



Factors Influencing Student retention in East Kenya Union Conference SDA Secondary Schools in East Kenya: An Empirical Study

Shadrack Kamundi

kamushed@yahoo.com

University of Eastern Africa, Baraton, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Student retention is a significant issue in secondary education, especially in faith-based institutions that prioritize holistic development. This study evaluated student retention in secondary schools affiliated with the SDA Church in EKUC. The study utilized a concurrent mixed methods research design and employed an exploratory strategy through a descriptive survey. The study's subjects comprised students, principals, Conferences/Field Education Directors, and chairpersons of the Board of Management (BoM). The study employed a contemporaneous mixed methods research approach, grounded in expectation theory of motivation. The target population comprised the twenty Seventh-day Adventist Church-operated secondary schools in EKUC. The unit of analysis comprised eleven secondary school principals, five education directors, eleven chairpersons of the school boards of management, and 335 pupils. The cluster sampling technique was employed to obtain the samples. The target demographic was categorized into five clusters: principals, students, education directors, and board chairpersons. Samples were collected from each of these clusters. The data gathering instruments employed were questionnaires administered to students. Interview schedules were arranged for education directors, school Board of Management chairpersons, and principals for the purpose of triangulation. An observation schedule was established. This focused on the school infrastructure and all activities occurring within the institution. The educational facilities and the conduct of teachers within the school were also documented here. The additional instrument employed was the document analysis tool utilized to gather data over a span of 8 years. Three hundred thirty-five students were mandated to complete the supplied questionnaire, while eleven principals, five educational directors, and eleven Board of Management chairpersons had interviews. The documentary analysis method was employed to obtain information on KCSE performance throughout the same eight-year period. The acquired data was evaluated utilizing descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations. An study of documents regarding teacher retention was conducted. Content analysis was conducted on the responses from interviews and open-ended questions. The statistics indicate a significant number of pupils in Form 2 and 3 who either withdrew or enrolled during the year. Students were substituted as they withdrew in certain years. In conclusion, the annual turnover rates were elevated. This may impact the learning processes and pupils' academic achievement. The report advocates for schools to implement ways to ensure the availability of learning facilities for pupils. Students ought to be encouraged to persist in their education. Bursaries and sponsorships for students from disadvantaged families should be provided. Spiritual mentoring, employment initiatives, and adaptable fee payment structures should be established to assist children from disadvantaged backgrounds in continuing their education.

Key words: East Kenya Union Conference (EKUC), Secondary Schools, Seventh-day Adventist Church, Student Retention;

I. INTRODUCTION

Schools across the world continue to face persistent challenges related to low student retention. Retaining all students in school is often difficult due to academic barriers, inappropriate academic pathways, or missed foundational learning steps that compromise progression (Ahmed Abdulla, 2024). Student retention refers to the ability of learners to remain enrolled in school and successfully complete an academic programme, which is fostered through self-motivation, institutional support, and guidance interventions such as counseling (Ross & McNamara, 2025). High school retention benefits not only students, by preparing them for further studies and future opportunities, but also schools, through continued fee payments and institutional stability (Deborah et al., 2014). Conversely, high dropout rates reflect a school's inability to meet learners' needs, resulting in both educational and financial losses.

The success of any education system is closely linked to its ability to retain students (Furger, 2008). For example, in California, alarming dropout rates were attributed to socioeconomic challenges, boredom, and peer pressure. Lau (2003) further posited that student retention is shaped by institutional experiences, both formal and informal; negative interactions and experiences significantly increase the likelihood of withdrawal. Orientation programs for new students and supportive school environments are vital in fostering student persistence.

Farrell (2009) argued that student departure should not be solely attributed to personal failure; rather, schools must take responsibility by ensuring effective structures and systems to support students. Schools exist to benefit students, not the other way around, and should not admit learners merely for institutional gain. In South Africa, Subotzky and Prinsloo (2011) emphasized the importance of early detection of attrition risks and timely intervention, noting that barriers such as domestic responsibilities, psychological stress, and economic hardship are leading contributors to low retention.

In Kenya, student retention is recognized as a measure of internal school efficiency. Factors such as collaborative learning, positive student-teacher interactions, and supportive environments enhance persistence, while socioeconomic challenges, child labor, and family responsibilities contribute to dropout rates (Gituriandu, 2010). Dropouts suffer long-term disadvantages, including lower income, poorer health, and greater risk of incarceration, becoming a burden to their families and society.

Despite widespread concern among parents, administrators, and stakeholders regarding low retention (Acom, 2010), limited research has focused on the unique context of private religious schools, such as those operated by the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church (Omar, 2004). Globally, SDA schools are not immune to retention challenges. In the United States, financial constraints have been identified as a major factor in student attrition, with calls for increased funding and enrollment as potential solutions (Thayer, 2008). In Kenya, particularly within the East Kenya Union Conference (EKUC), both student and teacher attrition remain persistent concerns, affecting school stability and effectiveness (EKUC Education Statistics, 2015).

Drawing from professional experience as an education director in the Central Kenya Conference (2005–2015), it has been observed that retention challenges significantly impact Adventist secondary schools, yet there remains a lack of empirical evidence addressing the underlying causes. Thus, despite administrative records indicating declining retention trends in EKUC, the factors contributing to this issue are poorly understood and interventions often lack effectiveness.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Low student retention remains a persistent challenge in both developed and developing countries (World Bank, 2004), and is particularly evident in SDA Church schools within EKUC (EKUC Education Statistics, 2015). Low retention undermines school budgeting, disrupts academic performance, and compromises overall learning efficiency as new students may struggle to adapt and keep pace. While administrative data points to a declining trend in retention, the underlying causes are not well documented or addressed. Without empirical evidence, interventions may be ineffective or misdirected. This study therefore seeks to examine the factors influencing student retention in SDA secondary schools within EKUC and to propose strategies that can enhance retention and improve educational outcomes.

1.2 Research Questions

- (i) What is the retention trend of students in secondary schools of EKUC from the year 2008 to 2015?
- (ii) To what extent do students intend to remain in school?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored on the Expectancy Theory of Motivation, originally advanced by Victor Vroom in 1964 (Vroom, 1964) and later discussed by scholars such as Tinto (2007). The theory posits that individuals are motivated to act in a particular way based on their expectations that their efforts will lead to desired outcomes and rewards.

Expectancy theory explains motivation as a cognitive process in which individuals assess the relationship between effort, performance, and outcomes. Demetriou (2011) further explains that effort leads to performance, and performance leads to valued outcomes. When individuals believe that increased effort will result in improved performance and desirable rewards, they are more likely to be motivated to persist in a given activity.

In the context of education, students are expected to invest effort in their studies with the anticipation that good academic performance, particularly in examinations such as the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE), will enable them to access higher education and better employment opportunities. This expectation of future success motivates learners to remain in school and complete their studies. Continuous assessment and academic feedback further reinforce this motivation by helping students track progress and improve performance over time.

Similarly, the theory can be applied to explain student retention. Students are more likely to remain in school when they perceive clear benefits associated with completing their education, such as academic success, career



opportunities, and improved life prospects. Conversely, when these expected outcomes are unclear or perceived as unattainable, students may become disengaged and more likely to drop out.

The Expectancy Theory is therefore relevant to this study as it provides a framework for understanding how students' perceptions of effort, performance, and rewards influence their decision to persist in or withdraw from school.

2.2 Students in School

According to Wild and Ebbers (2002), student retention is fundamental because a school cannot exist without students. While student enrolment is often easier to achieve, retaining learners until program completion remains a major challenge. Once enrolled, students require structured support systems to ensure they achieve the intended educational outcomes within the expected timeframe. Since students reside in their homes rather than in school, institutional policies must focus on guiding and supporting them throughout their academic journey. School leadership should therefore establish effective monitoring systems for both academic performance and student behaviour, coupled with timely interventions where challenges arise. Such measures help sustain student engagement, strengthen commitment, and increase the likelihood of learners completing their education successfully.

In their studies Loeb, Kalogrides, and Beteille (2011) stated that students have goals which they work toward. For them to remain in course, they need to be motivated with things like sports, as they study. At the same time, they need to anticipate better paying jobs after school. Such students value and will do everything possible to remain. However, there are those who fail to maintain the academic performance and are unable to cope with the school rules. Such are likely to drop out before completing a program. Other underlying factors for low retention of students are as a result of social environment. Reacting on the same, Deborah et al. (2014) argued that student retention benefited individuals by achieving certificates at the end of a school program and prepares them for college/university admission.

Raisman (2009) looked at a school in a business perspective, and says that to retain students in school is to retain school budgets. Losing a student equals losing a customer, which equals losing a budget. This means, the bigger the school enrolment the bigger the school budget. The bigger the budget the more development and the bigger the attraction for more students. Therefore, students are the backbone for any school to succeed. Deborah et al. (2014) agreed with this and say that schools, whether private or public, benefit in one way or another, from the school fees paid by students.

Contributing on the same, Swail (2006), discovered, that losing a student was a loss to the institution. Every student lost was a deficit to the school. It was also a loss to the students who pay school fees and drop out before making use of the money. The other importance of students remaining in school, through the secondary level, college and university is that they stand high chances of better pay than their counterparts who drop out before graduating. In fact, those who graduate with a degree earn 70% more than those who drop out on the way. The other advantage is that student retention increases human capital.

Affirming on the importance of students in a school, Bennell (2004) advised that best ways should be sought to boost student retention as much as possible. Among the ways is to ensure that schools are available within villages to reduce distances. Cases have been reported of students walking as many as 7 to 8 Kilometers to the nearest school. The option should be to have boarding schools, if building new schools in the village becomes impossible. The other alternative is to encourage the opening of private schools. Public schools sometimes discourage student retention due to poor infrastructure, crowded class rooms, crowded buildings with no ventilation and without electricity, as well as having absent teachers, who come to school whenever they feel like.

2.3 Student Retention

In order to retain students in school, there are several factors to look into. Umi (2011) identified academic performance as one way which keeps students in school. In fact, it is one of the major factors. Academic success is among the predictors for student persistence until he/she completes the academic program. It is therefore, important to mind the student's ability prior to admission, through an interview or from records of previous performance. At the same time students, once enrolled they should be oriented to fit into a culture necessary to succeed in education, despite the barriers to success, which naturally exists in a school setting. Students cannot learn well or stay in a school where academic barriers are eminent.

According to Coley, Coley and Holmes (2009) students should not be left alone to find their own levels in academic pursuit. Their success is not about swim or sink. They should be supported by teachers and parents in order to achieve their academic goals. In USA, much effort is put on how to retain students but there is little success nationally. In the year 2013, 1.5 million students joined university education but only 39% graduated in four years while 59% graduated after six years.

In support of this Tinto (2007) stated that due to increase in student attrition and turnover, their retention has become a huge business not only for researchers, but for educators as well as entrepreneurs. This is because without students there can be no school. As a result, many schools opt to admit qualified students because the unqualified ones are more prone to leave than high academic achievers. The other reason for student retention is the ability to assimilate

and integrate into the institution. Every school should eliminate social retention barriers which hinder students from enrolling and staying. Instead, they should make their students have cultural connections. These should be through social cultural groups. If these cultural groups reflect their cultures of origin, chances of student retention are very high, especially when they are allowed to carry their identity into the learning institutions. Such students are more likely to persist until the completion of a school program.

The discoveries of Law (2014), stated that many schools spend a lot of time recruiting students, but do nothing on how to retain them. The effort to recruit new students into the system should match the effort for their retention. Parents take their children to school to benefit from the studies. They expect dividends at the end of an academic program. They should, therefore, be involved in the learning affairs of the children. There should be parents visiting days, possibly on termly basis or parents' week.

The students attend school to finish a program, earn a certificate and proceed to the next level of education. Once they earn degrees, after school, their lives get changed and they get better earnings. This means education enhances quality of life and increases employment. With this in mind, every effort should be put to ensure all the students who enroll in a program remain in school until the completion of the same. Schools should have retention programs where students are oriented to persist until they reap the benefits of being in school. Among the retention programs is the professional peer tutors, making learning centers to be more welcoming and the involvement of the staff members. Face to face orientation is said to work better, once the needy students have been identified. Such should be assigned advisors who have intensive advising sessions before the face to face interactions (Gargia and Thornton 2014).

The further findings of Law (2014), indicated that the face to face advising sessions prepared the students against any possibility of dropping out. This becomes successful up to 92%. In fact, 90% of the students who go through the orientation confess that they get helped by the face to face program and become prepared to remain in school.

Parental involvement was identified by Furger (2008) as one way to enhance student retention. Those who are keen in checking their children's progress make them remain in school. The children whose parents do not visit the school frequently and do not check on their progress are more vulnerable to dropping out before the completion of a program. At the same time, frequent parental visit enables the students to perform better in class. In the United States, schools have come up with programs to enhance retention where parents are involved. These are referred to as *in-school family of sorts*. Their main objective is to advise students to remain. This is normally done by attaching an adult who knows them well to spearhead the effort of retention. Among the emphasis is to make learning interesting. Boredom is discouraged, since it contributes to 47% of student dropping out. Much should be done to identify early indicators of dropping out or transferring.

In support of this, Hoerr (2005) articulated that children benefit more in their studies when their parents are involved in the learning institution. Schools should, therefore, create an environment where parents are welcome to share in the affairs of their children's learning. However, not all parents are active in following up on their children's education. Such require parent-teacher conference to encourage them in the school involvement and teach them the importance of being concerned in the school. There are other parents who only visit school only when teachers call them, after something big has occurred. On the contrary some parents are found at the classroom doors on daily basis. There are other parents who make appointment with teachers yet forget to attend. Such, care less about the education of their children. Parental involvement is so important because it creates a good relationship between home and school, as well as making the child connect home and school.

Contributing to student retention, Saret (2016) stated that students do not begin studies to drop, however, many do. The factors which make them drop should be identified and addressed if learning is to be meaningful and if students are to reap the fruits of education. There is a need to understand the retention theory to reduce student wastage. Tinto's theory on student retention serves a great deal. It concerns the family background, skills, abilities and prior education. The theory also stresses the need to ensure home experience connects academically and socially with the school. While academic reasons contribute only 20 - 30% of retention, other reasons, like isolation and lack of a feeling to belong contributes up to 70-80%.

The National Center for Education Statistics (2003), elaborated that there were other reasons for leaving the school as stated: family problems, friends being in different schools, lack of family encouragement and single parent status. Others include: emotional problems like drug abuse, lack of institutional involvement, lack of teachers' interaction, financial challenges, transportation issues and low academic ability.

Saret (2016), on the contrary, advised that in order for the school to fight the challenges of retention, it should have a mechanism in place to identify early signs of dropping out of school and deal with them before the damage is caused. Prevention is better than cure. These early signs include: uncompleted assignments, no class participation, no taking notes, doing poorly in assignments, not attentive, absenteeism, as well as leaving the school earlier before the scheduled departure time.

Tinto (2007) wonders why student retention is one of the most studied area in education, yet the results have been sophisticated. Why some students leave, while others persist to the completion of the program still remains a

dilemma. Initially dropping out of school was wholly blamed on students that they were less able, lacked self-motivation and that they were less willing to enjoy the benefits of education. Students failed not the institution. Today, however, it could no longer be a guess work. Student retention is a big business with consulting firms in place to educate schools on the best ways on how to retain their students.

It is one thing to know the factors affecting student retention, argues Tinto (2007), and another thing to know how to make them stay. Student dropping out of school is not a reflection of them staying. Why they leave without completion does not tell us why they stay. Neither does it tell us the action plan to make them stay. All efforts should be made to ensure students remain in school, as long as learning is ongoing. Teachers and others who are concerned about the education should be fully committed to ensure there is retention of students at all levels and share with the students past stories of successful students. Mentors should give their own examples on how they persisted and became who they are. Students should be carefully listened to and given all the attention that they require so that they can open up in sharing the possible challenges which make them leave school before completing.

The advice from K-12 (2016) is that the entire school organization contributes to the retention of the students. This includes even the blackboard layout. The holistic approach to learning also enhances student retention. Once students are fully engaged throughout the entire school program, they are likely to bond with the school and have high chances to stay, because a student engaged is a student retained. In fact, students should be engaged throughout the day, seven days in a week. Since retaining students is a complex challenge, it requires serious coordination in a data based scientific manner. Therefore, schools should be highly committed to the factors which enhance retention. There should be retention committees fully engaged in retention matters. These are expected to always have retention reports submitted to the school administration daily, especially the reports of the at-risk students.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a concurrent mixed methods research design in which both quantitative and qualitative data were collected simultaneously and integrated during analysis. Quantitative data were obtained using structured questionnaires, while qualitative data were gathered through interviews, observations, and document analysis to provide a comprehensive understanding of student retention.

The target population comprised 20 Seventh-day Adventist Church–maintained secondary schools within the East Kenya Union Conference (EKUC). The units of analysis included 11 secondary school principals, 5 education directors, 11 Board of Management (BOM) chairpersons, and 335 students. These groups were selected because principals influence school administration, education directors are involved in policy formulation, BOM chairpersons oversee governance, and students are the primary beneficiaries of educational services. The schools were targeted due to persistent challenges related to student retention and transfers.

Cluster sampling technique was used to select the study sample by grouping respondents into four clusters: principals, students, education directors, and BOM chairpersons. From each cluster, respondents were selected to ensure representation across all key stakeholder groups.

Data collection instruments included student questionnaires and interview schedules for principals, education directors, and BOM chairpersons. In addition, observation schedules were used to assess school infrastructure, learning facilities, and general school environment, while document analysis was conducted to review records on student retention and KCSE performance over an eight-year period. For triangulation purposes, a subset of students (approximately 10 per school) was also interviewed.

Data collection involved administering questionnaires to all 335 students, while interviews were conducted with all 11 principals, 5 education directors, and 11 BOM chairpersons. Principals were interviewed during school visits after questionnaire administration. Education directors and BOM chairpersons were interviewed either face-to-face or via telephone, depending on accessibility. Observations were made during school visits to capture real-time institutional practices and learning conditions.

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations. Qualitative data from interviews and open-ended responses were analyzed using content analysis to identify emerging themes, while document analysis was used to examine trends in student retention and academic performance over the eight-year period.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Response Rate

The researcher issued 335 questionnaires to students. All of these questionnaires were returned. This made a response rate of 100% which was considered sufficient for analysis.

4.2 Demographic Profile of Students

The majority of students were girls (53.7%). The rest, boys, were 46.7%. Either sex was well represented in the study. This means that sex bias could be easily avoided in the findings obtained.

All the students (100%) were purposively selected from Form Two Class. This was due to the fact that by the time a student is in Form Two, he or she has a firm understanding of issues related to the school. Such a student can thus adequately respond to the subject under investigation. It is also in this class that students are to change schools before they select the subjects they will undertake in Form Three and Four.

Table 1
Sex of Students

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Female	180	53.7
Male	155	46.3
Total	335	100

The findings obtained show that most of the respondents were boarders (94.3%). This shows that they were able to respond adequately to the subject under investigation since they were mostly at school and could observe all what was happening at the school.

Table 2
Boarding Status

Boarding Status	Frequency	Percent
Boarder	316	94.3
Day scholar	19	5.7
Total	335	100

The majority of the respondents (74.9%) had been enrolled in 2015, a year before this study. They had thus been in the school long enough to understand the subject under investigation. Only a few joined the school in Form 2 (25.1%).

Table 3
Year of Joining the School

The year they joined the school	Frequency	Percent
2015	251	74.9
2016	84	25.1
Total	335	100

One of the students did not respond to the question on KCPE performance (missing 1). As shown in Table 11, the majority of the respondents had above average KCPE scores (more than 251). As such, it can be deduced that the students had adequate qualifications to undertake secondary education and could easily make decisions to remain in school, if their needs were met.

Table 4
KCPE Score

KCPE Score	Frequency	Percent
below 250	49	14.6
Between 250-300	110	32.8
Between 300 – 350	105	31.3
Between 350 – 400	62	18.5
400 and above	8	2.4
Missing	1	0.3
Total	335	100

4.3 Descriptive Statistics on Students' Intention to Remain

The students tended to agree that they were to remain in their current schools until they sat for KCSE. In addition, some were not thinking of transferring to any other school even though an opportunity to do so arose. They knew that remaining in the church schools made them better people.

However, majority of respondents could not encourage their siblings and neighbors to join the school (mean of 2.49). The dilemma remained on how students could remain in the school yet they would not encourage others to join them. The possibility is that the SDA schools suffered both low retention and low enrolment because students who study



in them discourage others from joining. This is evidenced by the fact that Form 2 students were 30 per school, on average, a total of 335, instead of 990 Form 2 students within the schools under investigation.

Table 5
Descriptive Statistics on Students’ Intention to Remain

Intention to remain	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Dev.
I plan to remain in this school until I sit for KCSE	1	4	3.08	1.102
I love this school that I am not thinking of transferring to another one	1	4	2.87	1.126
I will not transfer to another school even though an opportunity to do so arises	1	4	2.51	1.204
I am decided to remain in this school to be a better person	1	4	3.26	1.032
I can encourage my siblings and neighbors to join this school	1	4	2.49	1.331
I will miss this school once am through with my studies	1	4	2.99	1.197
This is my best school since when I started learning	1	4	2.54	1.298
Average	1	4	2.82	0.875

N = 335

During the observation schedule, the researcher discovered that each school had enough empty classrooms (one extra for every class from 1 to 4) to accommodate 90 students, each with a capacity of 45 students per classroom. Each school, lacked sixty students in every Form 2 class. On average, the SDA schools in EKUC operated at only 33.83% of the required capacity.

Owing to the fact that students were not willing to recommend others to join their school, could mean that the students were forcing themselves to remain in the Adventist schools. What then could be the reason behind it? This could mean that although they had decided to remain, there were some challenges which needed to be rectified. At the same time, there was a possibility that although they felt uncomfortable in staying in the schools they could have remained due to either pressure from parents or because they had no alternative but to continue in the schools. They only tended to agree instead of agreeing fully to the given statements.

The students went on to point out that they would miss their school once they were through with their studies. This looks like the turn of events, but could mean they were happy to be in one another’s company. When asked, during the interview schedule why they would miss the school after completion, yet they never wanted others to join them, some respondents said that *they would only miss the company of those that they suffered together*.

Lastly, the students pointed out (though not fully) that their current schools were the best since when they started learning. This could be that they were comparing them with the primary schools, which they had left a few years before. Some primary schools, especially the public ones, sometimes had pathetic infrastructure, among other shortcomings. They exhibited no likelihood to leave their current schools. This could be as a result of several reasons, either because they never qualified for other schools or due to religious attachments. On the interview for triangulation, *students confirmed that they rated these schools as best, because of religious satisfaction, as confirmed by Omar (2004)*.

4.4 Students’ Turnover and Attrition (2008 – 2015)

The researcher assessed the turnover and attrition trends among students in nine schools for a period of 8 years (2008-2015). This was through secondary data collected from each of these schools. To this, the number of students in Form 2 and 3 who dropped within the year and those who joined were assessed. This is shown in Figure 1 to 3.

The findings obtained in figure 1 show that students were being replaced as they dropped out in some of the years (2009, 2010, 2011, 2012 & 2014). This shows high turnover rates. There were, however, incidences of attrition (students leaving without being replaced) in 2008, 2013 and 2015. In these three years, the number of students who left was more than those who joined the school. Generally, the average number of students who dropped (48) was less than those who joined the schools (61).

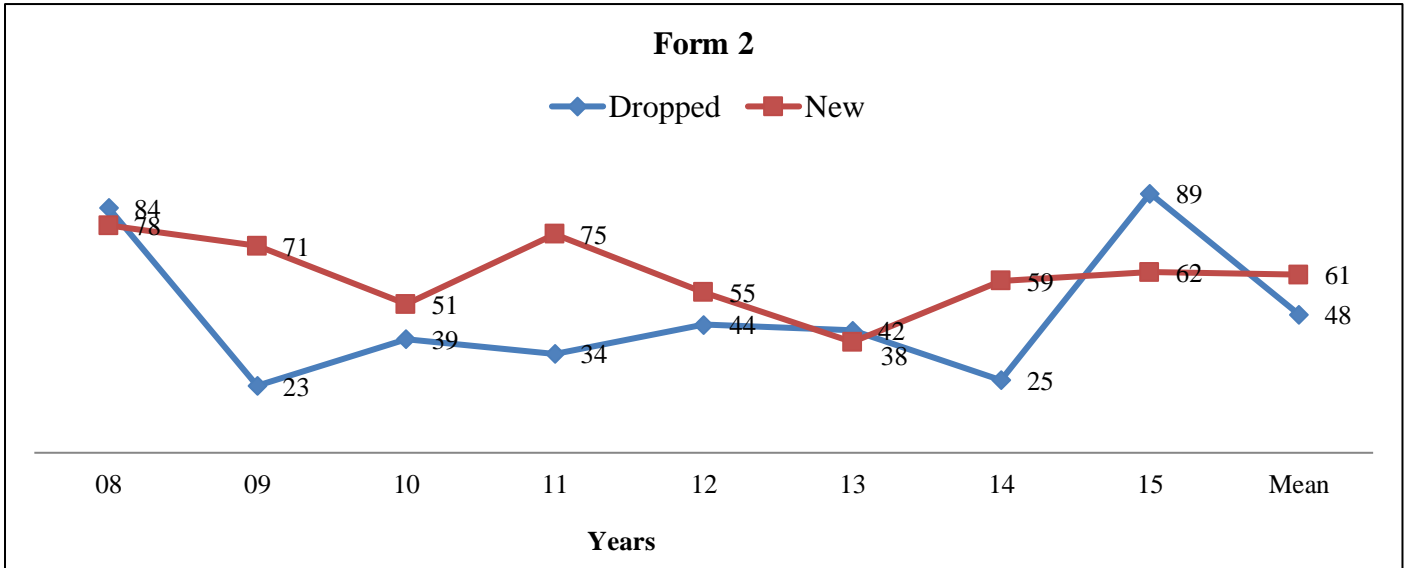


Figure 1
Turnover and Attrition among Form Two Students

Students who dropped in Form 3 within the year were quickly replaced except in 2013. In that year, 106 students dropped but only 89 joined. There was a high turnover in the schools, as shown by the average number of students who dropped out against those who joined, 60 and 94 respectively. These findings show that there was more turnover in Form 3 than in Form 2. This shows that students were more settled in Form 2 than in Form 3. This can be attributed to the fact that students in Form 2 were trying to make a decision whether to leave or remain in the schools. The high levels of turnover in Form 3 could be explained by the fact that students in the class were looking for better schools to prepare for KCSE. This explains the large number of those leaving and those coming into the school.

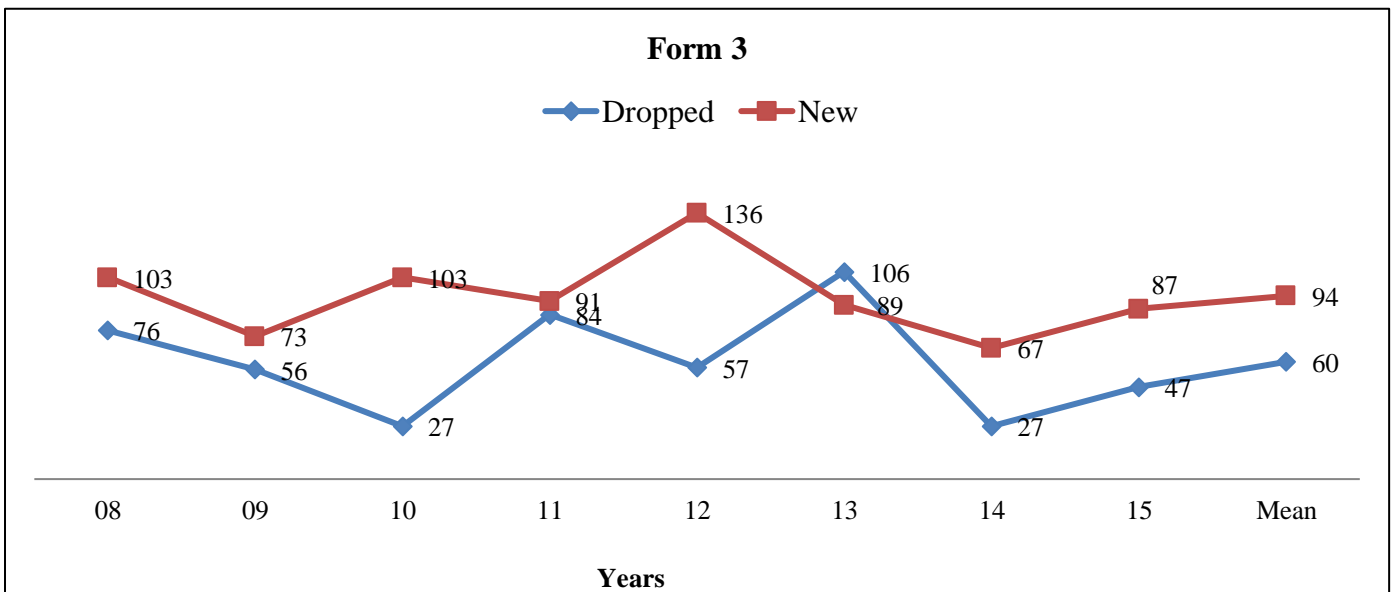


Figure 2
Turnover and Attrition among Form Three Students

As shown in Figure 3, the number of candidates in 9 schools (who responded) between 2008 and 2015 kept on fluctuating. It ranged between 44 and 60. Since 2012, the number of candidates has been on the decline (from 56 in 2012 to 44 in 2015). Although mean scores improved most of the time and did not go below the score of 3.85 recorded at the beginning of 2008, most of this may not be strong indication that the schools' performance kept on increasing



since less number of candidates could increase the central tendency (mean) of scores. These findings show that the schools faced serious challenges with students’ retention, especially in the final year of school.

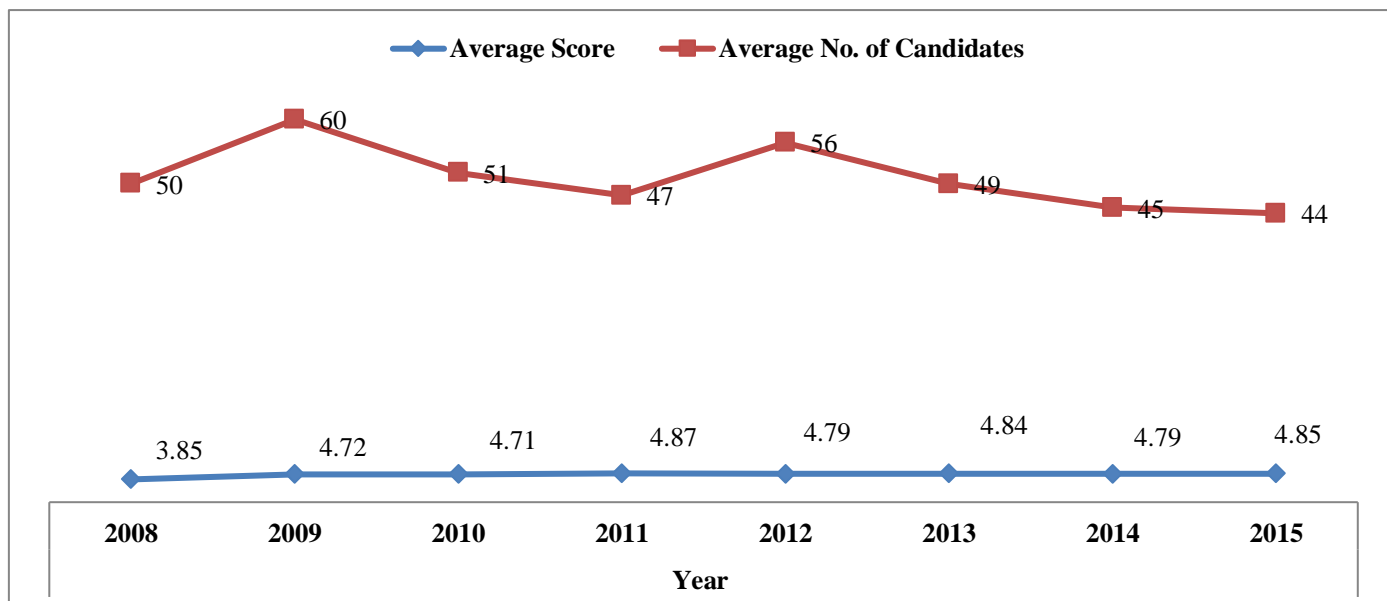


Figure 3
Candidates and Performance in KCSE in 9 schools (2008-2015)

IV: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Conclusions

This study's findings offer substantial insights regarding student retention in secondary schools managed by the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church in the East Kenya Union Conference (EKUC). The data indicated that these schools encounter significant student turnover, especially in Forms 2 and 3, with a substantial number of students withdrawing annually, while others are enrolled to occupy the vacancies. Despite the replacement of certain students upon their departure, elevated annual turnover rates persisted as a consistent characteristic. This volatility is troubling, since it disturbs the continuity of the learning process and challenges the academic achievement of individual students and the schools collectively.

The results indicate that some students are compelled to remain due to factors such as religious connection, personal resolve, or a lack of alternatives, while others persist in the schools due to external pressures or the absence of superior possibilities. Although many students want to complete their studies at these institutions, they exhibit a reluctance to promote the schools to classmates or family members, suggesting probable discontent or unfulfilled needs. The variation in student enrollment, particularly during test years, along with the decrease in candidate numbers since 2012, emphasizes the seriousness of the retention issue. These findings highlight the necessity for a holistic strategy to tackle the elements leading to student attrition and turnover in SDA secondary schools, acknowledging the extensive consequences for institutional efficacy, resource allocation, and student results.

4.2 Recommendations

This study presents various recommendations aimed at enhancing student retention in SDA secondary schools within the East Kenya Union Conference. Firstly, it is imperative that schools prioritize the provision and upkeep of sufficient instructional facilities. Providing students with access to adequately equipped classrooms, libraries, and laboratories significantly improves their academic experience and motivation to persist in their education. Furthermore, educational institutions ought to prioritize student retention by implementing mentorship programs, peer support groups, and consistent counseling services. Such programs can mitigate academic and personal problems, enhancing students' sense of belonging and perseverance.

Financial obstacles were recognized as a major factor in student attrition; hence, educational institutions are urged to enhance access to scholarships and sponsorships for students from underprivileged families. This may entail



cooperation with ecclesiastical organizations, alumni associations, and community stakeholders to procure the requisite resources.

Considering the spiritual essence of SDA schools, it is imperative to preserve a robust values-driven atmosphere. Providing spiritual direction, vocational programs, and character development activities can enhance students' resilience and dedication to their study. Moreover, educational institutions ought to contemplate implementing flexible tuition payment alternatives to assist families experiencing financial difficulties, thereby mitigating the likelihood of student attrition owing to an inability to fulfill financial obligations.

Educational institutions should establish mechanisms to track student attendance, academic advancement, and overall wellbeing. Prompt identification of students at risk of disengagement facilitates timely interventions, whether academic or psychosocial, to mitigate issues before they develop into attrition. Ultimately, involving parents and the broader community in facilitating students' educational experiences is essential. Consistent communication and participation in school activities foster a supportive atmosphere that motivates students to persist until graduation.

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