

Implication of Guidance & Counselling Services Management for Student Retention in Uganda's Universal Secondary Education

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Abstract

The Government of Uganda (GoU) has improved the implementation of USE policy by building classroom space, providing instructional materials, and by taking several initiatives to improve learning. This has resulted into considerable growth in student enrolment in USE schools. However, the growth in enrolment is tainted by declining student retention rates at over 30% leading to an average of 64% and 62% completion rates for male and female students respectively. Over the years, this concern has attracted scholarly attention, albeit most attention is given to academic factors at the expense of non-academic factors notably student Guidance and Counselling (G&C). This qualitative case study examined the implication of G&C management for student retention at a USE school in Masaka City. We established that the way G&C service is managed at the school is too basic to effectively mitigate student retention. We conclude that the nature of students who patronize the school suggests that tuition-free education that is bereft of functional G&C services hardly motivate students to stay in school up to completion, thereby undermining student retention.

Key words: *Guidance & Counselling; Student Retention; Universal Secondary Education; Implication, Masaka City School.*

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The 21st century presents a momentous opportunity for growth in Uganda with over 70% of the country's population under the age of 30. Such a labor force bulge promises a demographic dividend with a high potential for economic productivity in the country in the foreseeable future before the dividend flattens out (UNESCO, 2020). However, the demographic dividend is contingent on children acquiring the requisite knowledge, skills, and values to enable them be productive in the workforce to render them useful to themselves, their communities and to the broader economy. Thus, Uganda's low secondary school completion rate presents a substantial challenge with about 60% of children completing secondary school by 2018 (Mayoma & Nabukenya, 2022; Kemigisha, 2019). According to the Ministry of Education & Sports (MoES), student retention rate in many USE schools, is decreasing while dropout rate is increasing (MoES, 2017).

In 2007, GoU launched USE to increase access to secondary education for the economically vulnerable families and communities. The initiative was intended to accommodate the student bulge created by successful Universal Primary Education (UPE) school completers. Besides, the labor market was looking for a more educated workforce. Since USE policy advocates for promotion of equitable access to quality and relevant education for all; GoU abolished tuition fees in USE schools. However, students/parents still have to meet boarding fees, scholastic materials, medical care, meals and the like. Parents are at liberty to send their children to any USE school around the country, while those who are capable can send their children to fee-charging government and private schools (MoES, 2010; 2007).

The introduction of USE under the Uganda Post-Primary and Education Training (UPPET) in 2007 increased secondary school enrolment at an annual rate of 6%, growing from a total of 954,000 in 2007 to over 1.36 million in 2013 (Uganda Secondary Education Expansion Project-USEEP, 2020). By 2013, 806,992 students were enrolled in 1,819 USE schools, and USE enrolment into senior one (S1) continuously increased from 161,396 in 2007 to 251,040 (MOES Sector Fact Sheet 2002-2013). Before 2007, annual transition rate from primary to secondary education was around 40%, but by 2018, transition rates had risen to 69% (USEEP, 2020). Furthermore, the number of O-level candidates rose from 172,000 in 2006 to 265,000 by 2010; an increase of 54%. By 2013, USE school S1 enrolment had risen from 161,396 in 2007 to 251,040 by 2015, and by 2019, total enrolment in USE schools was 648,957 students (MoES, 2020). This remarkable achievement has attracted scholarly attention, with most of studies focusing on USE policy with respect to: School enrolments (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2013); teachers' commitment (Lisa & Kristof, 2015); head teacher implementation (Nabaseruka, 2010);

and students' educational attainment (Pattengale, 2010). Enrolment figures and scholarly reports produced over the years have provided important insights on free education policies in general and the dynamics of USE policy in particular (Aayog, 2020).

Thirteen years down the road, however, limited attention has been paid to student retention and completion rates in USE schools. While a study done by MoES on student dropout rates shows that completion rates rose from 16% to 40% between 2000 and 2013 (MoES, 2013); the said growth was inclusive of the period before and after USE implementation. So, student completion rate resulting from USE was unclear. Secondly, while Gross and Net enrolment ratios (GER & NER) in MoES statistical abstracts show high access to USE schools the statistics are silent about completion rates, which is a key target of SDG4; aiming to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. So, in keeping with Wagaba (2017) citing Lewin (2009), the key concern about the growing student access rates to USE is that it has not resulted into comparable growth in student completion rates. Besides, anecdotal evidence depicts that a considerable number of USE school students stand a lower chance of completing secondary education.

Yet, today, the success of school systems goes beyond enrolment rates to keeping track of students' learning up to completion. The World Bank report 2016 shows that the survival rate to the last grade of lower secondary general education for males in Uganda was at 63.59% while that of females was 62.0%. (World Bank Report, 2016). Close to 1.2 million pupils out of the 3.6 million children who successfully completed primary school between 2002 and 2011 and joined secondary school did not complete secondary education (Bbaale, 2020; Uganda National Examinations Board (UNEB), 2017). Besides, the completion rate of the first USE cohort was 74.1%, meaning that 25.9% of the children in this cohort did not complete the tuition-free USE program (MoE, 2012). Nabugoomu (2019) established that 28% of the youths in Uganda do not complete secondary education.

Masaka Diocesan Education Secretariat and West Buganda Diocesan Education Secretariat reports of 2018 and 2019 decry the small number of candidates who take Uganda Certificate of Education (UCE) exams relative to the number of children who enrolled in senior one. Thus, like UPE, the student retention trend in Uganda's USE schools suggests that elimination of tuition fees without provision of a supportive learning environment is untenable (Akyeampong, 2009). So, we postulate that tuition-free secondary education that does not effectively relieve deprived children of their emotional, psychological, social, and economic baggage may explain the declining student retention in USE schools (Hazel, 2010). Given that effective G&C services makes the USE school environment more unobjectionable to learners, it surely affects students' learning and completion rates (Gyanun, 2012). Otherwise, tuition-free USE with dismal student retention is a disinvestment to students, their families, the community and to society at large (Akyeampong, 2009; Sabates et al., 2010).

I. Statement of the Problem

To augment the implementation of USE policy, GoU has built classroom space, provided more instructional materials, and has taken several initiatives to improve access to secondary education (UBOS, 2019; MoES, 2018). However, the growth in student enrolment is undermined by rising dropout rates and declining student retention rates (Bbale, 2020, Nabugoomu, 2019; MoE, 2013). It is estimated that 63.6% and 62.0% of male and female students respectively complete secondary school in Uganda (African Promise, 2017; World Bank Report, 2016). The situation in Greater Masaka region is not any different (Masaka Diocesan Education Secretariat, 2018; West Buganda Diocesan Education Secretariat, 2019). While considerable scholarly attention on the matter has focused on parental support (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2013), teachers' commitment (Lisa & Kristof, 2015), headteachers' efficacy (Nabaseruka, 2010), and students' commitment (Pattengale, 2010); cursory attention is given to G&C as a possible harbinger of low student retention, more so in USE schools. We therefore, undertook to examine the implication of G&C management for student retention at one Masaka City USE school herein called Mango Secondary School.

Research Questions

The study was guided by three research question thus:

1. How does Mango secondary school manage students' G&C services?
2. What are the major barriers to student retention at Mango secondary school?
3. What is the implication of G&C services management for student retention at Mango secondary school?

II. Methodology

The study was single case study by design, qualitative in nature, and was conducted in one USE schools located in Masaka City. We collected data from 10 respondents; the headteacher and his deputy, the discipline master, one male and one female dropouts, a teachers' focus group, and two student focus group, one for male and another for female students. Respondents were purposively/conveniently selected. We used Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) to collect data from the headteacher, his deputy, discipline master, and the two dropout students were; and we employed Focus Group Discussion (FGD) to collect data from students and teachers. We audio-recorded the KII and FGD sessions and where applicable note book-recorded some observable processes during the field visits. Thereafter, we transcribed, content analysed, and organized data into three emergent themes namely; management of G&C services, barriers to student retention, and G&C services vs. student retention (Robinson, 2014; Lichtman, 2012).

Theoretical Benchmark

We were guided by Tinto's Model of Student Departure (1975) that mirrors the iterative process that a student experiences in school, as she/he ponders about the possible decision to stay or drop-out of school. The model specifies the physiological, psycho-social, and emotional orientations students bring with them into the school setting. These orientations are important predictors of the way a student fits in the school environment. We thus, averred that the psycho-social, emotional, and intellectual baggage a typical USE student joins Mango SS with is contingent on her/his individual characteristics, primary school experience, and her/his family background. This baggage will then impact on the student's motivation to integrate into the school system, and his/her inclination to stay in school up to completion or leave before completion. Finally, we postulate that a student's initial commitment to join Mango SS and her/his success/failure to integrate into the school system, strengthens or undermines her/his commitment to stay in school up to completion. So, the more supportive Mango SS is to the student, the more likely he/she is likely to persist up to completion.

III. Literature Review

Whereas there is a tendency to use the two terms interchangeably, guidance and counselling are two sides of the same coin. Guidance is the process of assisting learners to recognise their potential to work through problems (Salgong, Ngumi, & Chege, 2016), while counselling is the process of helping a student to explore difficulties experienced in life so as to make informed decisions that will lead towards a more satisfying life (Lunenburg, 2010; Idowu, 2008). The definitions suggest that counselling is an integral part of guidance without which guidance is not complete. Guidance and counselling focus on the cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and social needs of individuals, groups, and families of students (National Association of School Psychologists, 2010; Diane, 2012).

Guidance & counselling services are designed to prevent and address problems, facilitate positive learning and behaviour, and enhance healthy development. The services also address barriers to learning that include inadequate basic resources, psychosocial problems, stressful situations, crises and emergencies, and life transitions. In addition, these services address healthy psychosocial development for all students, including responsibility and integrity, self-esteem, social and working relationships, self-evaluation and self-direction, temperament, personal safety and safe behaviour, health maintenance, effective physical functioning, careers and life roles, and creativity (School Social Work Association of America, 2010). G&C is a widely applied method of treatment for all age groups intended to provide psychological support to individuals, groups or organizations for more successful management of everyday situations presenting challenges as a result of social pressure or personal issues (NCDC, 2019).

According to NCDC (2019), G&C primarily helps a student to understand him/herself, know how to get on with others, learn manners and etiquette, pursue leisure activities, practice social skills, develop family and family relationships, and understand social roles and responsibilities. Therefore, G&C services are means by which the helper expresses care and concern towards the person (s) with a problem and facilitates that person's personal growth and brings about change through self-knowledge. In this regard, G&C helps learners to: gain insight into the origins and difficulties of their emotional difficulties leading to boost their capacity to take rational control over their feelings and actions; amend maladjusted behavior; fulfil their potential and achieve integration of conflicting elements within themselves; and acquire skills, awareness and knowledge which will enable them to confront social inadequacy (NCDC, 2029). This implies that the major aim of G&C is to equip learners with the life skills they need to navigate through school life and the life after school.

Life skills in this regard would mean a group of psychological and interpersonal skills that can help USE students make informed decisions, communicate effectively, and develop coping and self-management skills that will help lead to a healthy and productive life (UNICEF, 2012). Life skills enable young people resolve their

problems or learn to live with them without being stressed. The skills will help young people make the right choices, live safely, avoid being infected with diseases, and to pursue their goals and aspirations to reach their full potential. The skills also help young people to develop the flexibility needed to adjust to different life circumstances and strengthen their ability to develop solutions in the face of challenges (Baskin & Slaten, 2014). By imparting life skills into USE learners, G&C serves as the means by which Mango SS can help students overcome and/or cope with Tinto's (1975) excess baggage.

School counsellors thus, help to make learning a positive experience for every student. They are sensitive to individual differences, and they know that a school environment that is good for one child is not necessarily good for another different students carry different baggage. In addition, school counsellors facilitate communication among teachers, parents, administrators, and students to adapt the school's environment in the best interests of each individual student. Counsellors help individual students make the most of their school experiences and prepare them for the future (UNESCO, 2018). Since premature school termination is a serious concern, school counsellors are in a unique position to assist students commit to their studies by helping them establish meaningful goals including the completion of their education (Ruttoh, 2015).

In Japan, the goal of high school counselling is to help every student develop abilities of self-understanding, decision-making, life planning, and action-taking to be able to adjust in the career options he/she decides to pursue (Watanabe-Muraoka, Senzaki, and Herr, 2011). In France, secondary school counselling assist students with vocational guidance. In Thailand, school counselling incorporates advice-giving by teachers, while in Israel, school counsellors devote one-third of their time to classroom instruction and the rest to personal and social counselling. In Hong Kong, school counselling and guidance is becoming more of a service that is incorporated into the whole school with an emphasis on prevention. Many secondary schools have counselling services and receive support from the Ministry of National Education (Encyclopedia.com, 2019).

This renders management of G&C an organized system of the tools needed to manage G&C programs in schools. It is associated with when, why, by whom and what is needed when G&C is launched. A well managed G&C programme is essential in assisting students cope with the stresses they face while in and out of school. The stress includes physical, psychological and emotional changes they face as adolescents. The challenges of adolescents include adapting to their new image, facing the growing academic demands, establishing vocational goals, learning to control sexuality, emotional and psychological independence from their parents. Most learners in secondary schools are at adolescence stage and thus, effective G&C management in schools must be availed to assist these students cope and stay in school up to completion (Melgosa, 2001 in UNESCO, 2018).

Students' retention in secondary schools remains a global challenge and affects any social establishment in the world irrespective of student socialization. Despite the Government of Uganda launching USE in 2007, many students who are enrolled to join secondary school do not complete secondary school level according to Ministry of Education and Sports (2013). Hence, while guidance and counselling are deemed to offer the solution to these challenges, there is a research gap this study sought to address. Generally, school G&C programs have been introduced to help students overcome challenges that accrue from home and school and which hinder them from remaining in school till graduation in the final grade (Ndanu, Mukadii, and Tarus, 2022).

The effectiveness of school G&C programme is when students are helped to face the realities of life, identify talents, interests, needs and attitudes. Basically, G&C helps students deal with their personal needs and evaluate the societal challenges facing them. This gradually develops life's goals that are individually satisfying and socially acceptable (UNESCO, 2006). Nthiga (2014) agrees that G&C students to complete secondary education increases their chances of formal sector employment and informal sector livelihood. This means that lack of total student retention indicates that students face at risk factors that deter them from completing schooling which can be intervened by the effectiveness of guidance and counselling programme before the student drops out of school (Ndanu, Mukadii, and Tarus, 2022).

Furthermore, Ndanu, Mukadi and Tarus's (2022) findings agreed with Egbo's (2015) findings that established that a G&C program helps school-going children to adjust meaningfully to the environment, develop the ability to set realistic goals, and improve on their willingness to stay in school and finish their education program. This indicated that G&C inspires students by giving them a clear perspective of their aspired goals in education and therefore continue learning to attain their goals. For instance, when students are guided and counselled to avoid drugs and substance use, their focus is targeted and focused to learning, which enhances their retention. Otherwise, drugs and substance use divert students' attention away from learning and becomes a risk factor that drives students to leave school (Ndanu, Mukadi and Tarus, 2022, citing The World Drug Report, 2011).

Finally, a relationship was established between high-quality G&C and high rates of student retention. Effective G&C exerts an appreciable impact on student retention (Haverila, Haverila, and McLaughlin, 2020).

citing Cuseo, 2003 and McWilliams & Beam, 2013). The study further established that students clearly need support from effective G&C due to the challenging educational planning process. A poor sense of direction was a frequently cited as the reason by students as a variable reason preventing them from experiencing a more satisfying and successful academic career. Hence, good quality G&C contributes toward higher student retention. The utilization of intrusive G&C and the establishment of a student G&C centre contributes to improved retention rates (Haverila, Haverila, and McLaughlin, 2020).

IV. Results

Mango SS is a USE school located a few kilometers along Masaka City-Villa Maria Road. The school's total student enrolment is 1086 learners and 54 staff, both teaching and non-teaching combined. The school serves students from Masaka city and the surrounding areas, within a radius of up to seven kilometers. Government pays tuition fees, provides textbooks and other instructional materials, pays school administration and maintenance costs, and co-curricular activities. It was apparent that government and parents'/guardians' contribution to Mango SS falls short of what is needed to effectively manage G&C service for upward social mobility of the children it serves. The respondents provided rich information, knowledge and first-hand understanding of the way the school manages G&C services as well as student retention experience that enabled us to discern the implication of G&C management for student retention at Mango SS.

Table 1: Themes Identified from Mango S.S.

Research Questions	Themes
How does Mango SS manage students' G&C services?	Management of G&C at Mango SS
What are the challenges to student retention at Mango SS?	Challenges to student retention at Mango SS
What is the implication of G&C service management for students' retention at Mango SS?	G&C vs. student retention in Mango SS

Management of G&C Services at Mango SS.

We established that Mango SS offers G&C services to students, management takes G&C seriously, and students are encouraged to seek support from the teachers. The school employs one professional counselor on a part-time basis. The counsellor shares the office space with the school chaplain. Teachers, senior woman and man teachers, warden and matron, headteacher, and other staff members are involved in offering G&C service to students. The school has a teacher-parenting scheme where students are clustered and allocated teacher to be their school parent, listen to students' problems, and deal with them. We established that the former headteacher visited the USA and established that G&C was key to keeping children in school. He therefore introduced a G&C department in the school and hired a part-time professional counselor who handles students' issues.

Our professional counselor holds a Masters' degree in G&C and is doing a good job. She is supported by the chaplain and the senior woman and man teachers, and all other members of staff. We are also giving teachers more training in G&C, especially in matters on ethical conduct, because sometimes, learners complain that their secrets are revealed by some teachers (Deputy Headteacher).

The school counsellor was very upbeat about her job. She organizes regular parents' meetings to devise ways of supporting children, given their socio-economic background. *I work with teachers, senior man, senior woman, matron, warden and give them basic tips on G&C because they deal with students a lot, otherwise I can't do it alone.* The counsellor intimated that when she joined the school, she was disturbed by the way teachers were beating students all the time, something that would hinder students from opening up since they took teachers as their tormentors. That teachers did not have time to spend with students, outside classroom work.

Now things have improved a lot and the school administration is very supportive of my department and they listen to me. The only challenge is that currently I share this office space with the Chaplain and, yet I need a separate office for G&C. Whenever the chaplain is around, I can't do my counseling well, because of the need for confidentiality. I have to look for another place where I can meet the students in private. I understand the challenge because the school has a space challenge (School Counsellor).

The boys concurred that teachers, religious leaders, administrators and motivation speakers guide and counsel students. They however, felt that the counselor gives more attention and time to girls than she does to boys; *.....for us boys, G&C is not that intensive as it is with the girls, the fact is that counseling for boys here is minimal.... they simply suspend us for wrong doing, and counseling is done from home by our parents.* The boys insinuated that even when they tell someone their problems, they are not give the solutions they need.

We have mature boys in school but when they break school rules, they are not listened to because of their age. Attention is on the young ones. The disciplinary committee needs improvement. One time I lost a calculator I borrowed from a girl and the case went to the disciplinary committee. Before I was given chance to explain one teacher asked, "Is this the thief?" I felt so bad and did not even say a word in the hearing. I was suspended for a week and I felt like not coming back to school (FGD Boys).

The girls also admitted that they receive G&C and they appreciate the service, much as they expressed dissatisfaction in some ways. They observed that as a part-time staff, the counselor is not readily available when students need her, and that when the girls tell her their problems, she just tells them to pray. The matron is not friendly and does not listen to the girls. Some teachers reveal students' confidential matters to other staff members, which embarrasses students to the point of wanting to leave the school.

I almost left the school, when my dad died in an accident. Before he died, he used to tell me that I study very hard because I will have to pay him back the money he was spending on my education. But when he died, I felt sad because he died before I had paid him his money and I lost interest in school. I talked to a teacher who counseled me to stay in school, but afterwards, the teacher told other teachers about my problem. I hate that teacher (FGD Girls)

We also established that students who are good academically but who have school fees issues are counselled and some are connected to NGOs that help them with fees. World Vision, Unbound, and sponsors from Netherlands were supporting a number of bright students who cannot afford to pay school dues. *Every Friday, we go for mass and thereafter, the Chaplain talks to students. We also have an Imam for the Muslims who comes and talks to them (FGD Girls).* On her part, the matron is always open to girls, and she warns them against indulging in actions that will distract them from pursuing their studies. *She always gives them vivid examples of failures in the community, and what the girls need to do to be successful in life (FGD Girls).*

The senior matron always gives girls vivid examples of the challenges in the community, and what the girls need to do to be successful in life. She had this to say;

A girl came to me and said she was HIV positive because she was caring her sister who was HIV positive. She said she felt cold always and her body was always shaking. I took her for an HIV test, and she was negative and she is happy and currently in S.4. I later found out that she was sleeping with her sister's husband. I talked to the girl's parents and advised them to find the girl another place to stay and she did and she is living happily (Matron).

The senior woman teacher stressed that she always offer individual counselling to students who are in need thus;

We try individual counseling and guidance and we check the girls for pregnancy once a term, and those who are found to be pregnant are counselled first, while those who are not are advised to be careful. When we find a pregnant student, we always invite her parents for counselling. Some parents become so angry when they are told about their daughter's pregnancy to the level of wanting to beat or even to strangle the girls, so we always counsel the parents as well to accept the situation, to calm down, and support the girl (Senior woman teacher).

Management of G&C services is marred with challenges such as lack of a designated guidance and counselling office, limited time for G&C, unapproachable and rude teachers, among others. A teacher during the FGD session remarked;

Parents also need guide and counselling. Sometimes it works sometimes it doesn't, and perhaps that is why some students and their parents don't take what we tell them very seriously. We also find it hard to persuade students who have deep-seated issues to open up to us. We handle cases of students' romantic relationships, pregnancies, substance abuse, and fighting. We invite parents' representatives on board and on PTA as well as students' representatives during some of these serious cases. We need them to give us feedback from the girls and boys to enable us handle these students during our sessions ((Teachers' FGD).

Another challenge voiced by the girls was inadequate guidance and counselling services in the school. They lamented staff incompetence and lack of commitment, tendency to disclose students' secrets, quarrelsome matron and senior woman teacher, and most teachers are not approachable. The girls reported that the timing for counselling sessions is improper because sometimes sessions are held in the evening after classes the time when students are tired and are going back home. For students that come from far, leaving the school late is another challenge. The challenge about the timing of G&C sessions came up several times. Unscheduled G&C sessions

makes students miss the sessions. Sometimes the sessions are held in the evening when students are tired and are ready to go home.

Separation of boys and girl for guidance and counseling for counselling always comes abruptly and is not timetabled. Sometimes it is done in the evening after classes when we are tired and for us who come from very far, this puts us at risk. We don't want to miss some of these serious guidance and counselling sessions, held once in a term, because as adolescents, we can easily make wrong decisions (Girls' FGD).

Similar sentiments were raised by the male dropout, whose biggest challenge was raising school charges. He was supported by an organization called Child Care, since primary school days but the organization pulled out due to the Covid-19 outbreak. Consequently, he could not pay school dues totaling up to one million shillings.

I really wanted to sit for Senior four exams but I had no choice, I decided to drop out of school to give my young brother a chance to finish primary seven because my mother could not afford to pay fees for the two of us. I knew she was suffering too so, I decided to drop out, to look for a job to support my mother but I intend to save some money to join a technical school someday (Male Dropout).

When asked whether he sought counseling and guidance from the staff, he said he didn't because it would not help much. He explained that all what the teachers talk about is academic performance and male-female romantic relationships. Yet there were many issues that affect students such as drug abuse, theft, bullying but are left unresolved.

The boarding section was very hard for me because of bullying, night dancing, and theft. I reported to the dormitory captain but nothing serious was done, so, I left the boarding section. I never told my teachers because I didn't think they would help. The only person I would freely talk to was my mother, who always encouraged me to persist, but she had no money.

Finally, lack of funds for effective provision of guidance and counselling services was another challenge voiced by respondents. The headteacher and the deputy in charge of academics expressed regret for the school's inability to employ professional counselors due to lack of funds. During the teachers' FGD session, a member lamented that much as they were actively participating in offering guidance and counselling services to students, there is no allowance given to the staff for the work well done. Similarly, the senior man and women teachers felt that they were overloaded with teaching, guiding, and counselling students, yet there were no allowances for guidance and counselling.

Barriers to Student Retention at Mango SS

As for student retention at Mango SS, the respondents were tasked to give the challenges to student retention, or the major causes of student dropout in the school. All respondents acknowledged that student dropout is a problem in the school. Reasons given for the dropout were; failure to pay school charges, pregnancy, getting married, gambling, need to make money, lack of parental support, peer pressure, covid-19 lockdown, family background, substance abuse, bullying, culture, long distance from home to school, and sexual harassment. In his words, the warden had this to say;

Indeed, we have retention issues here we enroll around 200 students in senior one but the number keep on reducing and by the time they reach senior four, they are about 150 students, much as there are many more who join in between. The issue of school fees and other essentials requirements is the major cause of dropout. Some students have mental problems arising from not being loved at home, while some who are sex workers have been found with sexually transmitted diseases (School Warden).

The warden thought that boys drop out because they want to make money, and some of them say it openly that they are in school just because their parents want them to, and that such students are more likely to dropout at the slightest provocation.

There is boy who has just been forced to come back to school. He had started a chapatti business in Kyabakusa, and I doubt that he will finish senior four. The girls drop out more than the boys, and last year, 15 students did not come back to register for senior four exams and of these 11 were girls. Even the other year, 12 girls who registered to for exams did not come to write the exams (School Warden).

The teachers attributed student dropout to the long-distance students have to travel, as well as the economic situations that prevent them from paying for school requirements, uniforms, lunch, and many more. Parents' attitude towards education featured during our discussion that many parents don't mind much about their children's academic progress.

Some parents don't take their children's education as a priority. The boys drop out to do business, riding bodabodas, chapatti selling, working on construction sites etc. Girls drop out to go to the Middle East to become maids, some get married, sell tomatoes and they see education as a waste of their time (FGD Teachers).

Some students pay their fees and thus, they do a lot of hassling running around selling small eats around town to raise the money for school fees. *We actually have sizable section of students from slums copy behaviors of their brothers and sisters and some are forced into prostitution for financial conditions. Pregnancies take some of the girls, much as we encourage them to come back to school after giving birth, they don't come back (FGD Teachers).*

A number of respondents blamed the high dropout rates on the school location, being in the city, and surrounded by slums. According to the school counsellor, the school is surrounded by slums which attract students to drop out and look for money. That given that majority of the students come from single families, the parents tend to be too busy to monitor their children. some parents make students work with them at night in risky places.

Students who live in or near slums find it easy to drop out for cheap work. We are sensitizing them about the importance of education, and we even try to reach out to those who dropout and encourage them to come back to school. Some girls have come back but boys usually don't. For girls, pregnancy is a key factor. Those who are found to be pregnant tend to dropout due to stigma, much as government allows them to stay in school (School Counsellor).

The girls emphasized the issue of parents monitoring their children that some girls are renting rooms near the school but their parents think that the girls are living in school dormitory, and one girl was caught stealing from her landlord to buy food. *Single parenting is a big problem because some girls who stay with fathers cannot freely discuss their problems with fathers. Once the situation becomes very tough on these girls, they drop out of school (FGD Girls).*

Guidance & Counselling vs. Student Retention at Mango SS

The following is the discernable implication of Mango SS' management of G&C services for student retention. Mango SS strengthened the school guidance and counselling service by employing a professional counselor to help students overcome school and home-based challenges, and which compel them to drop out of school. The counsellor explained thus;

When I joined the school, I was disturbed by the way teachers were beating students all the time, yet corporal punishment hinders students from opening up to teachers because students see teachers as tormentors. Teachers did not even have the time to spend with students, outside classroom work. So, students, whose challenges could be resolved would end up dropping out of school. Now the situation is improving steadily because we are now helping students to face the realities of life, identify talents, interests, needs and the right attitudes to enable them develop and maintain healthy and effective interpersonal relationships to motivate them to stay in school (Counsellor).

Asked to relate G&C management and student retention at the school, the counsellor revealed that as a USE school, Mango SS' student retention challenge is a demonstration that students face phyco-social and economic problems that lead them to dropout. She said that in her experience, many of those problems can be resolved by effective G&C before and after the student drop out of school. She clarified thus; *among other duties, I identify, monitor, intervene, and follow up cases likely to dropout of school. This has largely helped many potential dropouts to stay in school (Counsellor).*

In relation to the above, one girl revealed that she was at the brink of dropping out if there was not G&C in the school thus; *I almost left school when my dad died in an accident. Before he died, he used to tell me that I would pay him back all the money he was spending on my education. After his death, I lost interest in school, but when the matron took me to the school counsellor, she convinced me to stay in school (FGD Girls).*

Academically good but financially unable students who seek counselling are connected to benefactors such as World Vision, and Unbound that help pay such students to pay fees. So, students who seek G&C services as an

intervention for different schooling challenges can be helped to stay in school up to completion. Another way in which G&C at Mango SS promotes student retention was revealed by the teachers thus;

A good number of students in this school live in or near the slum area, whose bad influence makes it easy for them to drop out. Students copy bad behaviors from their relatives, some are enticed into prostitution for financial conditions, some girls get pregnant others get into early marriages; but through G&C, we counsel them to avoid such temptations, and encourage those who dropout to come back to school. Some students have come back to continue with studies while some don't (FGD Teachers).

One of the boys gave a situation where the school counsellor saved him from dropping out due to a teacher's unprofessional conduct thus;

One time I lost a calculator that I had borrowed from a girl in my class and she forwarded the matter to the disciplinary committee. When I appeared before the committee, one teacher asked, even before I was given chance to explain that "Is this the thief?" I felt so bad to be called a thief, and did not even say a word to the committee. I was suspended for a week and I vowed not to come back to school, but the school counsellor reached out to me and convinced me to come back to school (FGD Boys).

Thus, G&C at Mango SS helped that students to overcome the letdown and anger that could have led him to dropout of school.

V. Conclusions

While the school claimed to take their G&C operations very seriously, it was clear that the service is managed in a very basic manner due to a number of logistical and structural barriers that undermine the school's ability to manage co-curricular services effectively. Secondly, given the students entering behavior, the school suffer a multitude of student retention challenges precipitated by students' psycho-social, physical, and emotional challenges that make them unable to cope with the school environment. Thirdly, the way the school manages G&C services has far-reaching implication for student retention at Mangoe SS.

VI. Recommendations

We recommend that the school keeps students' interests and needs in mind as they plan G&C activities to ensure that every student has ample opportunity to benefit in the service without fear or apprehension. Secondly, the school puts G&C on top of their resource mobilization agenda and make budgetary allocation for the smooth running of G&C programs. Thirdly, the school searches for non-government donors and sponsors to supplement the government budgetary allocation for effective management of G&C services.

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