

Influence of Economic Distress on Dropping out of School: A Case Study of Selected Secondary Schools in Nabbingo, Wakiso District, Uganda

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of economic distress on dropping out of school. a case study of selected secondary schools in Nabbingo Wakiso District-Uganda. The specific objectives of the study were to find out the cause of school dropout, to find out the impact of economic distress on school dropout and establish solutions to the school dropout problem in Nabbingo Wakiso District District, Uganda. The methods used for data collection were interviews for the parents and questionnaires for teachers and students involved in the study The findings were presented and interpreted in relation to the study objectives and research questions, while linking to the existing literature, results included demographic characteristics. Frequency and percentages. Basing on the findings. It was observed that economic distress negatively affected and caused school drop-outs in Nabbingo Wakiso district, developed some of solutions to the problems, effects and causes of drop out. The findings suggested some recommendations on areas of providing free education for all students, bursaries and also dealing with parents who force their children in early marriage.

Keywords: Economic distress; School dropout; Nabbingo Wakiso District; Education solutions; Early marriage prevention

INTRODUCTION

Globally economic hardship is a significant factor contributing to school dropout rates globally. Families facing financial challenges may struggle to afford basic necessities, including education-related expenses such as school fees, uniforms, and supplies[1, 2]. This can lead to children being pulled out of school to help support their families financially or due to the inability to meet educational costs. In many developing countries, economic hardship exacerbates the issue of school dropout. According to UNESCO, around million children and youth were out of school with economic distress being a major barrier to accessing education[3–5]. The lack of financial resources can force children to prioritize work over schooling, perpetuating a cycle of economic distress and limited educational opportunities. The World Bank estimated 1.29 billion people were living in absolute economic distress. Of these about 400 million people absolute economic distress hired in India and 173 million people in China. In USA, in 5 children live in economic distress. In terms of percentage of regional populations, sub-

Saharan African at 47% had the highest incident rate of absolute economic distress [6–8].

In Africa, economic challenges play a significant role in school dropout rates. The continent faces various socioeconomic issues that impact access to education, including economic distress, limited infrastructure, and inadequate funding for schools. According to the African Union Commission, approximately 30 million primary school-aged children in Africa are out of school, with economic distress cited as a key factor. Countries in Africa often struggle with high levels of inequality, with marginalized communities disproportionately affected by economic hardship. This can result in disparities in educational attainment, with children from poorer backgrounds more likely to drop out of school compared to their wealthier counterparts [9–12]. In East Africa, there is no exception to the impact of economic hardship on school dropout rates. Countries like Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Rwanda, and Burundi face similar challenges related to economic distress and limited resources for education. In East Africa, factors such as armed conflicts, natural disasters, and

political instability further compound the issue of economic hardship and its effects on dropout rates. For instance, in countries like Somalia and South Sudan, ongoing conflicts have disrupted educational systems and forced many children out of school. Economic instability resulting from these conflicts hinders families' ability to support their children's education financially [13, 14].

In Uganda specifically, economic hardship is a significant driver of school dropout rates. Despite efforts by the government to improve access to education through initiatives like Universal Primary Education (UPE), many children still face barriers due to economic distress. The cost of additional expenses such as uniforms, books, and transportation can be prohibitive for families living in economic distress. According to a report by the World Bank, Uganda has made progress in increasing primary school enrollment; however, retention rates remain low due to socioeconomic factors [15, 16].

The rapid influx of children into school following the removal of school fees and other levies suggest economic distress was the major reason why Uganda children were out of school. However, by 2008 about two and half years later the local media reported that over one million children had dropped out of school in both primary and secondary levels. Assuming that many of those who went back to school with the onset of UPE and USE were children of the poor who could not even afford school fees, basic needs or education. Here the question remains why would poor parents allow their children get rid of rumors from UPE? What has made such great number children dropout of school even though the government had provided the necessary equipment and materials for the education system required? It is possible that there are other factors that influence or contribute whether children remain in school or drop out of school. Despite the free education the numbers of children

who get enrolled in secondary schools from primary level and hence complete the four years course are also few in numbers as compared to those who complete A level education. There is more common in rural areas compared to urban areas [17].

The recent report identifies the imbalance on regions or areas to access the education that is divisions and districts and also the sex gender because of the historical, social, economic and environment factors. The report pointed out that is the imbalances was the particular problems among the agricultural communities and pastoral communities and therefore recommended that dropout rates were dominating and resolved to curb down the problem [18].

The research therefore seeks to find out the causes of economic distress in the selected schools Nabbingo Wakiso District, Uganda. Due to increased rate of student dropout, economic hardships pose a serious obstacle to educational success in Uganda. Many families are forced to put short term financial survival ahead of long-term educational ambitions due to economic problems like economic distress, unemployment and limited access to resources. Because of this, kids especially those from low-income families are more likely to leave school early in order to work and support their families. This circumstance prolongs the cycle of economic distress and underachievement by widening the already existing educational gaps and reducing opportunities for economic mobility. It is imperative to comprehend the precise mechanism by which economic hardship impacts school dropout rates and to pin point efficacious treatment in order to guarantee fair education opportunities and enhance long term social economic consequences for individuals and communities in Uganda. It's upon this background that this study will consider to establish the relationship between economic distress and dropping out of school in Nabbingo Wakiso district Uganda.

METHODOLOGY

Study area: Fig. 1. A map showing the selected secondary schools in Nabbingo Wakiso District-Uganda. Nabbingo is located in Wakiso district in

Nsangi sub-county in the Buganda region, The nearby cities are Kajansi, Kampala and Mpigi.

Table 1: showing the sampling procedure

S/N	Population group	Population	Sample size
1	Students	1500	160
2	Parents	300	100
3	Teachers	200	73
Total		2000	333

Source: present study (2024)

Research tools

The study utilized research-devised tools which were self-administered questionnaires to collect data. This was done in order to avoid losing some information and also saving time for data analysis and presentation. A set of questionnaires via students and teachers were given out for responses. The researcher also used unstructured interview while interviewing parents this also saved time and provided detailed information.

Data collection procedure

Questionnaire Method

One major research method for the study involved use of questionnaires. This study used both open-ended and closed-ended questionnaires to collect data. A questionnaire is a series of well-considered research questions that are determined following a thorough evaluation [19]. In order to support the achievement of the research objectives, the questionnaire tried to elicit particular responses from study participants. In order to allow respondents to provide thorough answers for a thorough analysis, the surveys included both closed- and open-ended questions. The organization of these was determined by the research objectives, which are outlined in the first chapter of this study. Questionnaires, mostly aimed at physics teachers and students.

Interview Method

In-person interviews between the researcher and study participants was also be used in this investigation. According to DeJonckheere and Caduff [19], formal interview guides at delicate and complicated topics. In order to allow the interviewee to express opinions, clarifications also were made. Managers are supposed to go through this type of data collecting process, and this helped to obtain firsthand information from the respondents who are to be chosen to supply the necessary data through one-on-one interview sessions.

Statistical treatment of data

The frequency and percentages distribution were used to determine or display data on causes of economic distress and school drop out of students. And the percentage was determined using the formular below

That is;

$$\text{Percentage} = \frac{F}{N} \times 100$$

Where;

F = is the frequency

N = Total number of respondents

100 = constant number of percentages.

Limitations of the study

Financial constraints for instance the amount of money fundraise for the study was not enough due to the demand for typing and printing of work, questionnaires, interview guides for respondents, transport to reach the study of study areas among others. Limited time factor was also a study limit that affected the research process due to few hours and delays given to collect data needed for analysis and presentation.

Ethical issues

The request for approval to conduct the study shall be accompanied by a letter of authorization from Kampala International University. The questionnaires, which were sent directly to study participants in their different locations, were collected one month after they are completed and returned, together with a covering letter outlining the goal of the research. Decisions about whether or not to utilize the data was made after it has been updated. The study is only for academic purposes, and the responders were reassured that the confidentiality and anonymity of the provided information are of utmost importance.

RESULTS

Table 2: Return rate of questionnaires

S/N	Respondents category	Sampled size	Number of questionnaires returned	Return percentage (%)
1	Teachers	73	73	100
2	Parents	100	100	100
3	Students	160	160	100
TOTAL		333	333	100

Source: field data 2024

The Table 2 above shows that all the questionnaires collected from all the intended sample of students and teachers were returned by both the students, parents and teachers therefore was a good representation as proposed. This shows that data was

Table 3: Age of Respondents

Age group	Frequency
15-20	150
20-25	97
25-30	43
30-35	23
35-40	15
40-45	5
Total	333

Source: present study 2024

The Table 3 shows the distribution of 333 individuals across various age groups. The majority (150) are aged 15-25, with 97 in the 20-25 range and 43 in the 25-30 range. The number decreases as age increases,

with 23 aged 30-35, 15 aged 35-40, and only 5 respondents in the 40-45 group. The data highlights a younger demographic, with fewer individuals in older age groups.

Table 4: Teachers working experience

Working experience (in years)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1-5	18	25
6-10	37	50
11-15	11	15
16-20	7	10
Above 20	0	0.0

Source: present study 2024

The above Table 4. shows that majority (50%) of the teachers that participated in this study had a working experience of 6-10 years while 25% of the teachers had a working experience of 1-5years, those who had

a working experience of 11-15 years were 15%, 10% of the teachers had an experience of 16-20years and none of them had a working experience greater than 20 years.

Table 5: Class of student respondents

S/N	Class	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Senior two(S.2)	40	25
2	Senior three(S.3)	48	30
3	Senior four (s.4)	64	40
4	Senior five(S.5)	8	5
Total		160	100

Table 5 shows the distribution of students across different classes. The highest percentage of students (40%) are in Senior Four (S.4). Senior Three (S.3)

follows with 30%, while Senior Two (S.2) has 25% of the students. Senior Five (S.5) has the fewest students, making up 5% of the total.

Table 6 Distribution of respondents on the causes of school dropout.

S\N	Causes of school dropout	Agree		Not sure		Disagree	
		freq	%	Freq	%	freq	%
1	Cultural beliefs	103	30.9	70	21	160	48
2	Economic distress	237	71.2	36	10.8	60	18
3	Bullying	100	30	189	56.8	44	13.2
4	Peer influence	90	27	54	16.2	153	45.9
5	School rules and regulations	50	15	50	15	203	61
6	Early marriages	193	58	65	19.5	75	22.5

Source; (present study 2024)

From the above Table 6 its evident majority (71.2%) believe that economic distress is the major cause of school dropout, 10.8% of them were not sure about the cause and 18% of the them disagreed with economic distress as the major cause of school dropout. However, there are other factors that led to school dropout such; cultural beliefs, bullying, peer influence, school rules and regulation and early marriages

Relationship between economic distress and school dropout

An inquiry of the relationship between economic hardship and school dropouts was conducted in this subsection, and respondents were asked to provide the following feedback:

A Strong relationship, B Weak relationship, and C No relationship.

Table 7 Degree of the relationship between economic distress and school dropout

S/N	Respondents	Frequency	Response		
			A	B	C
1	Students	160	150	5	5
2	Parents	100	95	5	0
3	Teachers	73	63	5	5
TOTAL		333	308(92%)	15(4.5%)	10(3%)

Source; present study 2024

From the above data, a large percentage of respondents (92%) believes there is a strong

relationship between economic distress and school dropout, 4.5% of the respondents suggested a weak

relationship between economic distress and school dropout and 3% of the respondents said there is no relationship between economic distress and school dropout.

Extent to which economic distress impacts school dropout

In this subsection, an investigation on how economic distress leads to school dropouts was carried out and

respondents were required to give their opinion as follows;

To what extent does economic distress impacts school dropout?

A. To a large extent, B. To a less extent, and C. Does not in any way affect school dropout?

Table 8: Extent to which economic distress impacts school dropout

S/N	Respondents	Frequency	Response		
			A	B	C
1	Students	160	145	10	5
2	Parents	100	90	10	0
3	Teachers	73	68	3	2
TOTAL		333	303(91%)	23(6.9%)	7(2.1%)

Source; present study 2024

From the above data, majority of the respondents (91%) stated that economic distress influences school dropout, 6.9% suggested that economic distress affect

school dropout but to a less extent while only 2.1% believe that economic distress has no effect on school dropout.

Table 9: Distribution of respondents on the solution to reduce school dropout in Nabbingo Wakiso district Uganda

S\N	School dropout could be reduced by	Agree		Not sure		Disagree	
		freq	%	freq	%	Freq	%
1	Massive sensitization	293	88%	40	12%	0	0
2	Support of universal education program	310	93%	0	0	23	7%
3	Provision of guidance and counselling services to students	214	64.3%	88	26.4%	102	30.6%
4	Support to economic distress reduction programs so as parents get jobs and pay for their children school fees	215	64.6%	47	14.1%	71	21.3%
5	Strict laws on raising of school fees	95	28.5%	71	21.3%	167	50.2%
6	School rules should support pregnant students	209	62.8%	76	22.9%	63	18.9%
7	Parent and community care responsibility	223	70%	47	14.2%	26	18.6%
8	Re-admitting of school dropout student programs should be put in place among secondary school	185	55.6%	45	13.5%	102	30.6%
9	Government should increase on supervision of school activities and students' attendance rates	181	54.4%	71	21.3%	81	24.3%
10	Fight against early marriages	285	85.6%	20	6%	28	8.4%

Source; (present study 2024)

The researcher thought of understanding the strategies that could be taken to reduce school dropout and the responses results shows that majority (88%) of them agreed that massive sensitization could be of help, (12%) amongst them were not sure and none disagreed with the strategy. The study furthermore revealed that almost all respondents agreed that support of universal

education program could be of importance however, 7% of the respondent's total disagreed with the strategy.

The researcher went further and found out that (64.3%) agreed that provision of Guidance and counseling services to students at schools is the best way while (26.4%) of them were not sure however, (30.6%) disagreed with the strategy. Another

strategy proposed by the researcher was Support to economic distress reduction programs so as parents get jobs and pay for their children school fees and the result shows that (64.6%) of the respondents agreed with the strategy while (14.1%) were not sure with the strategy however, (21.3%) of them disagreed. Furthermore, the study revealed that (28.5%) of the respondents agreed that enacting strict laws against higher increase of school fees, (21.3%) were not sure while (50.2%) disagreed with the strategy. On schools' rules supporting pregnant students 59 (59.6%) agreed with the strategy while 29 (29.3%) disagreed with the strategy. Furthermore, more than half 83 (84%) agreed that parents and community care

The return rate of 100% for all categories of respondents (parents, teachers and students) is highly commendable. This exceptional response rate provides confidence that the data collected accurately represents the target population, ensuring that the study's findings are reliable and valid. The full participation of all sampled respondents reflects a strong engagement with the study and suggests that the issues explored are relevant and of significant interest to the participants.

Economic distress significantly impacts school dropout rates through various interconnected mechanisms[20, 21]. Families facing financial hardship often struggle to meet basic needs, which can lead to increased stress and instability in the home environment. This instability may result in students having to take on part-time jobs to support their families, thereby reducing the time and energy they can devote to their studies. Additionally, economic distress can limit access to educational resources such as tutoring, extracurricular activities, and even basic school supplies, which are crucial for academic success. Schools in economically distressed areas may also suffer from inadequate funding, leading to larger class sizes, fewer qualified teachers, and diminished support services that could help at-risk students stay engaged. Furthermore, the psychological effects of economic distress such as feelings of hopelessness or low self-esteem can diminish a student's motivation to succeed academically[22, 23]. Research has shown that these factors create a cycle where economic hardship leads to lower educational attainment, which in turn perpetuates economic distress across generations. Thus, addressing economic distress is essential for improving educational outcomes and reducing dropout rates.

The causes of school dropout are multifaceted and can be attributed to a combination of academic, social, economic, and environmental factors. Academic challenges often play a significant role; students who struggle with subjects like math may develop a sense of helplessness that undermines their confidence and

responsibility is the best strategy however 16 (16%) disagreed with strategy.

On re-admitting of school dropout student (55.6%) agreed with the statement while (13.4%) of them were not sure however 30.6%) disagreed with the strategy. With respect to government increase on supervision of school activities and students' attendance rates (54.4%) agreed with the statement (21.3%) were not sure of the strategy while (24.3%) disagreed with the statement. Lastly, majority of the respondents (85.6%) agreed that fighting against early marriages is the best strategy to prevent school dropout among students in secondary schools, 6% of the respondents were not sure while 8.4 disagreed with the strategy.

DISCUSSION

leads to disengagement from school[24]. Social issues such as bullying or feeling isolated in the school environment can also contribute to a student's decision to leave. Economic factors, particularly for students from lower-income families, can force them to prioritize work over education to meet basic needs. Family dynamics, including parental involvement and support, significantly influence a student's educational journey; those from families with lower educational attainment or unstable home environments are at higher risk of dropping out [25, 26]. Additionally, institutional factors such as inadequate support systems within schools, lack of early intervention programs, and negative perceptions of teachers can exacerbate these issues. Ultimately, the interplay between these various elements creates an environment where students may feel compelled to leave school before completing their education.

Economic distress significantly influences school dropout rates, primarily through the mechanisms of financial strain, family instability, and reduced access to educational resources. When families experience economic hardship, such as job loss or low income, they often face increased stress and instability, which can lead to a lack of support for children's education. Financial constraints may force students to leave school to contribute to household income or care for siblings, thereby prioritizing immediate economic needs over long-term educational goals. Additionally, schools in economically distressed areas frequently suffer from inadequate funding, resulting in fewer resources, larger class sizes, and less experienced teachers[27]. This environment can diminish student engagement and motivation, further increasing the likelihood of dropping out. Furthermore, the psychological impact of economic distress-such as feelings of hopelessness or disengagement can also contribute to a student's decision to leave school prematurely. Overall, the interplay between economic distress and educational outcomes creates a cycle that perpetuates inequality

and limits opportunities for future generations [28, 29].

Addressing the issue of school dropout requires a multifaceted approach that targets various underlying causes. First, implementing mentorship programs can provide students with guidance and support from adults who can help them navigate academic and personal challenges. These mentors can foster a sense of belonging and motivate students to stay engaged in their education. Second, enhancing academic support services, such as tutoring and after-school programs, can assist struggling students in mastering difficult subjects, thereby increasing their confidence and likelihood of completing their education[30]. Third, creating a

This study investigated economic distress and school dropout in Nabbingo Wakiso District, Uganda. It was intended to investigate the causes of economic distress, and school drop outs in selected schools of Nabbingo Wakiso District, Uganda. This was in relation to the establishment of use by the government in 2008. The study specifically sought to find out the

causes of school dropout, the impact of economic distress on school dropout and the solutions to curb the drop out problem. The study established that economic distress, Poor influences, marriages, lack of fees, lack of requirements level of family income early marriage, lack of fees, lack of requirements level of family income among others cause drop out, forced marriage, poor conditions of living, drop a, malnutrition, are the effects of provision of bursaries, employing parents, strict laws on early marriages free education were established. In view of these findings the study concludes that research findings investigated the causes of drop effects/Impact of economic distress and solutions to curb the problem. This means that economic distress is as a factor causes /leads to drop out.

Recommendations

To effectively tackle the intertwined issues of economic distress and school dropout rates, a multifaceted approach is essential. 1. Financial Support Programs: Implementing targeted financial assistance programs for low-income families can alleviate immediate economic pressures, allowing parents to prioritize their children's education

more inclusive school environment that respects diverse backgrounds and learning styles can help all students feel valued and understood, reducing feelings of alienation that often lead to dropping out. Fourth, establishing strong parental engagement initiatives encourages families to take an active role in their children's education, which has been shown to improve student performance and retention rates. Lastly, providing financial assistance or incentives, such as scholarships or stipends for low-income families, can alleviate economic pressures that may force students to leave school prematurely. By addressing these areas comprehensively, schools can significantly reduce dropout rates and promote higher levels of educational attainment.

CONCLUSIONS

without the burden of financial instability. 2. Community Engagement Initiatives: Schools should foster partnerships with local businesses and community organizations to create mentorship programs that provide students with role models and career guidance, enhancing their motivation to stay in school. 3. Access to Mental Health Services: Providing accessible mental health resources within schools can help address emotional and psychological barriers that may lead to dropout, ensuring students receive the support they need to cope with stressors related to both economic hardship and academic pressure. 4. Flexible Learning Options: Offering flexible schooling options such as online classes or evening sessions can accommodate students who may need to work during traditional school hours, thus reducing dropout rates among those balancing education with employment responsibilities. 5. Early Intervention Programs: Identifying at-risk students early through data analysis and providing tailored interventions such as tutoring or counseling can significantly improve retention rates by addressing potential issues before they escalate into dropouts. 6. Policy Advocacy for Education Funding: Advocating for increased funding for public education, particularly in economically disadvantaged areas, ensures that schools have the necessary resources to provide quality education, extracurricular activities, and support services that keep students engaged and enrolled.

ABBREVIATIONS

USA:	United States of America
UPE	Universal Primary Education
MOE	Ministry of Education
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
CPI	Consumer Price Index
CDC	Centers for Disease Control
UNESCO	United Nations Scientific and Cultural Organization
IPCC	Intergovernmental panel on climate change
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation

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