

Parents' level of income and students' dropout in lower secondary schools in Kamwenge district. A cross-sectional study.

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ABSTRACT

Background:

The study aimed to examine the relationship between parents' level of income and students' dropout in lower secondary schools in Kamwenge district.

Methodology:

The study used a descriptive, correlational, cross-sectional survey design with a mixed-methods approach. A population of 526 respondents was considered, from which 220 were selected using simple random and purposive sampling. Data were collected using questionnaires, interviews, and document review from both primary and secondary sources. Analysis was done using SPSS with descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation. Validity (CVI=0.85) and reliability (Cronbach's alpha=0.80) were ensured. Ethical standards included informed consent, confidentiality, and proper academic acknowledgment of sources.

Results:

The study recorded a response rate of 90.9% (200 out of 220 participants). 40% of the respondents were single, 58.5% were married, and 1.5% were separated. 22% of the parents were farmers, 15.9% are engaged in business and trade, and 7.3% of the parents are engaged in service provision, while 54.9% of the respondents were peasants. Findings on income showed financial constraints among parents, with low capacity to afford school fees, scholastic materials, and stable income (means mostly below 3). However, there was strong agreement (mean 4.3) that parents encourage enrollment in Universal Secondary Education. Student dropout indicators revealed high agreement on low academic performance (mean 4.8), behavioral problems (4.7), and lack of progress (4.6), while completion rates were perceived as very low (1.2). Irregular attendance and transfers were less agreed upon. A strong negative correlation existed between parents' income and dropout ($r = -0.693$, $p < 0.05$).

Conclusion:

Higher parental income is associated with lower student dropout rates.

Recommendation:

The government and education stakeholders should provide financial support and strengthen community assistance programs for financially disadvantaged students.

Keywords: Parents' income, Student dropout, Socioeconomic status, Secondary education, Kamwenge District, Academic performance

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BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Parents' level of income refers to the total financial earnings obtained by parents through employment, business activities, investments, or other sources, and it plays a central role in determining a family's socioeconomic status and living conditions (Mayer, 2002; Adler & Ostrove, 1999). In Uganda, lower secondary education typically ranges from Senior One (S1) to Senior Four (S4), and it provides learners with essential academic knowledge and skills necessary for further education, vocational training, and future employment opportunities (Brinda, Puhlmann, &

Schulte, 2009; Restad, 2021). Completion of this level is therefore critical for students' academic progression and long-term success.

Parental income significantly influences students' ability to remain in school and complete lower secondary education. Families with higher incomes are better positioned to provide educational resources such as textbooks, uniforms, tutoring, digital learning tools, and access to extracurricular activities, all of which enhance academic performance and reduce the risk of dropout (Mayer, 2002). In addition, higher-income households often reside in better

communities with improved schools, qualified teachers, and enriched learning environments, which further support students' academic achievement (Mugumya et al., 2023). Such families are also more capable of offering stable home environments and emotional support, which contribute to students' persistence in education.

In contrast, low-income families often face significant financial constraints that directly affect students' schooling. These challenges include the inability to consistently pay school fees, provide scholastic materials, or afford transportation to school. In some cases, learners may be forced to engage in income-generating activities to support their families, increasing the likelihood of dropout (Onsomu et al., 2006; Machebe et al., 2017). Although income is a strong predictor of educational outcomes, other factors such as parental involvement, motivation, family structure, and individual learner characteristics also influence whether students complete lower secondary education (Guzman, 2022).

Empirical studies consistently show a strong relationship between family income and educational attainment. Higher household income is associated with increased access to educational opportunities and improved completion rates, while low-income backgrounds are linked to higher dropout rates and reduced academic achievement (Blanden, 2004; Thomson, 1983). Parental education and employment status also interact with income to shape children's educational

decisions and outcomes (Cooper & Stewart, 2021). For example, students from low-income households are more likely to face difficult decisions regarding continuation to higher education due to financial limitations (Finnie & Mueller, 2008). The study aimed to examine the relationship between parents' level of income and students' dropout in lower secondary schools in Kamwenge district.

METHODOLOGY

Research design

The study adopted a descriptive, correlational, and cross-sectional survey design. It also employed a mixed-methods approach involving both quantitative and qualitative data.

The study was quantitative in nature because numerical data were used to examine key variables, particularly student completion rates in selected lower secondary schools.

In addition, the study was cross-sectional, as data were collected at a single point in time over a short period.

Study population

The study used the students in senior four from the selected secondary schools in Kamwenge District, parents/ guardians of the selected students, class teachers from selected secondary schools, head teachers, inspectors of Schools, and the District Education officer as the respondents of the study, hence constituted the study population.

Table 1: Study population

Participants	Target population
Students (s4)	243
Parents/guardian	243
Teachers (Class teachers)	32
Head teachers	4
Inspector of schools	3
District Education Officer	1
Total	526

The target population of the study was 526 participants, and these included 243 students, 243 parents/ guardians of the students, 32 teachers, 4 head teachers, 3 inspectors of schools, and the District education officer. Parents have been selected to participate in the study in order to gather information relating to their socioeconomic status. Senior four students have been selected, particularly due to their level of understanding in conceptualizing the research questions and independently providing answers without any

assistance, on student dropout and factors forcing their colleagues to leave school.

Sample size

The Krejcie and Morgan sample size determination table was used to determine the sample size, resulting in the selection of 220 participants as study respondents.

Table 2: sample size

Participants	Population	Sample size	Sampling technique
Students (s4)	243	90	Simple random sampling
Parents/guardian	243	90	Simple random sampling
Teachers (Class teachers)	32	32	Purposive sampling
Head teachers	4	4	Purposive sampling

Inspector of schools	3	3	Purposive sampling
District Education Officer	1	1	Purposive sampling
Total	526	220	

Source: *Kamwenge District Education Department (2024)*

The sample size of the study was 220 respondents, who included 90 students, 90 parents, 32 teachers, 4 head teachers, 3 inspectors of schools, and the District Education officer teachers.

Sampling techniques

Simple random sampling was used to select both students and parents who participated in the study. The selected Senior Four students were considered sufficiently mature to read, understand the questions, and provide independent, unbiased responses. Parents were also selected using simple random sampling, specifically from among those whose children had been chosen to participate in the study. Purposive sampling was used to select teachers, inspectors of schools, head teachers, and the District Education Officer. These provided key information relating to school dropout and student enrollment in Kamwenge District.

Sources of data

Both primary and secondary sources of data were used, as explained below.

Primary data sources

Primary data was obtained using a self-administered questionnaire, which was administered to students and parents who were selected for the study. Further, the questionnaires were both open and closed-ended. The questionnaires were used to collect information relating to parents' level of income, level of education, and occupation. Questions were measured using a five-point Likert each objective.

Also, interviews were conducted to collect primary data from class teachers, head teachers, inspectors of schools, and the district education officer in Kamwenge district. These provided general information relating to student dropout and student enrollment.

Secondary data was obtained directly from magazines, journals, newspapers, academic reports, and school databases. The information obtained includes: completion registers, enrollment registers of students.

Validity of instruments

Validity of an instrument refers to the appropriateness of the instrument to measure what it intends to measure..

To ensure a high level of data validity, the questionnaires were reviewed by a research supervisor for expert input. A Content Validity Index of 0.85 was obtained by dividing the number of relevant questions by the total number of

questions ($CVI = n/N$). This value was compared with the acceptable threshold of 0.7 proposed by Amin and was found to be adequate for the study.

Reliability

To assess the reliability of the research instrument, Cronbach's Alpha was used. This method evaluates reliability by comparing the degree of shared variance (covariance) among the items in an instrument to the total variance. The idea was that if the instrument were reliable, its coefficient would be 0.80 or greater than 0.7 as suggested by Amin (2009).

Data analysis

Before data was analyzed, it was carefully classified, edited, and coded based on clarity, completeness, accuracy, and consistency to ensure reliability. This was done using SPSS software.

The Likert scale was used to assess non-numerical responses, which were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as the mean and standard deviation. The Pearson correlation coefficient was applied to examine relationships between the study variables. In addition, multiple regression analysis was used to analyze the relationship between parents' socioeconomic status and student dropout in lower secondary schools in Kamwenge District.

Ethical Consideration

Permission was obtained from the School of Graduate Studies and Research, along with an introductory letter for fieldwork, following a successful proposal defense.

A consent notice was provided to respondents, requesting their voluntary participation and seeking relevant information for the study. Respondents were informed about the purpose of the research and the expected outcomes.

Confidentiality was assured, and all information provided was used strictly for academic purposes. In addition, all sources of literature were appropriately acknowledged, with due credit given to previous scholars whose work contributed to the study.

RESULTS

Response rate

Based on the study sample size of 220 participants, who were issued with questionnaires and scheduled for interviews, only 200 returned the questionnaires and accepted interviews, hence the response rate of 90.9%.

Table 3: Response rate of the study

Participants	Questionnaires issued and interviews scheduled	Questionnaires returned and interviews conducted	Response rate
Students (s4)	90	82	91.1%
Parents/guardian	90	82	91.1%
Teachers (Class teachers)	32	28	87.5%
Head teachers	4	04	100%
Inspector of schools	3	03	100%
District Education Officer	1	01	100%
Total	220	200	90.9%

These findings suggest a high level of participation and engagement from the various stakeholders involved in the study. Both students and parents/guardians had a response rate of 91.1%, indicating a strong willingness to contribute to the research. Additionally, head teachers, inspectors of schools, and the district education officer all achieved a 100% response rate, showcasing a high level of cooperation and commitment from key educational authorities in Kamwenge district.

Overall, the high response rates across participant groups provide a solid foundation for conducting a comprehensive

study on parents' socioeconomic status and its potential impact on students' dropout rates in lower secondary schools in Kamwenge district.

Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

Under this section, gender and age, marital status, education level of respondents were captured. The demographics are presented in descriptive form, considering percentages and frequencies as shown in Table 4;

Table 4: Demographic characteristics of respondents

Category of respondent	Frequency	Percentage
Students (s4)	82	41%

Parents/guardian	82	41%
Teachers (Class teachers)	28	14%
Head teachers	04	2%
Inspector of schools	03	1.5%
District Education Officer	01	0.5%
Total	200	100%
Gender		
Male	120	60%
Female	80	40%
Total	200	100%
Age Group		
16 – 24 years	82	41%
24-34 years	32	16%
35-45 years	47	23.6%
46+ years	39	19.5%
Total	200	100%
Education level		
No education (parents)	10	5%
Primary (parents)	36	18%
Secondary	120	60%
Diploma	29	15.5%
Bachelors	5	2.5%
Total	200	100%
Marital status		
Single	80	40%
Married	117	58.5%
Separated	3	1.5%
Total	200	100%
Occupation (Parents)	Frequency	Percentage
Farmers	18	22%
Business	13	15.9%
Civil servant	6	7.3%
Peasant	45	54.9%
Total	82	100%

Source: Field data, 2024

The study findings, as presented in Table 4, provide insights into the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents involved in the research on parents' socioeconomic status and students' dropout in lower secondary schools in Kamwenge district.

According to findings, 41% of the respondents were students (S4) and parents of the selected students for the study. Also, 14% were teachers, 2% were head teachers, and 1.5% was inspectors of schools in Kamwenge District.

According to findings, 60% (120) were males and 40% (80) were females. This indicates gender inequality in the education sector in Kamwenge District.

Findings also showed that 41% of the respondents were in the age group of 16 – 24 years, 16% were in the age group of 24-34 years, 23.6% were in the age group of 35-45 years, and 19.5% were in the age group of 46 and above years.

Findings showed that 5% of the respondents (parents) had no form of education, 18% had Primary (Parents), 60% had secondary education, 15.5% had a Diploma, and 2.5% had a university degree.

According to findings, 40% of the respondents were single, 58.5% were married, and 1.5% were separated. This indicates that the majority of the respondents have families and have responsibilities.

Findings of this section were obtained only from parents of the selected students. Therefore, findings showed that 22% of the parents were farmers, 15.9% are engaged in business and trade, and 7.3% of the parents were engaged in service provision, while 54.9% of the respondents were peasants.

These findings provide a comprehensive overview of the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents involved in the study. They encompass a diverse range of age groups, educational backgrounds, marital statuses, and occupations, reflecting the varied perspectives and experiences of the participants in the research on parents' socioeconomic status and students' dropout in lower secondary schools in Kamwenge district.

Parents' level of income in lower secondary schools in Kamwenge district

Descriptive statistics on parents' level of income in lower secondary schools in Kamwenge district.

The first objective of the study sought to assess the relationship between parents' level of income and students' dropout in lower secondary schools in Kamwenge district. Respondents were tasked to give their views on the various variables ie parent's level of income, and the responses were recorded, summarized, and presented in Table 5.

The findings in Table 5 were captured using a Likert 5-point scale where 5= strongly agree, 4=agree, 3= Neutral, 2= disagree, and 1= strongly agree. These were summarized and presented using descriptive statistics as follows.

Table 5: Descriptive statistics on parents' level of income in lower secondary schools in Kamwenge district

Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation
Parents afford school fees for their children in private quality secondary schools	2.2	0.2
Parents allow their children to make the choice of the school they want to attend	2.3	0.4
Parents pay school fees for their children in secondary schools on time	2.5	0.2
Most parents encourage their children to enroll in Universal secondary schools	4.3	0.4
Parents have enough assets that generate sufficient income to provide for their children's needs.	2.3	0.1
Parents have stable sources of income to cover any unexpected expenses of their children's education.	1.7	0.2
Parents have the financial capacity to provide all the scholastic materials sufficiently.	2.7	0.3

The findings presented in Table 5 provide insights into the relationship between parents' level of income and students' dropout in lower secondary schools in Kamwenge district. The statement "Parents afford school fees for their children in private quality secondary schools" had a mean of 2.2 and Std. Deviation: 0.2. On average, parents disagree that they can't afford school fees for their children in private quality secondary schools. This suggests that a significant portion of parents perceive themselves as financially incapable of meeting this expense.

The statement "Parents allow their children to make the choice of the school they want to attend" had a mean of 2.3 and Std. Deviation: 0.4. Parents disagree that they allow their children to make the choice of the school they want to attend. This indicates potential limitations in children's autonomy in school selection, possibly due to financial constraints or other factors.

The statement "Parents pay school fees for their children in secondary schools on time" had a mean of 2.5 and std. Deviation: 0.2. On average, parents disagree that they pay school fees for their children in secondary schools on time. This suggests that there may be delays or challenges in meeting school fee obligations promptly.

The statement "Most parents encourage their children to enroll in Universal secondary schools" had a mean of 4.3 and Std. Deviation: 0.4. Parents strongly agree that they encourage their children to enroll in Universal secondary schools. This indicates widespread support for the government's education initiatives aimed at increasing access to secondary education.

The statement "Parents have enough assets that generate sufficient income to provide for their children's needs" had a mean of 2.3 and std. Deviation: 0.1. On average, parents disagree that they have enough assets generating sufficient income to provide for their children's needs. This suggests

concerns about financial stability and adequacy of resources.

The statement “Parents have stable sources of income to cover any unexpected expenses of their children’s education” had a mean of 1.7 and std. Deviation: 0.2. Parents strongly disagree that they have stable sources of income to cover unexpected expenses of their children's education. This indicates vulnerability to financial shocks and challenges in managing unforeseen costs.

The statement “Parents have the financial capacity to provide all the scholastic materials sufficiently” had a mean: 2.7 and std. Deviation: 0.3. On average, parents somewhat disagree that they have the financial capacity to provide all the scholastic materials sufficiently. This suggests constraints in meeting educational material requirements for their children.

The findings suggest that while there is some level of financial capability among parents to afford school fees and support their children's education, there are also significant challenges and limitations. Delays in fee payments, concerns about financial stability, and constraints in providing educational materials indicate potential barriers to ensuring consistent access to quality education. Additionally, the strong support for Universal secondary schools underscores the importance of government initiatives in addressing accessibility issues in education. However, there is a need for further support and interventions to address financial constraints and ensure equitable access to education for all students in Kamwenge district.

During an interview with one of the teachers who was also a parent, he said that “most parents have unpredictable sources of income other than selling coffee, maize, and thus have seasonal incomes”. This highlights the reality that many parents in the district rely on agricultural activities as their primary source of income, which can be unstable and seasonal. Such unpredictability in income can create financial challenges, especially when it comes to meeting consistent educational expenses like school fees and materials.

Also, another parent said, “Most parents, including me we put our children in Universal government secondary schools because we can't afford the high cost of education elsewhere”. This underscores the financial constraints faced by parents in the district. The preference for Universal government secondary schools suggests that parents opt for more affordable options due to limited financial resources, indicating a potential barrier to accessing higher-quality education.

A student said, “My parents can't even afford a school uniform due to many siblings and other dependents, and I am the one working during the holidays to raise school fees”. This statement reflects the economic burden placed on students and their families. The inability to afford school uniforms and the need for the student to work during holidays to raise funds for school fees indicate significant financial strain. It also suggests that students may face challenges in balancing academic pursuits with economic responsibilities, potentially impacting their academic performance and likelihood of dropping out.

One of the parents also said, “I am the sole provider in the household since my husband died”.

This highlights the vulnerability of single-parent households and the added financial responsibility placed on the sole provider. In such cases, the loss of a spouse can have significant economic implications, potentially exacerbating financial challenges and limiting resources available for children's education.

Students’ dropout in secondary schools in Kamwenge District

Descriptive statistics on students’ dropout in lower secondary schools in Kamwenge district.

The findings were recorded on a five-point scale, where 5- strongly agree, 4- agree, 3- Neutral, 2-Disagree, and 1- strongly disagree, and they had varying responses. The findings were recorded and presented in Table 6.

Table 6: Descriptive statistics on student dropout in lower secondary schools in Kamwenge district

Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation
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Students irregularly attend school.	2.1	0.4
Students lack progress towards graduation requirements	4.6	0.3
Students achieve low grades in exams	4.8	0.4
Students have behavioral problems and are usually indefinitely suspended	4.7	0.3
Some students experience frequent school transfers	2.4	0.3
A small number of students complete secondary education	1.2	0.2

According to findings, the statement “Students irregularly attend school” had a mean of 2.1 and Std. Deviation: 0.4. On average, respondents disagreed that students irregularly attend school.

The statement “Students lack progress towards graduation requirements” had a mean of 4.6 and Std. Deviation: 0.3. The mean score suggests that respondents strongly agreed that students lack progress towards graduation requirements. The statement “Students achieve low grades in exams” had a mean of 4.8 and Std. Deviation: 0.4.

The high mean score indicates that respondents strongly agreed that students achieve low grades in exams.

The statement “Students have behavioral problems and are usually indefinitely suspended” had a mean score of 4.7 and Std. Deviation: 0.3. Respondents strongly agreed that students have behavioral problems and are usually indefinitely suspended.

The statement “Some students experience frequent school transfers” had a mean of 2.4 and std. Deviation: 0.3. On average, respondents disagreed that some students experience frequent school transfers.

The statement “A small number of students complete secondary education” had a mean of 1.2 and std. Deviation: 0.2. The very low mean score indicates that respondents strongly disagreed that a small number of students complete secondary education.

Overall, the findings suggest that respondents perceive students in lower secondary schools in Kamwenge district to face significant challenges related to academic achievement, behavior, and completion of secondary education. These challenges include low grades in exams, behavioral problems leading to suspensions, and difficulties progressing towards graduation requirements. However, there is less agreement on the extent of irregular attendance and frequent school transfers among students.

Correlation findings of the study.

Table 7: Correlation findings

Students' dropout in lower secondary schools		Parents' level of income
	Pearson Correlation	-0.693**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	200

****.** Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The correlation findings presented in Table 7 provide insights into the relationship between various parents' levels of income and students' dropout in lower secondary schools in Kamwenge district.

According to the findings, the correlation between parents' level of income and students' dropout in secondary schools in Kamwenge District was -0.693 (significant at the 0.05 level). There was a strong negative correlation between students' dropout rates and parents' level of income. This means that as parents' income increases, students' dropout rates decrease. Higher income levels likely provide families with more financial stability, allowing them to afford

educational expenses and support their children's schooling, thus reducing the likelihood of dropout.

DISCUSSION

According to the findings, the relationship between parents' level of income and students' dropout in secondary schools in Kamwenge District was -0.693 (significant at the 0.05 level). There was a strong negative correlation between students' dropout rates and parents' level of income. This means that as parents' income increases, students' dropout rates decrease. Higher income levels likely provide families with more financial stability, allowing them to afford

educational expenses and support their children's schooling, thus reducing the likelihood of dropout.

Findings showed that the relationship between parents' level of income and students' dropout in secondary schools.

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In Kamwenge District was -0.693 (significant at the 0.05 level). There was a strong negative correlation between students' dropout rates and parents' level of income. This means that as parents' income increases, students' dropout rates decrease. Higher income levels likely provide families with more financial stability, allowing them to afford educational expenses and support their children's schooling, thus reducing the likelihood of dropout.

The literature supports these findings by elucidating the complex interplay between parental income and students' educational outcomes. Higher-income families generally have better access to resources, including educational materials, tutors, technology, and extracurricular activities, which support their children's academic success (Mayer, 2002). Conversely, lower-income families may face financial challenges that hinder their children's ability to stay in school, such as the need to work to support the family or the lack of resources for school fees, transportation, or supplies (Onsomu et al., 2006). Studies have consistently demonstrated the causal relationship between family income and educational attainment, with socioeconomic status significantly influencing children's access to quality education (Blanden, 2004; Thomson, 1983; Bala, 2020). Furthermore, the research underscores the importance of targeted interventions and policies to address the challenges faced by low-income families in supporting their children's education. Initiatives such as income-based scholarships, financial aid programs, and community resources are essential for mitigating the impact of socioeconomic disparities on educational attainment (Goshin & Mertsalova, 2018). Additionally, studies examining the connection between parental income, education, and children's educational outcomes highlight the need for comprehensive approaches that consider multiple factors influencing students' educational trajectories (Cooper & Stewart, 2021; Finnie & Mueller, 2008). By addressing socioeconomic disparities and providing adequate support to families, policymakers can work towards ensuring equitable access to quality education for all children, thereby reducing dropout rates and promoting academic success in Kamwenge district and beyond.

CONCLUSION

Findings indicate a moderate negative correlation between parents' level of income and students' dropout rates. Parents with higher income levels are associated with lower dropout rates among students. This suggests that financial resources play a significant role in supporting students' academic persistence and reducing dropout rates in lower secondary schools.

RECOMMENDATION

The government should implement targeted financial assistance programs for financially constrained students through fee waivers or subsidies for school supplies.

Schools should establish community-based support systems to help address financial challenges faced by families in the Kamwenge district.

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List of abbreviations

S4 – Senior Four

SPSS – Statistical Package for the Social Sciences

CVI – Content Validity Index

α – Cronbach's Alpha (reliability coefficient)

N – Number of respondents

p – Probability value (significance level)

Source of funding

The study had no funding.

Conflict of interest

The study had no funding.

Informed consent

Written informed consent was obtained from all participants before their inclusion in the study. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, procedures involved, potential risks and benefits, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty.

Author contributions

KM: collected the data.

Dr. MS: supervised the study.

Data availability

Data is available upon request from the author.

Author biography

Alifa Ntebwamu: a student pursuing a master's degree in education planning and management at Team University

Dr. Muhamad Ssendagi: research supervisor at Team University

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