Partnership Roles Played by Parents to Promote Retention in Primary Schools in Busoga Region, Uganda: Children's Views

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Abstract: The study analyzed the views of children on the partnership roles played by their parents that best promote their retention in primary schools in Busoga Region, Uganda. A total of 71 respondents who were in and out of school were involved in the study. Data was collected using focus group discussion and in-depth individual interview. Validity and reliability were confirmed through Factor Analysis and Cronbach Alpha test. Descriptive analysis involved the use of means and frequencies, while thematic content analysis was used for the qualitative data. The results revealed that attending meetings, talking to teachers, paying fees, and contributing to development of the school are the best partnership roles that were played by parents to promote retention in primary schools. In conclusion, partnership roles were an important element that influenced the retention of the children in primary schools. It was recommended that head teachers and administrators of districts should put emphasis on sensitizing the parents on their partnership roles which included attending meetings, talking to teachers, paying fees and contributing to development of the school to promote retention of children.

Keywords: *Children, Parents, Partnership roles, Schools Retention, Busoga, Uganda*

1. Introduction

The right to primary education has been legally guaranteed in most countries of the world (UNESCO, 2005). In Uganda inclusive education has been embraced and there is evidently commitment to bringing about inclusion at every level of education (Emong & Eron, 2016). Both legal and non-legal frameworks have been adopted to ensure increased school enrolment, retention and completion by learners. According to Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), failure by a child to complete quality inclusive primary school education limits future opportunities for children (CRC, 1989), the World Declaration on Education for All (EFA, 2000). This, therefore makes it critical that all attempts must be made by school administrations and parents to ensure child retention through partnership (Childs & Grooms, 2018).

School retention implies that children, who are enrolled in school, keep in schools and completed their programme (Hughes, West, Kim & Bauer, 2018). In this

study, retention means children going to school, returning to school, staying at school, learning at school, and completing the school programme. It is a state where registered school pupils progress from pre-primary to primary and stay in school to complete their education at primary level (Datzberger, 2018). It is reported that about 130 million children in the developing world as dropping out hence being denied their right to education (David, Albert & Vizmanos, 2018). Reasons for drop out are varied. For example, 40% of students in rural school in China expressed unhappiness with their studies as the main cause of drop out (Teneva, 2017), fulfilling financial needs and some parents not interested in education for their children (Latif, Choudhary & Hammayun, 2015). This statistic indicates gross wastage and inefficiency in the education system and seems to suggest that parents play a key role in late enrolment, withdrawal of children from school and low attendance that are predictors of low retention.

To avoid the costly effect of low retention, a number of strategies in collaboration with different stakeholders are in place to ensure that children are comfortable being in school. For example, the involvement of Parent Teacher Association (PTA) has long been used. Parents' involvement is widely acknowledged and recognized in contributing school effectiveness and children performance (Tatlah & Iqbal, 2011, Clase, *et al* 2007). In this strategy parents are continuously involved in forming partnership with teachers that will ensure children are supported to remain at school. This effort, however, sometimes does not bear maximum fruit without hearing the voices of children who are to benefit from it. A study conducted by Omondi *(2013)* shows that when you implement a programme without taking into consideration the voices of beneficiaries it usually lies to waste.

Similarly, a number of retention programs and studies have been conducted in Busoga Region like Universal Primary Education (UPE) targeting retention of children in school, but results still show that the region has the lowest retention rates in Uganda. These programmes have focused on implementing interventions in the best interest of the child without the child. Children's voices are not reflected in the implementation process, yet children's views are critical if they are to be part of it. The parents and guardians who are key in ensuring that children are retained in school may be among those who withdraw them from school. Such parents do these acts without due consideration of the opinion of the children. As a result, children obey their parents without question as demanded by their cultural beliefs and fail to benefit from education they urgently need. This study brings into picture the voices of *all* children and what perspective they have towards the partnership role played by their parents in as far as their retention in schools is concerned.

2. Literature Review

Retention, according to Sakwa (2012), is defined as staying in school until the end of a course, whereas dropping out is defined as leaving school early. As a result, dropouts are students who leave school before finishing a particular cycle of study. A dropout, according to Ouma (2016), is a student who stops attending school, either temporarily or permanently, before finishing the allotted educational cycle. Any government's development program must prioritize investment in human capital. As a result, dropping out of school translates to a waste of human resources, which will have a long-term impact on the country's development.

Parental participation has been linked to improved academic success and retention in school among children (Kosgei, 2021). Parents, as the primary educators, have a significant impact on their children's learning results throughout their schooling and beyond. According to Lee and Simpkins, (2021), parents may help and encourage their children by rewarding and praising them. This gives the children the initiative and confidence they need to study and persevere in school. According to Willems and Holbein (2015), children whose parents are actively involved in their education had higher academic achievement and a more favorable attitude toward school. Parents who continuously criticize, command, reprimand, and pressure their children, on the other hand, may cause their children to develop a negative attitude toward school, resulting in poor academic achievements and may also lead to them dropping out (Ogg, Clark, Strissel & Rogers, 2021).

Shared activities between parents and their children are positively associated with increased school retention, according to empirical data (Marsiglio, 2014). Only to the extent of sending their children to school, do parents participate in their children's official education (Kweyu, 2019). Other research has focused on the role of mothers. Mothers' involvement in education has been connected to higher academic achievement, more favorable school attitudes, and improved teacher-child interactions (Flouri, Buchanan & Bream, 2016; Henderson & Mapp, 2016).

Pupils' retention, according to Kamundi (2021), is an international concern that affects students' academic progress. There was a worldwide push to lower attrition rates so that students could finish their education. High student retention was a prerequisite for funding schools in Australia. Schools with a high rate of student dropout risked losing government funding. In Australia, 20% of pupils did not complete their high school education. Others who graduated from high school experienced a lot of change as a result of transfers to new schools (Saret, 2016).

According to Sampa *et al.,* (2021), the decision to enrol and keep a child in school is based on a number of factors, including parental beliefs and expectations about the value of education. Parents' opinions of the relevance of what is taught in school to their perceived survival needs impact enrolment and retention decisions

in schools. Shihab (2018) cites the results of a 2004 survey on indigenous children's primary school attendance and dropout rates in north-eastern Bangladesh, which revealed that only 22% of indigenous children completed a year of primary school education, with another 18% attending some school but dropping out.

While primary school education is aimed at children, parents usually influence their children's decision to attend school (Namukwaya, & Kibirige, 2014). According to Traag and Van der Velden's (2011), research with young students, having unsupportive parents is connected with dropping out of school. According to Traag and Van der Velden's argument, parents' values influence whether their children continue in school or drop out. Namukwaya, and Kibirige, (2014) cites a Tibetan example in which ethnic minority parents saw ideals taught through state schooling as foreign to their own values and hence of little relevance to their own culture.

Developing educational techniques that are appropriate for each student will necessitate the involvement of students and their parents in the development of any content and methodology adjustments, upgrades, or elaborations that will make their educational experience relevant and meaningful. Although the concept of differentiation has been around since the 1950s, it has expanded in importance and popularity as the diversity of pupils in today's classrooms has grown (Efthymiou & Kington, 2017). The current paper investigated the partnership roles played by parents to promote retention in primary schools in Busoga region, Uganda.

3. Methodology

The study was conducted in Busoga Region, Eastern Uganda composing of ten districts. The selection of this region was based on the fact that it has been one of the sub-regions plagued by low school retention rate (Datzberger, 2018). Three districts of Buyende, Namayingo and Iganga were purposely selected for the study whereby Buyende and Namayingo largely represented rural population while Iganga urban population

A causal-comparative design, guided the study. The design was chosen to make it possible to compare the in and out of school children perspective on their parent's roles towards their retention in school. Both qualitative and quantitative information primarily focussed on the experience and understandings within the children's world. The aim was to build a complex, holistic picture, analyse words, report detailed views of informants, and conduct the study in a natural setting (Creswell, 2014).

The study targeted children who were in and out of school between 6 and 17 years of age participated in the study. Particular interest was taken to ensure that voices of children with disabilities and other special needs were heard. Both boy and the girl child in and out of school

had equal opportunity. Children above 17 years found in the primary school and identified among those who dropped out of school were excluded from the study.

In each study site, 3 schools and ten learners from each school were drawn for 2 focus group discussions. The focus group discussions were carried out with the peer researchers (youths) trained by the research team. Thereafter, a sample of 10 learners from each school was sampled for individual interviews at school from each district. None of the pupils selected for the focus group discussion were engaged for the individual interview so as to allow for variation in responses.

Two sampling techniques were used to come up with a representative population of Busoga region. The sampling techniques adopted included stratified as well as snow ball sampling. The starting point for snowball was in the school, where children already selected for the study led the researchers to their colleagues who had dropped out of school. Care was taken to select gender balanced and disability representative participants. The intention was to get information from those who are experiencing dropout from their own perspectives.

Statistical data from each of the districts on the enrolment and dropout rates formed part of the information to guide the sampling process. Stratified sampling of children in school was based on gender and experience in dropout to guide the non-probability sampling (Zhao, Liang & Dang, 2019). Boys and girls, who were in and out of school and those with disabilities formed the strata. A snow ball sampling of out of school children was followed starting from a lead in the school. This was guided by those children sampled who are in school as they knew fellow pupils who dropped out of school. Snowball sampling is a method of expanding the sample by asking one informant or participant to recommend others for interviewing (Parker, Scott & Geddes, 2019).

Data was collected using a combination of focus group discussion and in-depth individual interview. Both instruments were open-ended allowing for flexibility in questioning. The questions for the focus group discussion and interviews were guided by the aim of examining partnership roles children identified as played by their parents to best promote their retention in primary schools. Focus group discussion was administered to in schoolchildren. The understanding is that they are together, know each other and can freely share their experiences. Focus groups were held within school pupils. A focus group of 5 pupils per group was arranged for discussion. Individual interviews were administered to children who are in and out of school. The individual interviews with pupils in school were done after the focus group discussion. Individual interviews for out of school pupils were done after school time with the help and direction of in school pupils. The team of researchers developed the instruments. These instruments were designed based on key themes related to the partnerships roles played by parents to enable them to be retained at school.

This study and its outcomes involved children as peers in gathering information from and through children. In doing so different approaches were adopted. First, peers were trained and engaged in the process of interviewing and using different approaches of collecting data from children. Secondly, children were encouraged to draw their own or others experiences and tell stories of experiences. In this case, children were empowered to take charge of the stories, narratives, experiences and feel recognized, appreciated, listened to and respected. Thirdly, different technologies were used to collect data so that analysis and follow up was made easy. Care was taken to ensure that the technology used with children were exposed to children in advance. The intent was to defuse the anxiety that get children to be diverted from contributing information.

The study commenced with training peers of these children to conduct the interviews with the children. Open-ended interview questions with prompts were used to guide the experience. Exact wording and order of questioning remained flexible to best navigate the interactive experience with each respondent (Nathan, Newman & Lancaster, 2019).

A pre-test interview was undertaken in a school and community which was not selected for the study. A review of the pre-test interview training was done to provide guidance to the peers who led the interview with the pupils. Interview times were determined by contacting the school head teachers through the contact provided by the District Education official to ensure convenience. The setting for interviews was under shades away from other children to enable the children feel safe sharing without distraction. Interviews were conveniently audio recorded by the research team for later transcription and analysis. According to Gooch and Vavreck, (2019), many people are willing to communicate orally than in writing and they would provide data more readily and fully than on a questionnaire. In each case, the interview and focus group discussions lasted approximately 15 to 30 minutes to cater for the low attention span of many children.

Since it was a comparative study, quantitative data was analysed through simple descriptive statistics outlining the gender, age and study status to establish difference in voices of girls and boys on the role of their parents in relation to retention. In the case of qualitative data form individual interview and focus group discussions,

thematic content analyses were conducted. Firstly, open coding was performed on all information from in and out of school pupils to discover their main concerns, core categories and related categories (Wolff, Mahoney, Lohiniva & Corkum, 2019). Secondly, selective coding was performed on all data from the individual interviews and focus group discussions. Throughout the analysis, memos were written about each category and their properties in a comparative manner based on location, disability and gender. Data was analysed using the constant comparative method of grounded theory.

This research project was taken through a series of approval process. The first approval was by Gulu University Research and Ethics Committee. The second review was carried out by the Uganda National Council of Science and Technology (UNCST). During fieldwork, written informed consent was given by the school administrators on behalf of the children's parents as the study was done at school. Confidentiality was assured during the process of data collection and analysis.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Results

A total of 71 respondents who were in and out of school were involved in the study. Out of these 52% (N=37) were in school and 48% (N=34) were out of school. Male respondents in school represented 51.4% (N=19) while out of school were 73.5% (N=25). There were 21 (61.8%) respondents in school and 10.7 (34%) out of school within the age range of 9-12 years while a total of 18 (48.6%) in school and 31 (89.3%) out of school participated in the study. The respondents dropped out and others were in school across the divide. Findings indicated that 12 (33.3%) were in school by primary 4 while 13 (38.2%) had dropped out. There were 12 (33.3%) respondents in primary 5 while 9 (26.5%) dropped out by primary 5. Data indicate that 11(30.6%) were in primary 6 and 7 while 12 (35.3%) dropped out in P6 and P7. Findings indicated that 19 (51.4%) of the participants had stayed in school for less than 4 years while only 1(2.9%) studied for less than 4 years before dropping out. A total of 18 (48.6%) participants attended school for a period of between 4 to 7 years while 33 (97.1%) dropped out of school after having attended school for between 4 to 7 years. Details are presented in Table 1

Table 1: Parents checking performance of pupils

If parents check performance	Frequency	Percent
Yes	33	89.2
No	3	8.1
Sometimes	1	2.7
Total	37	100.0

More than three quarters of the pupils (N= 33, 89%) confirmed that their parents checked their performance. About 8% (N=3) confirm that their parents did not check their performance while some 3% (1) revealed that their parents only sometimes checked their school performance.

Table 2: Parents helping in homework of their children

If parents help with homework	Frequency	Percent
Yes	23	62.2
No	12	32.4
Sometimes	2	5.4
Total	37	100.0

Asked whether their parents help to guide them with homework given by the school, more than half of the pupils (N=23 approximately 62%) confirmed that their parents were helping them to do their homework. However, some 32.4% (N=12) reported that their parents don't help them with homework. A small proportion of 5.4% (N=2) argued that their parents only helped them to do their homework sometimes.

Table 3: Number of times parents meet teachers about the pupils

Number of times parents meet teachers	Frequency	Percent
Weekly	3	8.1
Monthly	4	10.8
During Visitation	17	45.9
Anytime	9	24.3
Not at all	4	10.8
Total	37	100.0

Pupils were further asked the number of times with which their parents met with teachers about their performance. Most of the pupils (N=17, 46%) reported that their parents only met the teachers during visitation. Close to a quarter of the pupils stated that their parents met the teachers any time while 11% and 8% stated that their parents met the teachers monthly and weekly respectively Another 11% however, show that their parents never meet their teachers at all as shown in Table 3.

Table 4: Information shared to pupils by friends' parents

Information	Male	Female	Total
Always be obedient and disciplined while at school	5 (17.2)	1 (3.8)	6 (10.9)
Encourage me to study and emulate some role models	5 (17.2)	5 (19.2)	10 (18.2)
Nothing	2 (6.9)	2 (7.7)	4 (7.3)
Provide me some missing requirements	3 (10.3)		3 (5.4)
Respect elders and teachers	4 (13.8)	3 (11.5)	7 (12.7)
Tell me to take good care of myself	2 (6.9)	1 (3.8)	3 (5.4)
Tells us to read hard	5 (17.2)	11 (42.3)	16 (29.1)
They tell me to avoid bad peer groups	3 (10.3)	3 (11.5)	6 (10.9)
Total	**29 (100.0)**	**26 (100.0)**	**55 (100.0)**

Findings indicated that friends of parents contribute to guiding and counselling children towards school retention. Reading hard, emulating role models, respecting elders and teacher as well as avoiding bad groups were advice provided by parents of friends to children talked to. Such encouragements are vital as community engagement in the lives of children to help them stay at school.

Table 5: Discussions held by parents during school meetings

What things do parents talk in meetings	Male	Female	Total
Children's feeding and care at school	5 (19.2)	8 (25.0)	13 (22.4
I don't know	4 (15.4)		4 (6.9)
Parents to provide all requirements to children	2 (7.7)	2 (6.2)	4 (6.9)
Paying money for lunch and tests	1 (3.8)	4 (12.5)	5 (8.6)
Pupils should stop fetching water and digging at school		2 (6.2)	2 (3.4)
Punishment of wrong doers like thieves and fighters	1 (3.8)	1 (3.1)	2 (3.4)
Teachers should support slow learners more	2 (7.7)		2 (3.4)
Tell children to respect parents and teachers and be disciplined	2 (7.7)	3 (9.4)	5 (8.6)
They praise me in the meetings as well behaved	2 (7.7)	1 (3.1)	3 (5.2
They tell children to study because they pay a lot of money	1 (3.8)	3 (9.4)	4 (6.9)
They tell teachers to teach us well	3 (11.5)	2 (6.2)	5 (8.6)
To pay fees and contribute to development of the school	3 (11.5)	6 (18.7)	9 (15.5)
Total	26 (100)	32 (100)	58 (100)

Data indicated that during meetings parents reported discussed paying school fees, feeding and care of children, discipline as well as academics. It is clear that discussions in meetings cantered on social welfare and academic performances.

4.2 Discussion

This study presents the lived experiences of children on the partnership roles played by their parents to promote their retention in school. By listening to the voices of children on their expectation in relation to partnership roles that their parents can play would help in designing a community wide approach to retention interventions.

At a macro level, it was evident that slightly more boys than girls stayed home after dropping out. Our finding was that most girls had either delivered or are already married, therefore not willing to interface with the researchers. This finding was contrary to work done previously by (Shahidul & Karim, 2015) who stated that though inter-related factors affected school dropout regardless of gender, some other factors, and particularly increased dropout for girls. In spite of this, increased drop out of girls required the intervention of a trained counsellor to propel their retention. Considering that 48.6% of children aged 13-17 years were in school compared to 89.3% who were out of school, counselling could promote career guidance as a motivator for school retention. The high dropout of older school children concurs with the study by Hailu, Kassaw and Wondimu,

(2019), who found out that high dropout rate of boys was influenced by initiation ceremonies to adulthood that take place during the course of the term, causing absenteeism lasting up to one month, and sometimes leading to drop out.

Although the study had interest in documenting the voices of children with disabilities in school, it was found that only 8% of pupils in school were children with disabilities. The implication of the small number is that little attention is given to the education of children with disabilities in inclusive schools. Obligation of education to ensure that students with disability access and participate in education as other students is clearly documents in many national policies including the Disability Standards for Education (2005) in Australia. This neglect of children with disabilities is against SDG 4 which advocates for "leave no one behind".

Parents have roles to play in ensuring that children engage in exercises given to them. From the findings there were more than three quarters of the pupils (89%) who confirmed that their parents checked their

performance while about 8% stated that their parents did not check their performance. In a study by Ma *et al.,* (2016) parental involvement is one of the key variables associated with school effectiveness and pupil attainment in particular. The small proportion of parents who were not checking performance can partly be explained by the engagement of parents in other economic activities to ensure that they provide for the family. While this may be appreciated, failure to help children with homework limits corrections that parents could give to children. Considering that more than half of the pupils engaged were in middle and upper classes, stronger social skills are recommended. The social skills would help them confide in parents, discuss with others on academic matters and seek guidance from teachers. This probably could facilitate guidance that promote school retention.

There were high dropout rates at 76.5% in primary four, five and primary six compared to 17.6% dropout in Primary one, two and three. It implies that more pupils drop out of school from primary four, five and six. Pupils in lower classes and primary seven have lower dropout rates. This is supported by EPDC, (2009) which showed that over-age students have higher dropout rates than appropriately aged or under-aged students. This can probably be explained by the fact that in Primary one, two and three the pupils are still young and thus follow instructions while those in Primary Seven are ambitious to join the next level of education. The lack of encouragement, especially to the adolescents could explain the high drop out in middle classes. Other factors that could contribute to dropout among adolescents was the means of transport. According to the findings close to three quarter of the pupils (73%) move to school on foot. The feeling of the pupils about the means they use to reach school shows a lot of displeasure. Walking to school is attributed to poverty and lack of alternative means. A study by Datzberger, (2018) revealed that poverty and costs of education led to low retention at school. The implication of walking to school is getting tired before studies, social insecurity – being diverted by out of school opposite sex and/ engaging in child labour. This potentially affects their performance in school greatly.

The frequency by which parents and teachers interact could influence how the child perceives education. According to the findings, 46% of pupils reported that their parents only met the teachers during visitation. This finding is in agreement with those of Wagaba (2017) who found out that parent's participation in school meetings has an important relationship with students' retention rate. The lack of interest to interface with parents This could either mean that most of the parents themselves never went to school or are not involved in school activities like parents' meetings.

Pupils were also asked if they received punishment in form of being beaten when absent from school for which only 16% were in agreement while 84% stated otherwise. Moreover, more than half of the pupils (60%) were in agreement that punishments affected their education. The results also further revealed that a majority of the pupils (92%) received all they asked from their parents. Pupils were further asked if some girls avoided studies by becoming pregnant and the results indicate that about 62% of the pupils highlighted to this fact.

Pupils were asked if their parents encouraged them to play with other children while at school or at home; and the results indicate that more than three quarters of the pupils (83%) were encouraged by their parents to play with other children. Play is very important to child development. However, the type of games that children play has impact on their character formation and motivation to study or drop out of school.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations
5.1 Conclusion

It is evident that children are aware of what their parents should do for them to stay at school. Children are appreciative to the inputs provided by their parents. However, many children seem not to understand the reason why their parents pay tuition fees at school. Their responses were based on their priority or interest of being at school.

The study has found out that parents want very much to keep their children in schools but because of the viscous cycle of poverty, many parents are not able to pay fees to keep their children at school leading to dropping out. Some of the activities that parents allow children to do contribute to the main reason for the female pupils dropping out of school. These activities are reported to lead to early pregnancies, early marriages, fatigue and loss of interest in schooling.

There were many factors that are reported by children as affecting their retention at school. Poverty demonstrated in different circumstances contribute greatly to lack of school retention. When families cannot pay tuition, provide for the child's personal needs, and engages child in work, the mindset of the child is derailed by external factors that lead to joining troublesome groups, relationships and eventual pregnancy.

5.2 Recommendations

The following are recommended to facilitate school retention among children: parents should partner with the school and community to regulate the nature of work that is given to children. Supervision and close monitoring of the work is advisable to ensure the child is not exposed to dangerous lifestyle and attracted to wrong peer both at school and at home. This is reported to be the key cause of drop out by children. There is also need for strengthening the enforcement of the by-laws that require children to stay at school. This will cause fear in both parents and children to enable them work hard to provide and create viable partnerships for children to say at school.

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