Implication of Co-curricular Management for Student Retention at Masaka City Universal Secondary Education (USE) School

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Abstract: *The Government of Uganda (GoU) has augmented 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 of over 30% leading to 63.59% and 62.0% completion rates for male and female students respectively. Whereas this concern has attracted scholarly attention over the years, most of the attention is given to academic factors at the expense of non-academic factors. This qualitative study sought to address the latter by examining the implication of the way USE schools manage co-curricular services for student retention. We focused on management of co-curricular services, barriers to student retention, and the link between co-curricular management and student retention at one USE school in Masaka City. The study shows that tuition-free education devoid of effective management of co-curricular services adversely affects children's motivation to attend school regularly and stay in school up to completion.*

Key words: *Co-curricular; Student Retention; Universal Secondary Education; Implication, Masaka City*

I.   INTRODUCTION

As a party to a number of international commitments to increase access to education; Uganda was the first country in Sub-Saharan Africa to introduce USE in 2007 (Asankha and Takashi 2011). Since then, considerable progress has been made to increase access to secondary education, particularly for disadvantaged families. While more effort is put on increasing access to what the effort has not translated into comparable increase in completion rates. In this study, I address this issue by taking a critical examination of co-curricular management and its implication for student retention in one Masaka City USE school.

The 21st century presents a momentous opportunity for growth in Africa. With almost 70% of the continent's population being under the age of 25, such growing labor force promises a demographic dividend with potential for higher economic productivity in the continent before the growing dependency ratio flattens out (WHO, 2021; UNESCO, 2010). However, USE is contingent on children acquiring the skills to enable them enter the workforce and be productive to their communities and the broader economy. Thus, Africa's low school completion rate presents a substantial challenge with only 42% of children completing secondary school in 2015 (UNICEF, 2021). The situation in Uganda is not very different, largely due to inadequate provision of non-academic services, such as Co-Curricular Services (CCS) (Mugabo et. al., 2023), particularly in USE schools.

In 2007, Government of Uganda (GoU) launched USE, to increase access to secondary education for economically vulnerable families and communities. The USE initiative was intended to take on successful Universal Primary Education (UPE) school completers, and produce skilled workforce for businesses looking for a more educated workforce (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2008). 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. Under USE policy, parents are at liberty to send their children to any USE school around the country and those parents who can afford are free to send their children to fee-charging schools (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2008)

Fifteen years down the road, tremendous achievement has been registered in access to secondary education. 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 S1enrolment 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).

However, thirteen years after USE implementation, cursory scholarly attention has been given to USE student retention and completion rates. A MoES study on student dropout rates shows that completion rates rose from 16% to 40% between 2000 and 2013 respectively (MoES, 2013). But since the growth was inclusive of the period before and after USE implementation, student completion rate resulting from USE was unclear. Gross and Net enrolment ratios (GER & NER) in MoES statistical abstracts show high access to USE but do not show completion rates, which is a key target of SDG4 (It aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.). So, in keeping with Mugabo, Ssenkusu & Tamale (2023) citing Wagaba (2017) and 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.

Yet today, the success of school systems goes beyond enrolment rates to keeping track of students' learning up to completion. According to the World Bank report for 2016, the survival rate to the last grade of lower secondary general education for males in Uganda was reported at 63.59% while that of females stood at 62.0%. (World Bank Report, 2018). Uganda National Examinations Board (UNEB) reported that out of 3.6 million pupils who passed Primary Living Examinations PLE in the period between 2002 and 2011 and joined secondary school level; 1.2 million pupils (33%) did not complete secondary education (Bbaale, 2020). At the onset of USE, the completion rate of the first cohort was 74.1% implying that 25.9% of the students in this Cohort did not complete the USE program, regardless of the fact that it is free (MOES, 2012 in Mugabo et. al. 2023). Furthermore, Nabugoomu (2019) established that 28% of the youths in Uganda do not complete secondary education.

In addition, Masaka Diocesan Education Secretariat and West Buganda Diocesan Education Secretariat (2018; 2019) decried the small number of candidates who take UCE exams relative to the number enrolled in senior one. Thus, like UPE, the history of USE in Uganda seems to suggest that elimination of tuition fees without corresponding support services can put many deprived school children at a disadvantage (Akyeampong, 2022). So, a learner-friendly school environment is essential for students to stay in school and learn up to completion. Otherwise, a dreary school environment affects students' class attendance, engagement, and motivation to stay in school (Hazel, 2010).

Given that CCS is one of the key Student Support Services (SSS) that render any school environment more stimulating to learners (Mekebo, 2019), it can surely affect students' learning and completion rates in USE schools. I therefore partook to examine the management of CCS in a USE school and its implication for student retention. Otherwise, tuition-free USE with dismal student retention is a disinvestment to students, their families, the community and to society at large (Akyeampong, 2020). Besides, since learners who lack physiological, emotional and social support at school are more likely to give up on their studies than those who do, CCS can come in handy as one of the SSS that if well managed offers physiological, emotional and social support to USE school students, thereby creating a stimulating school environment (Mugabo et al., 2023). Thus, the need to examine the way CCS are managed and its implication for student retention at one of Masaka City's USE schools.

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

To augment the implementation of USE policy, GoU has over the years, built classroom space, provided more instructional materials, and has taken several initiatives to improve learning (MoES, 2018). This has resulted into considerable growth in student enrolment in USE schools. However, the growth in enrolment is flawed by declining student retention rates of over 30% (Bbale, 2020, Nabugoomu, 2019; MoE, 2013), leading to 63.59% and 62.0% completion rates for male and female students respectively (African Promise, 2017; World Bank Report, 2016). The situation in Masaka City is equally concerning (Masaka Diocesan Education Secretariat, 2018; West Buganda Diocesan Education Secretariat, 2019). Available scholarly attention on student retention focuses on; guidance & counselling and student retention (Mugabo et al., 2023), lack of

parental support (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2013), teachers' commitment (Lisa & Kristof, 2015), headteachers' efficacy (Nabaseruka, 2010), and students' commitment (Pattengale, 2010). No attention is given to CCS and student retention in USE school. I therefore, undertook to examine the implication of managing CCS for student retention at one Masaka city USE school hereafter called Apple SS.

Research questions
1. How does Apple Secondary School manage students' Co-Curricular Services (CCS)?
2. What are the major barriers to student retention at Apple Secondary School?
3. What is the implication of co-curricular services management for student retention at Apple Secondary School?

Apple Secondary School: Apple SS is a USE school located a few kilometers from Masaka City, along Masaka-Kampala highway. The school's total student enrolment is 874 learners and 51 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. At Apple SS, government pays the tuition fees, provides textbooks and other instructional materials, meets the costs of school administration, maintenance of school infrastructure, pays the staff salaries and meets the cost of co-curricular activities. Parents/guardians are required to pay for students' school meals, medical care, boarding fees (for students who opt to stay in the school hostel), uniforms, scholastic materials etc. However, the situation on the ground depicts that both government and parents'/guardians' monitory and in-kind contribution to Apple SS falls short of what the school needs to effectively meet its mandate of providing quality education and sports for the upward social mobility of the underprivileged children it serves.

III.   METHODOLOGY
This study was a single case study conducted at Apple SS; a USE schools located in Masaka City. The respondents I selected for the study were: the headteacher; a six-teacher Focus Group Discussion (FGD); one sports master; eight-girl focus group, eight-boy focus group; and two dropout students, a boy and a girl. I selected the headteacher and sports master using purposive sampling, teachers and students using convenience sampling, and the two dropouts using snowball sapling method. I collected the data using Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) for the headteacher, sports master, and dropouts; and FGD for teachers and students. I also used non- obtrusive observation to collect data from some of the observable co-curricular operations and facilities at the school. The KII and FGD sessions lasted close to one hour and I audio-recorded all the sessions, with permission from the respondents. During the field visits, I notebook-recorded data from observation. Thereafter, I transcribed, content analysed, coded, and organized the data into three emergent themes thus: (i) Management of CCS (ii) Barriers to student retention, and (iii) Management of CCS vs. Student retention.

IV.   THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK
In this study, I was guided by Tinto's Model of Student Departure (1975) that mirrors the iterative process a student experiences in school, as she/he ponders the possible decision to stay or drop-out. The model specifies the physiological and psycho-social orientations students bring with them into the school setting that are important predictors of the way a student is integrated in the school environment. Using Tinto's framework, I postulated that a typical student enters a USE school with a psycho-social, emotional, physiological, and intellectual baggage determined by her/his family background, individual characteristics, and primary school experience. The baggage in turn influences the student's level of school engagement, motivation to study, and his/her inclination to stay up to completion or leave before completion. The student's ability to integrate into the school system occurs under normative and structural integration. I argue that a student's initial commitment to join a USE school and her/his ability or failure to fully integrate into the school system, strengthens or undermines the student's commitment to stay in school up to completion. So, the greater the student's integration into the school, the more likely he/she is to persist up to completion. I take on CCS as one of the key student integration enablers in at Apple SS.

V.   LITERATURE REVIEW
The term co-curricular has different inferences in educational institutions, and generally, educators think of it as a separate domain of education (Robert, 2018). The prefix ''co'' refers to the activities that are separated from the academic curriculum, and these are named differently in schools such as; non-curricular, semi-curricular, para-curricular, extra-curricular activities of the schools (Ahmad, 2011 citing Berk, 1992). Harris, 1960) defined co-curricular activities as, programs and events carrying no academic credit, sponsored and organized by students' organizations or by institutions designed to entertain, instruct and/or provide exercise of interest and abilities; subject to some measures of control by the education institutions.

Bagaya and Sekabembe (2012) described co-curricular activities as interaction between students and the physical, social, environment and interpersonal relationship with people at the school. Whereas traditionally, the school curriculum is defined by the class time-table, and is called the formal curriculum, co-curricular activities that take place outside classroom lessons are called informal curriculum and are often regarded as less essential. However, co-curricular activities offer students privilege to cultivate values of cooperation, responsibility, effective use of time and developing their abilities to their fullest form (Robert, 2018). The learning experiences both from academic curriculum and co-curricular activities are equally important (Bagaya & Sekabembe, 2012). Life-wide learning is generally learning experiences that take place beyond the classrooms, which enable students to achieve goals difficult to attain through classroom learning (Oke & Ichima, 2020). By engaging in co-curricular activities, the school conveys values to the students, and to have life-wide learning, students should have extended outside classroom activities (Mekebo, 2020).

The scope and role of school managers is the centrepiece and driving force in the implementation of co-curricular programs. Principals are responsible for ensuring the planning of work activities, and availability of mentors, and advocates for improving the efficiency in implementing curricular activities (Gyanunlimited, 2012). As leaders, principals should discuss and provide incentives to increase the efficiency of implementing the co-curricular programmes. In addition, principals must be exemplary by practicing what they preach and actively participate in carrying out assessments to ensure that the goal of co-curricular activities are achieved (Haliimah, 2010).

Facilities such as playgrounds, equipment, materials, coaches, trainers and ample time should be provided in a school to promote co-curricular services. If skills like jumping, throwing, hitting, catching, kicking, acting, singing etc. are to be acquired and developed, major games like basketball, football, volleyball, music dance and drama must be included in the school program. With the available facilities, schools should plan, organize, and coordinate with teaching staff, non-teaching staff, and students to achieve the objectives. The principal, for instance, should allot responsibilities to the staff depending on their ability and suitability. Benefits of participation in interschool sports should presumably carry over to other aspects of life during adolescence (Taylor, 2012; Lussier & Kimball, 2014).

So, the importance of leadership in school is undeniable because without able leadership, CCC in school will only be a patchwork of people, equipment, and playgrounds. But if the principal acts effectively as a manager of CCS, certainly the services can be considered effective in promoting a balance of mental, spiritual, physical, emotional, and social development of students (Gibbs, 2012 citing Hicks, 1975). So, management provides direction to co-curricular activities thereby helping students to engage in meaningful activities. Following this engagement, the skills learned through these activities can cultivate a healthy lifestyle in students in school and after school days (Florah, 2020).

Berger et al. (2012) refer to retention as the ability of an institution to keep a student from admission through graduation. In this study, student retention is largely measured and judged against students who complete senior four by sitting National Examinations to obtain Uganda Certificate of Education (UCE) (Wagaba, 2017). Otherwise, student retention, at secondary school level is measured by the number of students who complete secondary education and take UCE/UACE Examinations. The opposite of retention is dropout, construed by UNICEF (2021) as students who enroll in a school in a certain grade, but do not enroll in the following year. School dropout or low student retention is a widespread phenomenon around the world (UNICEF, 2013). Failure of students to complete their studies not only means a loss for the individual in form of poor opportunities and future prospects, but it also means failure for the school and a loss for society at large.

School dropouts are a complex and multifaceted problem, which should be seen as a process rather than as an individual event. The fact that young people choose to drop out of school is often the result of several factors and collaborative processes. Some believe that these processes often start early, why there is a need to study the dropout process from a lifetime perspective, in order to gain knowledge of the factors that gradually cause students to withdraw from school, eventually leading them to drop out (Wagaba, 2017). It can be due to factors at school, such as lack of interest or achievements, or it can be about factors outside the school, such as early pregnancy, delinquency or being forced to work to contribute to the family economy. A growing body of research on school retention focus on institutional, socio-economic, and personal factors that impact on the completion of schooling. Other studies focus on identifying students most at risk of leaving school without certification, or without adequate educational or training requirements for on-going employment (Beavis, Curtis, & Curtis, 2005b; Lamb et al., 2004; Munns & McFadden, 2000; Ross & Gray, 2005; Wyn, Stokes, & Tyler,

2004). However, little research has been done in Uganda to explain student retention from the point of view of CCS.

Student's decision to drop out at the secondary level is not one that occurs at an isolated moment in time. Rather, it is often the culmination of a gradual process of social and academic exclusion, often beginning at the primary school level (Webster & Showers, 2011). There is a well-established literature on factors associated with dropping out. Researchers have examined the relationships between dropping out and different risk factors related to demographic characteristics and family background, school performance, personal or psychological characteristics, adult responsibilities, school or neighborhood characteristics. Researchers have been in agreement on factors related to dropping out even though their studies employed different data sources, covered different time periods, and differed in the extent to which they controlled for other factors in measuring these relationships (Wodon, Montenegro, Nguyen, and Onagoruwa, 2018). Although most studies involving risk factors for dropout show similar results, some researchers believe that the factors that determine, or contribute to, this phenomenon are still not clear.

The role of peer relations when it comes to school dropout has been extensively investigated in previous research (Doren, et al., 2014; Frostad, Pijl & Mjaavatn, 2015; Zaff, et al., 2017; Mcdermott, et al., 2018). Ream and Rumberger (2008) found that the characteristics of friends and of friendship networks are important risk factors in determining dropout. In contrast to the tendency of academically disengaged students to develop street-oriented friendships, students who are involved in school tend to befriend others who also make schooling a priority. Thus, at the same time as academically disengaged students tend to develop friendships that constitute a risk factor for dropout, school-oriented friendship networks have the potential to prevent dropout (UNICEF (2021). This is related to the norms that peers set for each other. According to Zaff, et al. (2017) the norms that peers set for each other around educational attainment also influence a young person's chances of staying in and graduating from high school.

Finally, Havik et al. (2015) found a direct association of teachers' classroom management with school refusal related and truancy-related reasons among secondary school students, suggesting that perceived poor support from teachers could increase the risk of school refusal and truancy. Based on this, the authors argued for the importance of efforts to prevent bullying as a measure to reduce school refusal. The importance of the teacher-student relationship cannot be underestimated. The results of Simić & Krstić's (2014) qualitative study on school factors related to dropout show that low individualization of teaching, lack of learning and emotional support and lack of positive teacher-student relationships proved to have the greatest influence on student dropout.

In the first place, co-curricular activities provide a place for students to come together, discuss ideas and issues, and accomplish common goals. Through these activities, students can feel at ease with one another, which enhances learning and development, which can positively impact student retention (Kiweewa, 2016 citing Tenhouse, 2008). Students are more likely to persist in college if they feel they have had rewarding encounters with a college's social and academic systems. A broad range of physical, interpersonal, leadership, and intellectual skills developed by co-curricular activities strengthen students' bonding with the education institution (Janosz, Le Blanc, Boulerice & Tremblay, 2000).

Besides, students who take part in these extra-curricular activities tend to show higher self-esteem when making choices than students who did not take part (Busi, 2017). Similarly, Martinez et al (2016), suggest that students' participation in extra-curricular activities can increase their connectedness and sense of belonging to their school, highlighting the possibility of a relationship between learning outcomes and student perceptions of the school environment. Metsäpelto and Pulkkinen (2012) go further to demonstrate how student participation in arts activities, sports or academic clubs led to better academic outcomes as well as a better sense of connection to their school leading to higher student retention.

In addition, emotions are trained through co-curricular activities. Co-curricular activities allow scope for release of pent-up emotions. They give emotions an outlet and thus have a cathartic effect on freedom. Students who are weak in studies develop inferiority complex and thus do not get opportunity to express themselves in classroom. Co-curricular activities provide them the opportunity to seek self-expression. Some may excel in these activities which help in development of their self-confidence and emotional well-being. These activities provide a means of emotional adjustment to all students, which enables them to focus on their studies and stay in school up to completion (Busi, 2017).

Musoke's (2021) study on effect of co-curricular activities on students' academic achievement in universal secondary education schools in Iganga Municipality shows that when adolescents participate in co-curricular activities, they often get greater opportunity to interact with others, develop friendships, and develop social confidence. Besides, participation in co-curricular activities is interpreted as a sign of maturity and as self-affirming behavior, which develops a sense of commitment and obligation. It was also established that students who participated in co-curricular physical activities had a higher self-perception than those who were not participants (Daley & Leahy, 2003 in Musoke, 2021).

VI. RESULTS

The results are presented in accordance to three themes that reflect the three objectives ot this study thus; management of CCS, barriers to effective student retention, and management of CCS vs. student retention at Apple SS. The respondents provided rich information, knowledge and first-hand understanding of the way the school manages co-curricular services, as well as student retention experience that enabled me to discern the implication of co-curricular management for student retention at Apple SS.

Management of Co-curricular Services at Apple S.S.

Apple SS offers a number of co-curricular activities, mostly outdoor games, mainly football, netball, athletics, as well as debate and Music Dance and Drama (MDD) for indoor games. Management encourages students to participate in co-curricular activities, and the school has a department designated for games and sports, headed by a Sports Master. Much as management has a narrow view of CCS limited to games and sports, other co-curricular activities exist in the school and they include; hoisting the National and Buganda Kingdom flags, singing anthems, praising God, cleaning the compound and class rooms, personal hygiene, playing around during break time, and observing holy and other important days, among others.

In addition, students go for educational tours, celebrate victories, and participate in school festivities. A handful of trophies and shields on display in the headteacher's office was clear testimony that Apple SS participated in competitive sports. Athletics, debate and MDD though encouraged, are not given as much priority as football and netball. The headteacher exuded optimism that the co-curricular had improved a lot since he joined the school, close to a year, before the time of the interview. He attributed to the rise in the number of the student population (from 600 to 924) to his effort to revitalize games and sports in the school. He intimated that by the time he joined the school, there was no competitive sports, but this year, (2023) the school was organizing inter-house sports competition. The school was also looking forward to participating in post-primary sports championship in 2024.

"Imagine, when I revitalized sports in this school, the number of students increased from 600 to 924 and I think you can see that involvement in sports activities can attract students to the school. We are preparing for inter-house games, and next year we shall go for post-primary sports championship. One old boy (alumnus) gave us trophies, medical kits and he promised to contribute referees' allowance. We give players special meals to motivate them" (Headteacher).

The teacher in charge of sports observed that the school supports sports through transporting players to sports venues, and providing refreshments (water) to footballers and netballers. On top of that, a few talented students are given school bursaries.

"The sports department exposes learners to people who can promote their talents further, and that's why we want to send them out to participate in district and national tournaments. The problem is that sports activities are not given enough time since emphasis is placed on academics. When we have athletics this year, the following year we do MDD and we keep alternating like that" (Sports Master).

Furthermore, the Sports Master mused that some students are in school to develop their talents, since many young people have made it in life through sports. He lamented that last year (2022) he lost two talented boys in senior two to a private school because of sports; "They called to inform me they had left the school because our football team was struggling, yet they had got better prospects in another school. That is how important games and sports can be in some students' life" (Sports Master).

The teachers lauded the new lower secondary curriculum for giving a new life to co-curricular activities, since the curriculum allocates more time to out- of- class activities, beginning from 3 pm thus; "the remaining time of the school day is allocated to co-curricular activities like football, netball, MDD, debate, and other projects, and as we talk now, they are preparing for post primary sports competitions" (Teacher's FGD).

The teachers reported that students used to do interclass competition in debate and would compete with other schools once in a while.

Male students appreciated the school's effort to revitalize games and sports, much as they decried lack of motivation for players and their supporters, thus; "There used to be awards like cow and goats every time we lifted trophies, but these days, they only give us old trophies and the other day, we were given only Shs. 40,000 for winning a trophy" (FGD Boys). This observation seemed to contradict the headteacher's and sports master's optimism about the revitalization of co-curricular in the school. Indeed, observation revealed that the school has key structural and logistical impediments to effective provision of CCS. It was clear that Apple SS offers a very limited menu of co-curricular activities, as captured in the boys' complaint about the limited number of games available in the school.

"Emphasis is on football while other games like volleyball, basketball, athletics, chess are ignored yet, we are talented in different games. I admire schools, which offer a variety of games. My friend who loved basketball joined another school that offers the game. Secondly, there are very limited bursaries here for sports and this is why three students left and join other schools that can give them sports bursaries" (FGD Boys).

On their part, the girls were more concerned about debate and MDD. They regretted that much as debate builds students' confidence for public speaking and for mastering the English language, the school has no debate club. A case in point was a girl, whose teacher identified, as very talented in MDD. The teacher recruited the girl in his MDD group and currently the girl dances on weekend functions and in holidays. She is able to earn money which helps her to clear the school fees. Her disappointment is that the school only cares about football.

"As MDD students, we are frustrated due to lack of costumes and enough time to practice. This affects our performance, because it does not come out well. We are not given enough time to train and we end up performing before mastering our roles in a play or dance. Secondly, students speak broken English but we have no debating club; neither do we hold debate competitions with other schools like we used to do" (FGD Girls).

The male dropout intimated that he is talented in football and athletics and he really liked the games but he could not stay due to failure to secure a sports bursary.

"I was really good in football and sports and I had a lot of joy playing games during that time. If they gave me a bursary, I would have remained in the school. The trainings were only done towards competitions; that is why I was not able to showcase my talent in order to win a bursary that would have kept me in school" (Male dropout).

Generally, the challenges to effective management of CCS at Apple SS, given by different respondents include: Limited financial resources to fund co-curricular activities, lack of adequate equipment, facilities and infrastructure, negative attitudes among students and staff towards co-curricular activities, limited training time, teachers' heavy work load, and lack of incentives and support for students. The Sports Master had this to say;

"The funds government allocates to games and sports vote are inadequate and cannot cover all the activities we need to offer. Raising the money to take players to outside games is a problem, and sometimes we have to beg well-wishers for support to buy jerseys and refreshments for the players" (Sports Master).

The teachers echoed the same concern that much as the school supports games and sports, it does not have adequate funds to sustain strong football and netball teams and MDD at the same time; "games and sports cost a lot in terms of hiring trainers, motivating players, purchase costumes and all the other requirements" (FGD Teacher). As regards sports facilities, equipment, and space; the headteacher commented;
"We do have only one pitch for both football and netball, and we lack facilities for MDD. There are many games we want to introduce but we are limited by lack of facilities. For debate, we can do them in the classrooms, as a requirement for the new curriculum" (Headteacher).

Insufficient time allocated to games and sports and limited cooperation from teachers was raised by students, thus;

"We need to commit more time to academics that is given first priority in this school. We need to give sports enough time so as to develop these students' talents. Another problem is that many teachers see sports as a waste

of time and some even discourage us from participating in sports that we came here to study not to play football or netball" (FGD Boys).

In the same vein, the teachers observed that games and sports are not for everybody, and that not all students are talented or interested in sports. The teachers stressed that majority of the students come to school to study and should give priority to studies; "We only spot out those who have the talent and select the best ones for the training. The rest can try their luck with books because it is what they are here for" (FGD Teachers). This clearly shows that not all teachers are enthusiastic about co-curricular activities in the school. The results also shows that the headteachers' attempt to revitalize CCS notwithstanding, the situation on the ground seems to suggest otherwise.

Barriers to Student Retention at Apple Secondary School
Respondents were tasked to give the challenges to student retention or the major causes of student dropout at the school. All respondents acknowledged that student dropout is a problem in the school due to; failure to pay school charges, pregnancy, early marriages, need to make money, lack of parental support, peer pressure, COVID-19 lockdown, family background, substance abuse, bullying, long distance from home to school, and sexual harassment. The headteachers had this to say;

"Indeed, we have retention issues the school had around 200 students in senior one in 2019, but the number keeps on reducing and by the time they reach senior four, they are likely to be 150 students, much as there are many more who join in between. The issue of school fees and other essential requirements is the major cause of dropout. Some students have mental problems arising from not being loved at home, while some who indulge in sex have been found with sexually transmitted diseases" (Headteacher).

The headteacher 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. These are students who 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 Nyendo, (a city suburb), 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 for exams did not come to write the exams" (Headteacher).

Teachers attributed the dropout problem to 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 boda-bodas, chapatti selling, working on construction sites etc. Girls drop out to travel to the Middle East to become maids, some get married, sell tomatoes and many see education as a waste of their time" (FGD Teachers).

Some students take care of themselves and thus, they do a lot of hassling, running around selling small eats in the city to raise money for school fees.

"We actually have sizable section of students from slums who copy behaviors of their older brothers and sisters and some are forced into prostitution for financial reasons. 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. Many students come from single parent families and such parents are too busy to monitor their children. Some parents make students work 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" (FGD Girls).

The girls stressed the issue of parental monitoring of children as a serious issue. Some girls are renting rooms near the school but lie to their parents that they are living in the school dormitory. One girl was caught stealing from her landlord to buy food. "Single parenting is a big problem because 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). The 16-year-old female dropout singled out pregnancy as the reason for leaving the school. She lacked support at home and at school thus;

"I live with my mother and my father left us for another woman. My mother works in the market and she does not get enough money to look after us. The distance from home to school is very long, and I used to lack many things, that's why I got a boyfriend who would give me some money to buy things I needed and for transport to and from the school. But when I got pregnant my boyfriend ran away for fear of being taken to prison. I am now four months pregnant" (Female Dropout)

Management of Co-curricular Services vs. Student Retention

Co-curricular activities are linked to the goals of an institution by building and maintaining a community at school. They create a bond between students as they interact with peers with similar goals and interests. Co-curricular activities assist students to integrate socially in the academic institution environment. A report by State University (Tenhouse, 2008 cited by Chalageri & Yarriswami, 2018), stated that students are more likely to persist in college if they feel they have had rewarding encounters with a college's social and academic systems. As schools become culturally and socially diverse, students desire an environment where they can connect with others, feel comfortable, and accomplish personal goals.

This is consistent with Tinto's (1975) model of student departure that the greater the student integration in academic and social spheres of an education institution precipitated by effective management of co-curricular activities, the more likely are the students to stay up to completion of their studies. Co-curricular activities provide a place for students to come together, discuss ideas and issues, and accomplish common goals. Through these activities, students can feel at ease with one another, which enhances learning and development, which can positively impact student retention (Chalageri &Yarriswami, 2018 citing Tenhouse, 2008).

In a thematic review of extra and co-curricular interventions by UK Aid (2018), one of the study reviewed concludes that school-based, structured, extra-curricular activity participation, in contrast to participation in unstructured activities, is associated with a number of positive adolescent developmental outcomes, namely: higher academic performance and attainment; reduced rates of dropout; lower rates of substance use; less sexual activity among girls; better psychological adjustment, including higher self-esteem, less worry regarding the future, and reduced feelings of social isolation; and reduced rates of delinquent behavior, including criminal arrests and antisocial behavior (Feldman, & Matjasko, 2005 in UK Aid, 2018).

A review of external literature shows that while there is a relationship between students' participation in extra and co-curricular activities and student learning outcomes, the specifics can be unclear. Overall, extra and co-curricular activities tend to be associated with a range of positive outcomes for students, such as higher grades and test scores, decreased school dropout, and greater educational attainment. Evidence from the GEC portfolio indicates that where academic support is explicitly part of the extra and co-curricular intervention, girls' learning outcomes are likely to be better. At the same time, projects including interventions designed to both boost learning and build personal assets such as self-esteem, also demonstrate positive outcomes for girls (UK Aid, 2018).

Since co-curricular activities are an extension of the school curriculum, such as student involvement in associations and clubs, sports and games; all these activities promote the physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual formation and student leadership. Poh-Sun Seow & Gary Pan (2014) cited by Ahmad (2011) in a study about co-curricular activities and student leadership, found that students' participation in co-curricular activities affects the quality of leadership, involvement, fitness, recreational skills and the relationship between race/tribes and social skills. This improves academic performance and self-control as co-curricular activities train students to control themselves when they are under stress and foster a sense of desire to stay in school and complete their studies. This indeed improves student retention in schools.

In addition, Oke & Ichima (2020) point out that co-curricular activity helps in developing students' values, improve students' academic performance and acts as a great tool for nation building. It also helps in physical development, spiritual growth, social development and intellectual development of students. Co-curricular activities enrich students' learning experience beyond classroom activities (Robert 2018). They enable

students to develop essential attitudes for classroom learning and skills for their daily lives such as leadership training, thinking skills, adventure training and community service. Cocurricular activities help students to develop multidirectional relationships between academic and psychological outcome, including school achievement, educational aspiration, self-esteem, political attitudes, personality development and character formation (Gyanunlimited, 2012).

UK Aid (2018) asserts that adolescence is considered to be an important life stage for supporting young people's development. The review highlights the assumption in the literature that reducing the risk of early pregnancy reduces the chance of early drop-out from school for girls. Research also demonstrates the positive impact of proactive extra and co-curricular interventions on early pregnancy and on young people's sexual reproductive health knowledge and behaviour; using three large, nationally representative data sets, Zill et al7 reported that rates of teenage childbearing were lower when adolescents participated in 1 to 4 hours of extra-curricular activities per week. Besides, Daley & Leahy (2003) in Eulu, (2018) states that students who participated in co-curricular physical activities had a higher self-perception than those who were not participants.

Through co-curricular activities, children learn social traits such as cooperation, helping others, self-awareness, tolerance, sympathy, taking and sharing responsibility, commitment, loyalty, etc. Membership to clubs and leadership develop in students a sense of belonging and partnership, which motivates them to work harder in school. Such traits once inculcated are transferred to other areas as well, help to build perseverance in students, and act as a training ground for students to finish what they start. This, among other things, promotes student retention and academic success (Mekebo, 2019).

Darling Cadwell, and Smith (2005) in Oke and Ichima (2020) suggested that participation in athletics is related to the following positive academic related outcomes including higher grade point average, fewer disciplinary referrals, lower absentee rates, decrease in dropout rates, stronger commitment to the school, liking school better, being in academic tract in coursework, taking more demanding coursework, likelihood to attend college fulltime and graduate, holding higher aspirations or attending college, applying to more universities and colleges, and had better occupational status 15 years after high school.

The recreational value in co-curricular activities is very important for students to learn to use their leisure time in productive ways. The cultural growth occurs during the leisure time which leads to satisfaction. If co-curricular activities are not managed well, students may engage in anti-social activities and spend their time and energy in gossiping, gambling, wandering, and engaging in all sorts of social vices adolescents may be tempted to indulge in (Mekebo, 2019). It is thus, very crucial that students be given opportunity to participate in co-curricular activities to get opportunity to spend their free time in a fruitful way. Participation in co-curricular activities helps students make good choices, develop interest in what they are learning and develop creative ways to utilize their leisure time. This makes school inspiring, as students build and strengthen bonds with one another, which promotes student retention (Rahel & Tsadik, 2012).

In addition, schools provide a mini social setup and a training ground for the development of skills for good citizenship. Through co-curricular activities, students learn to take responsibility, perform their duties, cooperate and work together. Secondly, like self- government, co-curricular activities train students to play their roles and take responsibilities of all members of participating in a particular game or activity. Co-curricular activities help students to develop self-discipline, a sense of tolerance, healthy exchange of ideas, feeling of fellowship, and accepting defeat with grace. All these qualities combined, make students persevere in the face of adversity, which promotes retention (Chalageri &Yarriswami, 2018).

While at school, students are engaged in a lot of activities so that they can balance the workload. Academic activities are necessary for a student as they need to improve an all-around personality in order to develop as a successful person. Co-curricular activities provide students a best chance to develop communication, management and time management skills. It gives students opportunity to get the most out of their school experience in finding the right balance between academics and co-curricular activities, which motivates them to stay in school and succeed in their studies. Olson (2008) in Robert (2018) observes that participation in a school's music program for example, lessened students' feelings of alienation, promoted individual growth and provided a common bond between home and school. It can provide adolescents with a social network and a support system that is associated with their school (Darling, et.al (2005) in Rahel & Tsadik (2012).

These positive effects are not just from participating in athletics but also from joining other activities as well. According to Olson (2008), students in fine arts activities had significantly lower absentee rates than those students who did not participate at all. In this research it was also determined that drop outs were involved in fewer extra-curricular activities than those who stayed in school (Brown, 2008). Involvement in co-curricular activities is consistently and positively correlated with good school attendance and good attendance is often correlated with a higher-grade point average (Olson, 2008 in Robert, 2018).

Finally, a wide spectrum of outcomes has been attributed to modern-day sports and play. Critics have condemned sport for fostering excessive violence, an overemphasis on competition and winning, and the exploitation of individuals. Sport proponents have extolled the value of sport as a contributor to health, personal fulfillment, and community integration. It is important to look at how sport has the potential for producing positive outcomes in educational and noneducational settings for children and youth (Bagaya & Sekabembe, 2012).

VII. CONCLUSIONS

While the school claimed to take their co-curricular operations very seriously, it was clear that there are 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 suffers a multitude of student retention challenges driven by their inability to cope with the school's academic and non-academic environment. Thirdly, the way the school manages co-curricular services has implication for student retention at Apple SS.

VIII. RECOMMENDATIONS

First, the school should keep students' interests and needs in mind as they plan co-curricular activities to ensure that every student has ample opportunity to participate without fear or apprehension. Secondly, the school should put co-curricular activities on top of their resource mobilization agenda and make budgetary allocation for the smooth running of co-curricular programs. Thirdly, the school should look out for non-government donors and sponsors to supplement the government budgetary allocation for co-curricular activities.

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