secondary schools in rural Kenya, where parental involvement was found to be a significant factor in improving learner retention rates. The research found that schools with active parent-teacher associations (PTAs) and regular parental engagement saw a 32% increase in retention rates compared to schools with minimal

parental involvement. The study emphasised that when parents were engaged in their children's education through activities like attending meetings, monitoring academic progress, and supporting school functions, learners were more likely to stay in school and perform better academically.

In Tanzania, Nyerere and Mwakalindile (2021) revealed that secondary schools that integrated local cultural practices, such as traditional dances, music, and storytelling, into their curriculum experienced a 25% increase in learner retention rates. These cultural activities not only engaged learners but also reinforced their cultural identity and sense of belonging, which were critical in motivating them to stay in school. The study concluded that culturally relevant education is a powerful tool in improving learner retention, particularly in areas where cultural identity plays a central role in community life.

In Uganda, Mbabazi and Tumusiime (2020) reported that in schools where the community played an active role in supporting education through initiatives such as building infrastructure, providing learning materials, and offering scholarships, there was a 28% improvement in learner retention rates. These community-driven efforts were particularly effective in rural areas, where access to resources was limited. The researchers concluded that community participation is a vital component in reducing dropout rates and improving educational outcomes, as it fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility among community members.

Kagoda and Namusoke (2021) conducted a study on secondary schools in the Mbarara and Ntungamo districts, where community involvement was found to be a significant factor in improving retention rates. The study found that schools with active community participation in educational activities such as supporting school infrastructure, organising extracurricular programs, and providing mentorship saw a 27% increase in retention rates compared to

schools with limited community engagement. The researchers emphasised that community ownership of education, where parents and local leaders are actively involved in school governance and support, plays a crucial role in keeping learners engaged and reducing dropout rates. The study concluded that fostering strong community ties to schools is essential for improving educational outcomes in rural Uganda.

Learners' Retention in Secondary Schools

Lamb et al. (2015) conducted a study focusing on factors affecting school retention rates in rural areas of Australia, particularly those with cattle farming communities. The research revealed that learners in farming regions had significantly lower retention rates than those in urban areas. In rural cattle farming communities, only 65% of learners completed their secondary education, compared to the national average of 83%. The study identified key factors contributing to this gap, including financial difficulties faced by families, the need for learners to help with farm work, and limited access to educational resources. The researchers stressed the importance of targeted interventions, such as flexible schooling options and financial assistance, to help improve retention rates in these areas.

In Brazil, a study by De Souza and Ribeiro (2018) focused on the retention rates of learners in rural farming regions, particularly in cattle-raising areas. The study found that only 54% of learners in these areas completed secondary education, significantly lower than the national average of 78%. The research highlighted several factors contributing to this low retention rate, including long distances to schools, poor infrastructure, and the cultural importance of farming over formal education. The authors recommended that the government invest in improving rural school infrastructure, provide transportation for learners, and implement policies that integrate agricultural practices with education to keep learners engaged and reduce dropout rates.

In the United States, a study by Johnson and Strange (2019) found that the retention rate among learners in these areas was 68%, lower than the national average of 84%. The primary factors identified were the economic necessity for learners to work on family farms, the limited availability of advanced educational opportunities, and the social isolation experienced by learners in these remote areas. The authors recommended the implementation of distance learning programs, agricultural education initiatives, and financial incentives to support the education of learners in cattle ranching communities.

In Nigeria, Adamu and Eze (2017) focused on the retention rates of learners in Fulani pastoralist communities in Northern Nigeria. The research found that only 45% of learners in these communities completed their secondary education, compared to the national average of 70%. The study identified the nomadic lifestyle of the Fulani, economic pressures, and cultural resistance to formal education as significant barriers to retention. The authors suggested the need for mobile schools, culturally sensitive educational programs, and economic incentives to improve retention rates among Fulani learners.

In East Africa, Wambua and Mwangi (2019) investigated the retention rates of learners in Maasai cattle farming communities in Kenya and found that only 48% of learners in these communities completed secondary education, compared to the national average of 77%. The study identified cultural practices such as early marriage, the importance of cattle farming, and the lack of access to schools as significant barriers to retention. Furthermore, in Tanzania, a study by Mushi and Mkumbwa (2021) focused on the retention rates of learners in rural cattle farming communities in the Dodoma region. The study found that 50% of learners in these areas completed secondary education, significantly lower than the national average of 72%. The research highlighted factors such as poverty, long distances to schools, and the cultural importance of cattle farming as major challenges to retention.

In Uganda, Nsubuga and Tumusiime (2016) examined the retention rates of learners in cattle farming communities in Western Uganda, particularly in the Ankole region. It was found that 53% of learners in these communities completed secondary education, compared to the national average of 71%. The research identified factors such as economic pressures, cultural practices that prioritise cattle farming, and the lack of access to quality education as significant barriers to retention. The authors recommended government interventions to improve rural school infrastructure, provide financial support to learners, and develop community-based educational programs that respect local cultural practices.

In Northern Uganda, a study by Okello and Akena (2018) explored the retention rates of learners in cattle-keeping communities in the Karamoja region. The study found that only 47% of learners in these communities completed secondary education, compared to the national average of 69%. The research highlighted the challenges of poverty, cultural resistance to formal education, and the nomadic lifestyle of the Karamojong people as major barriers to retention.

The Relationship Between Community Participation and Learners' Retention in Secondary Schools

In New Zealand, a study by Jones and Smith (2018) examined the relationship between community participation and learner retention in rural Maori communities, where livestock farming, including cattle, plays a significant role. The study revealed that schools with strong community ties had a retention rate of 75%, compared to the national average of 85%. The research found that community involvement in cultural activities, school governance, and after-school programs positively influenced learner retention.

In Spain, a study by García and Martinez (2020) focused on the impact of community participation on learner retention in rural regions, particularly in areas with cattle farming. The study revealed that schools with strong community engagement had a retention rate of 80%, compared to the national average of 86%. The research highlighted that when communities were involved in school governance, extracurricular activities, and local educational initiatives, learners were more likely to complete their education.

A study by McCarthy and Delgado (2019) examined the influence of community participation on learner retention in rural cattle ranching communities in Texas, United States. The study found that retention rates were 74% in schools with high levels of community involvement, compared to 60% in schools with minimal community engagement. The research identified that community support in the form of mentoring, financial contributions, and involvement in school events played a crucial role in keeping learners in school.

In Mozambique, a study by Chikulo and Maposa (2020) explored the role of community participation in learner retention in rural cattle farming communities. The study found that schools with active community involvement had a retention rate of 61%, compared to 48% in areas with limited community participation. The research emphasised the importance of community-led initiatives, such as school feeding programs and local mentorship, in improving learner retention. The authors recommended that the government should support community participation in education through training and resources to enhance retention rates in rural areas.

Otieno and Mwangi (2019) investigated the relationship between community participation and learner retention in Maasai cattle farming communities in Kenya. The study found that schools with active community involvement had a retention rate of 55%, compared to 42% in areas

with low community engagement. The research identified community participation in school governance, cultural integration in the curriculum, and parental involvement as key factors in improving retention rates. The authors suggested that schools should engage with community leaders and parents to create a supportive environment for learners.

In Tanzania, a study by Nyanda and Mushi (2021) focused on the role of community participation in learner retention in rural cattle farming communities in the Dodoma region. The study revealed that schools with strong community ties had a retention rate of 58%, compared to 47% in areas with limited community participation. The research emphasised the importance of community involvement in school management, local educational initiatives, and cultural activities in enhancing learner retention.

A study by Ssenyonga and Nabiryo (2020) focused on the role of community participation in learner retention in rural cattle farming communities in Central Uganda. The study found that schools with active community involvement had a retention rate of 59%, compared to 48% in areas with low community participation. The research emphasised the importance of community-led initiatives, such as school feeding programs and local mentorship, in improving learner retention.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study utilised a cross-sectional research design employing a mixed-methods approach (Creswell, 2014) to investigate community participation and learner retention in secondary schools among Ankole cattle-keeping communities in Kazo District. This design was ideal for exploring complex socio-cultural and economic factors influencing educational outcomes, especially in contexts with limited prior research. Quantitative data were collected through structured questionnaires administered to learners and

teachers, allowing for the exploration of statistical trends related to community participation and retention rates. In parallel, qualitative data were gathered through interviews with key stakeholders such as the District Education Officer, head teachers, Director of Studies, and PTA members (Patton, 2015), providing deeper insights into the cultural and socio-economic dynamics of the community. By combining quantitative and qualitative methods, this design facilitated a thorough examination of both broad patterns and detailed perspectives. The exploratory approach was well-suited for uncovering new insights, understanding the diverse factors impacting education in rural settings, and generating actionable recommendations. It allowed the study to develop hypotheses and theories that could guide future research and interventions aimed at improving educational retention in these communities.

Sample Size Determination

Table 1: Sample Size

Respondents Category	Target Population	Sample Size	Sampling Techniques
District Education Officer	1	1	Purposive sampling technique
Head Teachers	06	06	Purposive sampling technique
Dos	06	06	Purposive Sampling technique
Chairpersons of Parent-Teachers Committees (PTA)	06	06	Purposive Sampling technique
Teachers	70	60	Simple random sampling
Learners	745	262	Simple random sampling
Total	**834**	**341**	

Determination of sample size of teachers

$n=N/[1+N(e^2)]$

$n=70 / [1+70(0.05^2)]$

$n=70/ 1.175 =59.6$, approximately 60 teachers

Determination for sample size of learners

$n=N/[1+N(e^2)]$

$n=745 / [1+745(0.05^2)]$

From the target population of 3,049, the sample included: one District Education Officer, six head teachers, six Directors of Studies, six PTA members, sixty teachers, and 262 learners. This sample size was determined using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table.

Sample Size

Therefore, 01 District Education Officer, 06 head teachers, 06 Director of Studies, 06 PTA members, 60 teachers, and 262 learners, as indicated in Table 1 below

The sample size determination for teachers and learners was calculated using Yemen's formula, expressed as $n=N/[1+N(e^2)]$

Where n=sample size

N=population size

e=marginal error (0.05)

$n=745/2.8625 = 260$ learners

Data Collection Methods

Questionnaire Method

A questionnaire is a data collection method where a set of questions related to the researcher's subject of interest is completed by respondents (Mugenda and Mugenda, 2004). For this study, the questionnaire was designed based on the research objectives and questions. It included concise and clear sentences, comprising both closed-ended questions. Closed-

ended questions facilitated easy responses from respondents, particularly learners, as their retention rates provided a direct measure of the effectiveness of community participation.

Interview Method

According to Kothari (2004), interviews involve presenting oral stimuli and receiving oral responses, making it a method to gather firsthand and reliable data. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with the District Education Officer, head teachers, members of the School Management Committees (SMCs), community leaders, and teachers to obtain immediate feedback and use probing techniques to gather specific information about the study problem. This method also enabled the researcher to establish rapport with participants, ensuring high response rates and providing the opportunity to clarify ambiguous answers or seek further details.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Demographic Characteristics

Table 2: Demagogic characteristics for DEO, Head Teachers, DOS, Chairpersons of Parent-Teachers Committees, and Teachers

Category	Response	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Sex	Male	38	52.1
	Female	35	47.9
Age Group	20–30 years	15	20.5
	31–40 years	25	34.2
	41–50 years	18	24.7
	More than 50 years	15	20.5
Years in Service	1–5 years	25	34.2
	6–10 years	20	27.4
	11–15 years	15	20.5
	More than 15 years	13	17.8

The findings revealed that 38 (52.1%) of the respondents were male, making them the majority, while the least were female, comprising 35 (47.9%). In terms of age, the majority were in the 31–40 years age group, accounting for 25 (34.2%), whereas the least were in both the 20–30 years and more than 50 years categories, each representing 15 (20.5%). Regarding years of service, 25 (34.2%) of the respondents had served for 1–5 years, making them the majority, while the least, at 13 (17.8%), had served for more than 15 years.

Table 3: Learners' Demographic Characteristics

Category	Response	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Sex	Male	120	48.0
	Female	130	52.0
Age Group	12–14 years	50	20.0
	15–16 years	150	60.0
	17–18 years	50	20.0

The findings showed that 120 (52.0%) of the learners were female, making them the majority, while 48.0% were male, representing the least. Regarding age, most learners, 150 (60.0%), were aged 15–16 years, whereas the fewest, at 50 (20.0%), were in the 12–14 years and 17–18 years age groups.

The Rate of Learners' Retention in Government-Aided Secondary Schools in Kazo Sub-county, Kazo District

This section presents findings in relation to the first objective of the study, which was to examine the rate of learners' retention in government-aided secondary schools in Kazo Sub-County, Kazo District. Data was collected using a five-point Likert scale where responses were coded as follows: 1 – Strongly Disagree, 2 – Disagree, 3 – Neutral, 4 – Agree, and 5 – Strongly Agree.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics for Forms of Community Participation on Retention of Learners

Factor	1	2	3	4	5	Total
Community Financial Support for Fees	10 (3.3%)	20 (6.6%)	50 (16.4%)	100 (32.8%)	125 (41.0%)	4.02
Frequency of PTA Meetings	10 (3.3%)	15 (4.9%)	40 (13.1%)	90 (29.5%)	150 (49.2%)	4.16
Support for School Development Projects	8 (2.6%)	15 (4.9%)	60 (19.7%)	90 (29.5%)	132 (43.3%)	4.06
Parental Participation in Meetings	15 (4.9%)	25 (8.2%)	50 (16.4%)	90 (29.5%)	125 (41.0%)	3.93
Community Recognition of Academic Achievement	12 (3.9%)	20 (6.6%)	55 (18.0%)	85 (27.9%)	133 (43.6%)	4.01
Local Leader Involvement in School Events	10 (3.3%)	20 (6.6%)	55 (18.0%)	85 (27.9%)	135 (44.3%)	4.03
Community Contribution to Infrastructure	10 (3.3%)	15 (4.9%)	50 (16.4%)	90 (29.5%)	140 (45.9%)	4.10
Community-Organised Fundraising Events	8 (2.6%)	10 (3.3%)	60 (19.7%)	80 (26.2%)	147 (48.2%)	4.14
Support in Facility Maintenance	10 (3.3%)	15 (4.9%)	55 (18.0%)	90 (29.5%)	135 (44.3%)	4.07
Business Sector Contribution to Schools	10 (3.3%)	20 (6.6%)	50 (16.4%)	85 (27.9%)	140 (45.9%)	4.07
Recognition-Based Learner Privileges	10 (3.3%)	15 (4.9%)	60 (19.7%)	85 (27.9%)	135 (44.3%)	4.05
School-Community Relationship Strength	8 (2.6%)	15 (4.9%)	55 (18.0%)	90 (29.5%)	137 (44.9%)	4.09
Overall						**4.06**

The majority of 150(49.2%) of respondents strongly agreed that frequent PTA meetings enhance learner retention, while the least 10(3.3%) strongly disagreed, with a mean of 4.16, implying agreement. On community financial support for school fees, the majority, 125(41.0%), strongly agreed, and the least 10(3.3%) strongly disagreed, with a mean of 4.02, also implying agreement. For support in school development projects, the majority, 132(43.3%), strongly agreed, while the least 8(2.6%) strongly disagreed, with a mean of 4.06. Regarding parental participation in meetings,

the majority, 125(41.0%), strongly agreed, and the least 15(4.9%) strongly disagreed, with a mean of 3.93. In terms of community recognition of academic achievement, the majority, 133(43.6%), strongly agreed, while the least 12(3.9%) strongly disagreed, with a mean of 4.01. For local leader involvement in school events, the majority, 135(44.3%), strongly agreed, while the least 10(3.3%) strongly disagreed, with a mean of 4.03. The community's contribution to infrastructure had 140(45.9%) strongly agreeing as the majority, and 10(3.3%) strongly disagreeing as the least, with a

mean of 4.10. For community-organised fundraising events, the majority, 147(48.2%), strongly agreed, and the least (2.6%) strongly disagreed, with a mean of 4.14. Regarding support in facility maintenance, the majority, 135(44.3%), strongly agreed, and the least 10(3.3%) strongly disagreed, with a mean of 4.07. On business sector contribution to schools, the majority, 140(45.9%), strongly agreed, and the least 10(3.3%) strongly disagreed, yielding a mean of 4.07. For recognition-based learner privileges, the majority, 135(44.3%), strongly agreed while the least 10(3.3%) strongly disagreed, with a mean of 4.05. Lastly, for the strength of the school-community relationship, the majority, 137(44.9%), strongly agreed, and the least 8(2.6%) strongly disagreed, with a mean of 4.09. The overall mean was 4.06, implying that respondents generally agreed that the various forms of community participation positively contribute to the retention of learners in government-aided secondary schools.

The above findings are in line with findings from qualitative data, for example, during the interviews, one of the respondents highlighted the importance of regular PTA (Parents Teachers Association) meetings in fostering a strong relationship between the school and parents. He stated:

"Involving parents through regular PTA meetings creates a strong sense of ownership, and this has helped reduce dropout rates significantly in our school. When parents are part of the decision-making process and are consistently informed about their children's progress and school activities, they become more committed to supporting both the learners and the school as a whole. This consistent engagement not only improves learner attendance but also enhances discipline and academic performance."

The Levels of Community Participation in the Retention of Learners in Government-Aided Secondary Schools in Kazo Sub-county, Kazo District

This section presents findings in relation to the first objective of the study, which was to establish the levels of community participation in the retention of learners in government-aided secondary schools in Kazo sub-county, Kazo district. Data was collected using a five-point Likert scale where responses were coded as follows: 1 – Strongly Disagree, 2 – Disagree, 3 – Neutral, 4 – Agree, and 5 – Strongly Agree.

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics for Learners' Retention in Secondary Schools

Factor	1	2	3	4	5	Total
School Attendance	15 (4.9%)	20 (6.6%)	25 (8.2%)	90 (29.5%)	155 (50.8%)	4.15
Conducive School Environment	10 (3.3%)	15 (4.9%)	20 (6.6%)	85 (27.9%)	175 (57.4%)	4.31
Confidence in Completing School	12 (3.9%)	18 (5.9%)	20 (6.6%)	85 (27.9%)	170 (55.7%)	4.26
School-Based Support Systems	10 (3.3%)	15 (4.9%)	25 (8.2%)	80 (26.2%)	175 (57.4%)	4.30
Community Motivation to Stay in School	8 (2.6%)	12 (3.9%)	20 (6.6%)	85 (27.9%)	180 (59.0%)	4.37
Sense of Belonging in School	10 (3.3%)	15 (4.9%)	20 (6.6%)	85 (27.9%)	175 (57.4%)	4.31
Engagement in School Activities	12 (3.9%)	18 (5.9%)	30 (9.8%)	80 (26.2%)	165 (54.1%)	4.21
Community Support During Challenges	10 (3.3%)	15 (4.9%)	25 (8.2%)	80 (26.2%)	175 (57.4%)	4.30

Factor	1	2	3	4	5	Total
Peer Aspirations for Completion	8 (2.6%)	10 (3.3%)	20 (6.6%)	80 (26.2%)	187 (61.3%)	4.40
Academic Encouragement by School	10 (3.3%)	15 (4.9%)	25 (8.2%)	85 (27.9%)	170 (55.7%)	4.28
Low Dropout Perception	12 (3.9%)	18 (5.9%)	30 (9.8%)	80 (26.2%)	165 (54.1%)	4.21
Overall mean						**4.28**

The majority, 155(50.8%) of respondents strongly agreed that school attendance contributes to retention, while the least 15(4.9%) strongly disagreed, with a mean of 4.15, implying agreement. On the factor of a conducive school environment, the majority, 175(57.4%), strongly agreed, and the least 10(3.3%) strongly disagreed, yielding a mean of 4.31, implying agreement. Regarding confidence in completing school, the majority, 170(55.7%), strongly agreed, while the least 12(3.9%) strongly disagreed, with a mean of 4.26. For school-based support systems, the majority (57.4%) strongly agreed, and the least 10(3.3%) strongly disagreed, resulting in a mean of 4.30. When asked about community motivation to stay in school, the majority, 180(59.0%), strongly agreed, while the least 8(2.6%) strongly disagreed, with a mean of 4.37, indicating strong agreement. For the sense of belonging in school, the majority, 175(57.4%), strongly agreed, and the least 10(3.3%) strongly disagreed, yielding a mean of 4.31. Concerning engagement in school activities, the majority, 165(54.1%), strongly agreed, and the least 12(3.9%) strongly disagreed, with a mean of 4.21. On community support during challenges, the majority, 175(57.4%), strongly agreed, and the least 10(3.3%) strongly disagreed, resulting in a mean of 4.30. For peer aspirations for completion, the majority, 187(61.3%), strongly agreed, while the least 8(2.6%) strongly disagreed, with a mean of 4.40, indicating strong agreement. On academic encouragement by the school, the majority, 170(55.7%), strongly agreed, and the least 10(3.3%) strongly disagreed, with a mean of 4.28. Lastly, regarding low dropout perception, the majority, 165(54.1%), strongly agreed, and the least 12(3.9%)

strongly disagreed, giving a mean of 4.21. The overall mean was 4.28, implying that respondents generally agreed that various factors positively influence the retention of learners in government-aided secondary schools in Kazo Sub-county.

Additionally, from interviews, one of the respondents emphasised the importance of consistent attendance and the presence of strong school-based support systems:

"When learners attend school regularly and feel supported by their teachers and peers, they develop a sense of stability and belonging. They no longer see school as just a place for academics but as a second home. The routine gives them purpose, and when we provide counselling, guidance, and mentorship, it strengthens their emotional and academic resilience. As a result, they become more determined to stay in school and complete their studies. We have witnessed a clear drop in absenteeism and dropouts because of these consistent support mechanisms."

Another one highlighted the impact of a positive school environment coupled with active community involvement:

"We have worked hard to make our school a safe, welcoming place. From ensuring clean classrooms and sufficient learning materials to training our staff on learner-friendly teaching approaches, we aim to create a nurturing space. Additionally, involving the community— parents, elders, and local leaders—especially during school events or parent-teacher meetings, boosts learner morale. Learners feel

that their journey matters not just to the school, but to the entire community. Even during times of financial or personal difficulty, learners are encouraged to keep going because they feel seen and supported by more than just the school."

The Relationship between Community Participation and Learner Retention in Government-Aided Secondary Schools in the Sub-county of Kazo District

This section presents findings in relation to the first objective of the study, which was to examine the relationship between community participation and learner retention in government-aided secondary schools in Kazo Sub-County, Kazo District.

Table 6: Pearson Correlation Coefficient for Community Participation and Retention of Learners in Government Aided Secondary Schools in Kazo Sub-county, Kazo-District

Correlations

		Community Participation	Retention of Learners
Community Participation	Pearson Correlation	1	.134
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.009
	N	305	305
Retention of Learners	Pearson Correlation	.134	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.009	
	N	305	305
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

The findings from the Pearson correlation analysis revealed a positive correlation coefficient of 0.134 between community participation and retention of learners in government-aided secondary schools in Kazo Sub-County, Kazo District. This indicates a weak but positive relationship, suggesting that as community participation increases, learner retention tends to improve slightly. The p-value of 0.009 is less than the significance level of 0.01, meaning the correlation is statistically significant. Therefore, the study concludes that there is a significant but weak positive relationship between community participation and learner retention in the study area.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The Rate of Learners' Retention in Government-Aided Secondary Schools in Kazo Sub-County, Kazo District

The study revealed strong agreement among respondents that various forms of community participation positively influence learner retention. This is in line with Anderson and Larsen (2017), who revealed that community involvement in school activities, such as mentoring programs and parent-teacher associations, significantly increased the likelihood of learners staying in school. Frequent PTA meetings were widely perceived to enhance retention. This aligns with Nyakundi and Omondi (2022), who found that schools with active parent-teacher associations (PTAs) and regular parental engagement saw a 32% increase in retention rates.

Community financial support for school fees was also seen as a significant contributor. This is consistent with Ndiaye and Diop (2017), who revealed that community-based organisations providing financial support and scholarships can improve learner retention rates. Support for school development projects was similarly viewed as an important factor. This is in line with Tumwesigye and Ndyabawe (2018), who found that community-led initiatives, such as school infrastructure development, can improve retention rates.

Parental participation in meetings was also seen as crucial. This aligns with Kagoda and Namusoke

(2021), who emphasised the importance of parental involvement in school governance and decision-making. Community recognition of academic achievement was viewed as an important factor. This is consistent with Mendez and Alvarez (2019), who found that recognition-based incentives can motivate learners to stay in school. Local leaders' involvement in school events was recognised as playing a positive role. This is in line with Lwanga and Tumushabe (2020), who highlighted the importance of community leaders in promoting education and supporting schools.

Levels of Community Participation in the Retention of Learners

Respondents strongly agreed that regular school attendance and a conducive school environment are critical to retaining learners. This is in line with Ochieng and Kamau (2019), who found that a supportive school environment and regular attendance are essential for improving retention rates. Confidence in completing school and the availability of school-based support systems were seen as major positive influences on retention. This aligns with Anderson and Larsen (2017), who emphasised the importance of school-based support systems in promoting learner retention.

Community motivation to remain in school, a strong sense of belonging, and active engagement in school activities were also identified as key retention factors. This is consistent with Lwanga and Tumushabe (2020), who found that community involvement in school activities and a sense of belonging can improve retention rates. Support from the community during challenges, aspirations among peers to complete school, and academic encouragement from the school further contribute to learners staying in school. This is in line with Kagoda and Namusoke (2021), who highlighted the importance of community support and peer influence in promoting learner retention. The consensus was that these combined factors create a supportive atmosphere that enhances retention in government-aided secondary schools. This aligns

with Nyakundi and Omondi (2022), who found that a supportive school environment and community involvement can improve retention rates and promote academic success.

Relationship between Community Participation and Learner Retention

The statistical analysis conducted in this study revealed a positive but weak relationship between community participation and learner retention in government-aided secondary schools in Kazo Sub-County. Despite the correlation not being strong, it was found to be statistically significant, suggesting that as community involvement increases, so does the likelihood that learners will remain in school. This finding aligns with the work of Anderson and Larsen (2017), who also identified a positive correlation between community involvement and learner retention, although they noted that the strength of this relationship can vary significantly based on local socio-economic and institutional contexts.

Further supporting this observation, Nyakundi and Omondi (2022) found that active community participation in school-related activities—such as attending meetings, volunteering in school programs, and contributing to development projects—was significantly associated with improved learner retention rates. Their study emphasised that when community members feel a sense of ownership over local schools, they are more likely to support learners through both material and emotional means, reducing dropout rates and promoting continuity in education.

Although the positive correlation in the current study was not particularly strong, it still suggests that community participation plays a meaningful and supportive role in keeping learners in school. This is particularly important in rural and under-resourced areas where external support systems may be limited. Community involvement, therefore, helps bridge gaps that might otherwise hinder a learner's ability to stay in school, such as financial

challenges, lack of motivation, or poor school infrastructure.

This conclusion is further reinforced by Lwanga and Tumushabe (2020), who argued that while community participation is indeed a vital factor in learner retention, it often operates in tandem with other influences such as school leadership, parental engagement, and socio-economic status. They posited that the impact of community involvement may be moderated or amplified by these other variables, meaning that its effectiveness is best understood within a broader framework of educational support.

CONCLUSIONS

It is concluded that there is a statistically significant but weak positive relationship between community participation and learner retention, suggesting that community involvement is an important but not sole factor influencing retention.

Recommendations

The government should increase funding to government-aided secondary schools to support infrastructure development and the provision of learning materials.

Head teachers should encourage community members to participate in extracurricular activities that make the school more appealing to learners.

The government should invest in community infrastructure, such as roads and health services, which indirectly enhance learner retention.

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