

**USER FEES AND RETENTION OF PUPILS IN GOVERNMENT AIDED
PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN APAC DISTRICT**

BY

AKELLO PAMELA

18/U/GMEF/19792/PD

**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE DIRECTORATE OF RESEARCH AND
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Declaration

I, **Akello Pamela** declare that this Dissertation titled *User Fees and Retention of Pupils in Government Aided Primary Schools in Apac District* is my original work and has never been submitted to any institution of higher learning for any academic award. Where other peoples' works have been referred to, I have accordingly acknowledged them both in the main text and in the list of references.

Signed:..... Date:.....

AKELLO PAMELA

18/U/GMEF/19792/PD

Approval

This Dissertation titled “User Fees and Retention of Pupils in Government Aided Primary Schools in Apac District” by Akello Pamela has been written under our guidance as appointed supervisors.

Signed:.....

Date:.....

DR. GODFREY BAGONZA

Signed:.....

Date:.....

DR. ZAID KITAGAANA

Dedication

I dedicate this work to my mother, sisters, brothers and children who always looked after me to ensure that I completed the course.

Acknowledgement

First and foremost, I want to thank God for the far He has brought me, for the blessings, provision and most importantly the gift of life.

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Acronyms

EFA	Education for All
IMF	International Monetary Fund
ISER	Initiative for Social and Economic Rights
KCPE	Kenya Certificate of Primary Education
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MGLSD	Ministry of Gender, Labor and Social Development
MOES	Ministry of Education and Sports
MOFPED	Ministry of Finance Planning and Economic Development
NER	Net Enrolment Rate
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SMC	School Management Committee
UBFP	National Budgetary Framework Paper
UBOS	Uganda Bureau of Statistics
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
UPE	Universal Primary Education
HT	Headteacher
GoU	Government of Uganda
COVID -19	Corona Virus Disease, 2019

Abstract

Abolition of fees in primary schools is Uganda's strategy to ensure access and equity in primary education. Since the implementation of Universal Primary Education policy, thousands of pupils have failed to be retained in government aided primary schools to complete the primary education cycle. This study investigated the effects of user fees on retention of pupils in government aided primary schools in Apac district. The study used an explanatory concurrent mixed method cross-sectional design using a sample of 150 pupils, 30 parents and 10 headteachers from Apac district. Data was collected using the questionnaire for pupils in upper primary classes and interviews for parents and headteachers. School documents mainly on enrolment were reviewed to complement data from the questionnaire and interviews. The Pearson's product moment correlation was used to measure the relationship between user fees and retention of pupils in primary schools. Qualitative data was analyzed thematically and reported descriptively. The findings showed a significant relationship between user fees and pupils' retention. Qualitative findings demonstrated periodic attendance by pupils with high rates of attendance registered only in third term and on days when the user fees weren't being demanded, parents' willingness to keep their children in primary school and high school drop out in the upper classes. The study therefore concluded that user fees affect attendance and retention of pupils in government -aided primary schools in Apac district. There is therefore need to supplement the UPE structure put in place by the government of Uganda with a sustainable program of pupils' financial assistance.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

Uganda's major education policy is to eliminate fees in order to guarantee equitable access to education. Thousands of pupils have not been able to finish their primary education at government-aided primary schools since the adoption of the Universal Primary Education policy. This study looked into how user fees affected pupils' retention in government-aided primary schools in Apac district. This first chapter presents the background to the study under historical, theoretical, conceptual, and contextual. The statement of the problem, purpose of the study, the objectives of the study, research hypotheses and question, as well as the scope and significance of the study are also presented.

1.1 Background to the Study

1.1.1 Historical perspective

A child's right to education is not the one that he or she has as a privilege (Juuko & Kabonesa, 2007). The international, regional, and constitutional instruments sufficiently covered the right to education in general and free and compulsory education in particular. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) Article 26 recognizes the right to education. Everyone has the right to education, according to this article. Education shall be free and compulsory, at least in elementary and fundamental stages (UN, 1948). Although both Article 30 of the 1995 Constitution and the Education Act of Uganda (2008) state that primary education must be free and compulsory (GoU, 1995 & 2008), these requirements are yet to be achieved in Uganda because some of the children are not retained in primary schools.

User fees, according to Snilstveit et al (2015), are viewed as significant barriers to inclusive education, which would allow all children to attend school regardless of their socio-economic background. According to UNESCO, 69.3 million primary school-age children worldwide were not in schools by 2013 (UNESCO, 2014). More than half of these children (39.1 million) lived in sub-Saharan Africa (UNESCO, 2014).

The cost of schooling prevents learners from enrolling and staying in schools, according to a wide body of research. In Indonesia and China, parents sited user fees as the major obstacle to enrolling and retaining their children in primary school (Saroso, Yardley, Pacific News, 2005, cited in Katan, 2006).

In Sub-Saharan Africa, in 2001, parents and instructors in Tanzania claimed that the failure by parents to pay fees such as development funds was the main cause of children not attending school (Oxfarm, 2002). In addition, estimates from Zambia's Central Statistics showed that at least 45 percent of children who dropped out of school in Zambia did so because they had not paid user fees (Schenk et al, 2008).

Furthermore, in Kenya, Mukudi (2004) demonstrated that user fee levels were inversely correlated with absenteeism and dropout rates. Absenteeism and dropout rates rise and fall in line with user fees. For instance, in 2005, 31 percent of the time that children missed school in Kenya was due to non-payment of user fees. Children who failed to pay the fees were frequently sent back home and expelled from school (Katan, 2006).

In Uganda, a survey by the Uganda Bureau of Statistic (UBOS) reported that six (6) out of ten (10) primary school pupils are dropping out of school due to high education costs (GoU, 2021). According to the National Budgetary Framework Paper (NBFP) published in 2012 by the Ministry of Finance, Planning, and Economic Development (MoFPED), just 32 percent of

pupils complete their primary school cycle, representing further decline (GoU, 2012). In fact, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2010) predicated that, based on this trend, the planned primary completion rate of 100 percent, including the Sustainable Development Education Goal (SDG) 4, will not be met by 2030.

The user fees in primary schools in northern Uganda has continued to inhibit children of the poor from completing the primary education cycle. According to the Fact-Finding Survey conducted in northern Uganda by the John Paul 11 Justice and Peace Centre (JP2JPC,2014), primary schools were charging examination fees, teachers' welfare fees, and Parents and Teachers Association (PTA) fees in addition to meals and other expenses. According to Universal Primary Education (UPE) policy, these fees and any direct costs levied by the local authorities or the school head teachers are portrayed as voluntary (GoU, 2008). On the contrary, it has been discovered that this is not the case. What is on the ground is that schools charge parents for these expenses in the form of mandatory fees, most of whom are unable to pay (Initiative for Social and Economic Rights, 2016).

1.1.2 Theoretical perspective

This study used Education Production Function Model. According to Bowless (1970), this is a model that can be used to relate inputs to outputs in terms of development of productive capacity. This model is essential in measuring and estimating the schools' output in relation to the inputs directed towards achieving them.

In this study, inputs such as user fees, parental socioeconomic status, quality of learning and pupil characteristics are managed through the schooling system to produce outputs such as enrollment, retention, completion and ultimately academic achievement. Within the context of government aided primary schools in Apac district, user fees constitute a key input with direct

implication for retention. High and frequent user fees may act as a financial barrier that push financially vulnerable pupils out of school while reduced or eliminated fees ease access to learning and encourage continuous attendance.

The EPF model further emphasizes that user fees do not operate in isolation. Their influence is moderated by other inputs such as household income, availability of qualified teachers, adequate learning facilities and parental attitudes towards fees and willingness to pay user fees. The Education Production Function Model is appropriate in this study because the study seeks to relate inputs (user fees) which represents the cost of outputs (pupils' retention hence completion) of primary education cycle.

1.1.3 Conceptual perspective

User fees are compulsory charges and contributions in cash or in kind that are directly gathered from pupils or their families by the school to support the administrative, instructional, and learning activities (Katan & Burnett, 2004). These charges are accompanied by non-compulsory school attendance and children being sent back home or denied services like lessons, examinations, and report cards when payments are not made. For the purpose of this study, user fees were PTA/community contribution, teachers' welfare fee, examination fee, text book fee, and boarding fee, among others.

The ability of pupils to stay in school until they finish their academic cycle, in this case primary seven, is referred to as retention. This is indicated by the completion rate, which is expressed as a percentage of the total population of pupils who successfully complete the final year's grade in primary school (UNESCO, 2000). In this study, retention was the number of pupils who remained and progressed in school until primary seven.

The dropout is a pupil who enrolled in primary school and withdrew from school without completing the primary education cycle and did not join any other school to complete the grade level of primary education (UNICEF, 2016b, p. 23). In this study, it was used to mean lack of retention of pupils in primary schools.

A primary school refers to an educational institution where young learners encounter the foundational stages of formal education (Hayes, 2006). This study used primary school as a structured setting in Uganda where learners enrol for education from primary one to primary seven.

1.1.4 Contextual perspective

Northern Uganda during the two decades of civil war endured horrific cattle rustling and was impoverished. The region has continued to have low literacy rates in the country, according to UBOS (GoU, 2006). For northern Uganda, where Apac district is located, the right to education target for the rest of the country could not be met due to violence, insecurity, and underdevelopment.

Kjaer and Muwanga (2016) observe that most of the primary schools have 9 to 11 School Management Committee (SMC) members who organize general meetings at least once a term. These meetings, which are usually well attended, deliberate on how parents can contribute to the improvement of primary school education. The SMC meeting imposes a “stage managed” amount of user fees per child, which in most cases are not paid by many parents.

According to a report by ISER (ISER, 2016) in northern Uganda, late or partial disbursement of the UPE Capitation Grant forced school administrators to impose unlawful school development fees on their pupils in order to make up the budgetary deficit. The school head teachers acknowledged isolating the pupils who had not paid these unlawful fees by instructing

them to sit under a tree or separate classroom while their peers were in class attending lessons, notwithstanding their denials of sending the pupils' home (ISER, 2016). Notably, a large number of kids whose parents are unable to pay for their education eventually drop out. This has therefore motivated this study to investigate the effects of user fees on retention of pupils in government -aided primary schools in Apac district.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Every Ugandan primary school-age pupil should be enrolled and timely complete education at all levels of primary education (Mwesige, 2015). However, despite UPE policy, records in Ugandan primary education schools showed a continued low level of pupils' retention in government-aided primary schools. According to Uganda National Housing Survey, 2019/2020, Apac district showed a low level of pupils' retention rate at 36 percent, which was far below the national average (GoU, 2021). Etukuri & Kwesigwa, (2023) observed that out of the 100% of pupils who enroll in primary one, less than 50% sit for end of primary education cycle examination. In addition, Oketcho et al. (2022) too noted that the rate of primary school dropout had remained at 76% in Uganda. Parents were still incurring some school costs in the form of development fund, examination fees, teachers' welfare, boarding fee among others despite Uganda government interventions.

Record from Apac District Education Office, 2019-2022 indicated that ten primary schools in the district that included among others Arocha P/S, Ibuje P/S and Teboke p/S in 2019/2021 recorded decline in attendance of pupils by 393 from primary five to six, and those who progressed to primary seven decreased by 512 pupils. Between the years 2019 and 2022, there was a great decline in attendance of pupils by 719. Meanwhile, pupils who progressed from primary five to six also declined by 392 and primary six to seven by 243, respectively (Apac District Education Office Record, 2019-2022).

The above evidence indicates that thousands of children have failed to be retained in primary education cycle in Apac district which raised an important question. Could some school costs be influencing the attendance and completion rates of pupils in the primary education cycle? If these prospective human resources continuously fail to attend and complete primary education cycle in Uganda, then the future of Uganda education system is likely to be jeopardized. There will be creation of cycle of illiterates, reduction in social skills, decreased adaptability to societal norms ultimately hindering personal growth and national progress. Few studies have also been conducted in an effort to better understand primary school dropout. For instance, Arinaitwe and Agaba (2024) limited their studies to rural primary schools in other regions and ignoring those in northern Uganda and especially in Apac District. This knowledge gap limits the ability to develop nationally representative policy recommendations which may benefit all regions of Uganda. The current study aimed at comprehending how user fees affect pupils' retention in primary schools in Apac district. This study thus investigated the effects of user fees on pupils' retention in government-aided primary schools in Apac district.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of user fees on retention of pupils in government-aided primary schools in Apac district.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The study was guided by the following objectives:

1. To examine the relationship between user fees and school attendance by pupils in government-aided primary schools in Apac district.
2. To examine the relationship between user fees and parents' willingness to keep their children in government-aided primary schools in Apac district.

3. To examine the relationship between user fees and completion of the primary education cycle by pupils in government-aided primary schools in Apac district
4. To explore the perceptions and experiences of Headteachers and Parents regarding the influence of user fees on pupils' retention in government-aided primary schools in Apac district.

1.5 Research Hypotheses

This study was guided by the following hypotheses:

1. H1 There is a significant relationship between user fees and school attendance by pupils in government-aided primary schools in Apac district.
2. H1 There is a significant relationship between user fees and parents' willingness to keep their children in government-aided primary schools in Apac district.
3. H1 There is a significant relationship between user fees and completion of the primary education cycle by pupils in government-aided primary schools in Apac district.

1.6 Research Questions

1. What are the perception and experiences of Head teachers and Parents regarding the influence of user fees on pupils' retention in government-aided primary schools in Apac district.

1.7 Scope of the Study

1.7.1 Geographical scope

The study was conducted in Apac district, in government-aided primary schools. Apac district was chosen because it showed low level of pupils' retention rate at 36 percent which was below the national average (GoU, 2017). Government-aided primary schools receive Capitation Grant

from government to finance school activities and are not supposed to charge illegal and mandatory user fees (GoU, 2008).

1.7.2 Content scope

The study looked at the various user fees charged and their effects on pupils' retention in government-aided primary schools.

1.8 Significance of the Study

To the school administrators and parents, the study will provide up-to-date information on the impact of user fees on retention of pupils in schools. This will act as an eye opener to them, and thus they can act accordingly upon such charges of user fees. This study described systematically how certain user fees are likely to influence pupils' retention in primary education, especially in Apac district, and its consequences are made clear to them.

The findings of this study will help education scholars with knowledge on user fees in primary education. This will enrich literature about the effects of user fees on retention of pupils in government-aided primary schools.

To the policymakers, the findings of this study will expose financial burdens being shouldered by parents despite the introduction of UPE in Uganda in 1997. This will enable them to come up with policy options for further relief of cost burdens to poor households. It will also influence them to explore cost-saving measures instead of reverting to user fees that restrict retention of school-age children in primary schools.

In addition, the study findings will create awareness to the government of Uganda about the gaps in the existing policy interventions as regards pupils' retention in primary schools. This will enable the government to appropriately allocate resources to improve the internal efficiency of primary education.

1.9 Operational Definition of key terms

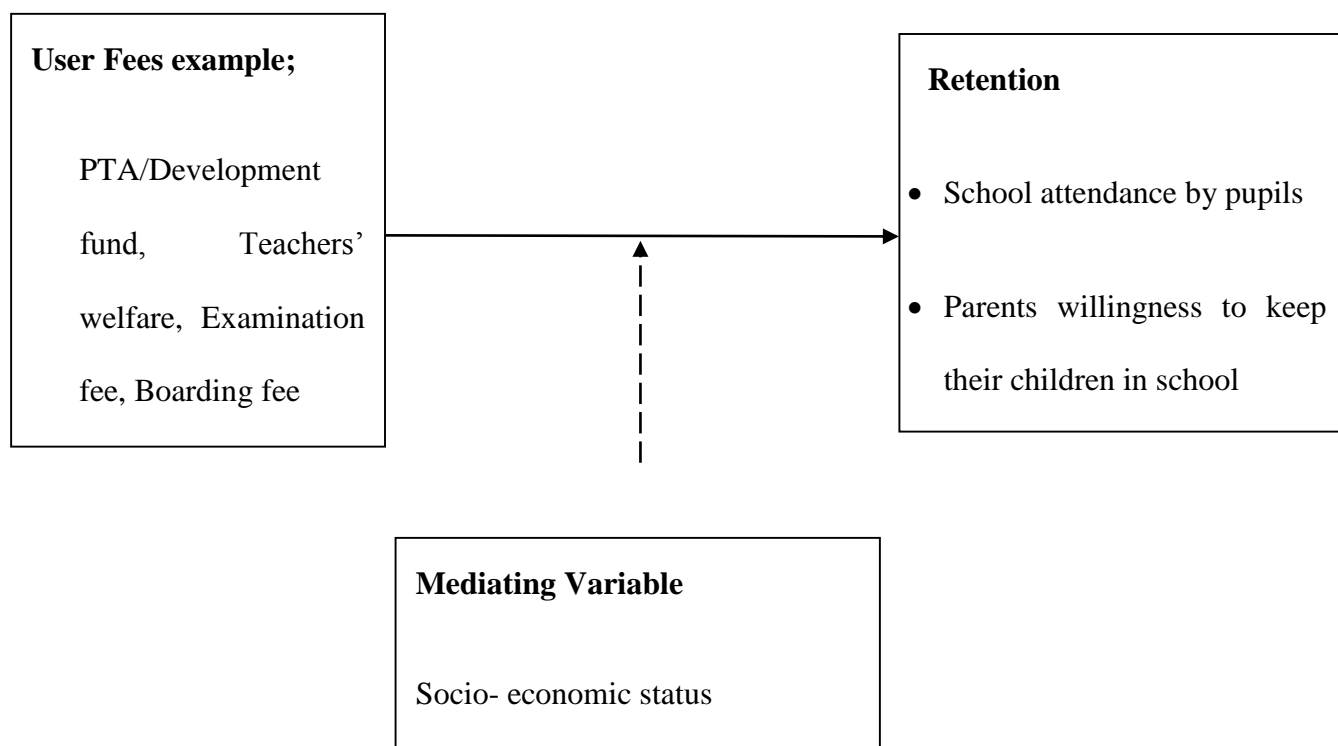
User fees are PTA| Development fund, teachers' welfare fee, examination fee, boarding fee which are levied on termly basis.

Retention is school attendance by pupils, parents' willingness to keep their children in school and the completion of primary education cycle by pupils.

1.10 Conceptual Framework

In this study, the independent variable was user fees in primary schools, while the dependent variable was retention of pupils in the primary schools. The relationship between these variables was presented diagrammatically in figure 1. below.

Figure 1. Showing the conceptual framework



Source: Researcher self-developed 2024

Figure 1. Conceptual Diagram Showing the Relationship between User Fees and Pupils' Retention

In the conceptual diagram, independent variable user fees were taken to be PTA/Development fund, teachers' welfare fee, examination fee, and boarding fee which affected retention. While dependent variable retention was indicated by: school attendance by pupils, parents' willingness to keep their children in primary school, and completion of primary education cycle by pupils. The mediating variable was the socio-economic status of parents who are supposed to pay user fees.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0. Introduction

In this chapter, the researcher reviewed a variety of literary works that were pertinent and directly related to this study. This section dealt with general literature related to user fees and school attendance by pupils, user fees and parents' willingness to keep their children in primary school, user fees and completion of the primary education cycle by pupils, which were the objectives of this study.

2.1. User Fees and School Attendance by Pupils

Minor (2023) carried out a study to look at how the introduction of tuition fees in several German federal states between 2006 and 2014 affected first-year enrolment and attendance rates. A longitudinal administrative panel data set covering 206 universities and universities of applied sciences from 2003 to 2018 served as the basis for the analyses performed to evaluate the hypothesis. Based on a quasi-experimental environment, the study employed an analytical research approach that included multiple panel-data models and robustness checks to investigate causal relationships. A fixed effect regressions' outcome supported the treatment's predicted detrimental effects and even showed that they persisted. When comparing universities with and without tuition fees, it can be observed that the former institutions lost, on average, between 3.8% and 7% of their incoming freshman class. All expenses, including tuition and user fees, have an effect on students' enrolment in and attendance at schools, both for lower- and higher-level education. The previous study was carried out in universities using secondary data. However, the current study used mostly primary data from primary schools to examine the impact of user fees on pupils' attendance.

The majority of students attending school have been kept in school because of initiatives taken by Chile and Mexico to encourage attendance, according to the Development Bank of Latin America (2018). According to this report from the Development Bank of Latin America, Mexico and Chile are having trouble raising student attendance rates. The research findings indicate that Chile and Mexico have achieved notable success in decreasing school dropout rates due to their efforts to provide free education to a large portion of their youth population. In addition, the study found that despite the geographical differences between the two Latin American states, their governments have recognized the need to create systems to raise students' attendance and retention in the classroom because doing so will raise literacy rates and improve the general well-being of the populace. This study by the Development Bank of Latin America investigated the outcome of removing user fee charges on pupils' attendance in primary schools, and the present study viewed it the opposite way by studying how the charging of such fees impacted on pupils' attendance in primary schools.

Ananga (2011) did a monographic study in Ghana where he found problems with regular school attendance by pupils. Three goals were set for the study: To start, identify the internal and external variables influencing pupils' attendance and departure from school: Second, investigate the following causes of some pupils' non-return to school: Lastly, to determine how educational institutions react to a high dropout rate. Results showed that user fees, such as PTA contribution, were among the variables influencing the attendance rate of students. The study made the following recommendation in this regard: all schools should adopt revised, free basic education. This study, however, was unable to determine how much user fees, such as PTA contribution, impacted on primary school attendance. Consequently, the goal of the current study was to close this information gap by estimating the impact of user fees on primary school pupils' retention.

Njoroge (2013) looked into how user fees affected academic achievement in public elementary schools in the Gatanga district of Kenya. The price of textbooks, transportation, and exam fees were mentioned as user costs that had an impact on primary school students' attendance and retention. According to research, head instructors found that students' punctuality was impacted by distance. Teachers believed that youngsters could not afford to pay for their academic excursions and exams because of poverty in their families. Just 33% of students who responded could not pay the usage fees. Parents might have provided additional information about the amount of user fee expenses and how it influenced their children's attendance; however, they were not included in this study despite the fact that it employed triangulated data from headteachers, teachers, and students. Furthermore, the study did not find a connection between user fees and student retention. These were the gaps that the current study filled by taking into account the opinions of parents in order to establish a relationship between user fees and pupils' attendance rates and determine the degree to which these payments impacted pupils' retention in primary schools.

Abuya et al. (2015) conducted an in-depth review of various published works to investigate free primary education and its implementation in Rwanda in a related study. In addition to discussing the roles and implications of teachers in the implementation of these policies, this study examined the numerous policies that were utilized in the context of free primary education. However, results demonstrated that these restrictions neglected instructors financially, raising the possibility of unofficial user fees being collected from students to support teachers' welfare. If payments were not received, this would have had a detrimental effect on students' attendance. Consequently, the government was advised to implement a policy that addresses the financial requirements of educators, which had a negative impact on student attendance and, consequently, teacher retention. However, rather than depending solely on secondary data from published publications, research into user fees such as instructors'

wellbeing required primary data from parents and students. The genuine cost of teachers' welfare, which was connected to pupils' attendance in elementary schools, was taken into consideration in the current study by parents and pupils.

In his investigation on the cost of attending school from the view point of young people, Farting (2014) looked into user fees and their effects on school attendance. The study employed an online poll to collect data on different costs associated with attending colleges in Northern Ireland, Scotland, and England. The survey results revealed that 21 percent of students had trouble affording fees and stationery they needed for their studies, which affected their school attendance. Students from low-income families were more affected by the lack of these resources than those from relatively wealthy families. The study findings only established the percentage of pupils who lacked the resources to pay for school fees and scholastic materials without describing the effect of the related cost or the failure to pay on students' attendance and subsequent retention in those schools. Thus, the current study sought to describe the effects of such costs on attendance and subsequent retention of pupils in primary schools from even parents' perspectives.

In Uganda, Deininger (2003), in a repeated cross-sectional survey from 1992 and 1999, 2000, compared households' pre- and post-free primary school intervention in Uganda. The outcome demonstrated that school attendance rates were positively and significantly impacted by the lower cost of education. Reducing school fees had a significant effect, increasing the likelihood of going to school by 60% over the two time periods. However, the result of the study gave only a percentage increase in attendance rate but failed to describe the extent to which this can lead to the retention of pupils in schools. Therefore, the current study related the increased cost by describing how far it affected attendance and subsequent retention of pupils in primary schools.

In a study by Arinaitwe and Agaba (2024) on school fees increment and its impact on students' enrolment in rural versus urban government schools in Uganda, the researchers set out to: determine the relationship between school fees charged and average monthly salary of teachers; determine the relationship between annual student enrolment and average monthly salary of teachers; determine the relationship between budget allocation to schools and average monthly salary of teachers. The study population included head teachers, school management committee members, and class teachers. Findings revealed a significant correlation between school attendance and fees. Based on this relationship established within the data, it was recommended that the Ministry of Education and Sport (MoES) implement a fair and balanced fee determination framework accounting for regional disparities in socioeconomic conditions and the linkage between fees collected and enrolment supported. This study, however, did not seek the opinion of learners who are the most affected by the fee hikes. The present study sought the views of pupils themselves on how user fees impact their attendance.

2.2 User Fees and Parents' Willingness to Keep Their Children in School

In a study published in 2022, Emurugat et al. examined children's perceptions of the parental partnership roles that best support their continued attendance in Uganda's Busoga Region elementary schools. The children's results showed that, among other things, parents talked about paying school fees, feeding their kids, and taking care of them during meetings at the school. Children did, however, list a variety of things that they believed affected their ability to stay in school. The various manifestations of poverty had a significant role in the low rate of school retention. When parents are unable to pay school fees, support their child's personal needs, and get their child working, the youngster's mentality is thrown off course by outside forces, which can result in the child joining problematic organizations, falling into romances, and eventually being pregnant. The research found that although most parents desire to retain

their kids in elementary school, many are unable to do so due to the vicious cycle of poverty, which causes the children to drop out. However, the study employed a comparative design and solely used focus groups and in-depth individual interviews to gather data from children. This gap was remedied by the current study, which also included parents and school administrators who impose these user fees.

A study on parents and guardians of children enrolled in state-funded schools in England was carried out by Davis (2015). He inquired about the cost of school uniforms over the phone. The study's conclusions stated that wearing a school uniform was one of the prerequisites for enrolment. 99 percent of students and parents also agreed that as kids advance from primary to secondary school, the cost of the uniform rises because the latter level requires more specialized things for the students' outfit. Nevertheless, the cost of the school uniform and parents' desire to purchase it—a measure of students' persistence in school—were not connected in this study. Additionally, school officials who are knowledgeable about the impact of school uniform costs on the teaching and learning process were required to corroborate the study's findings. In order to close that gap, the current study attempted to link the cost of the school uniform as user fees that parents must pay and their desire to do so, which influences pupils' retention in the classroom.

Mugoro (2014) investigated the effects of transportation problems on the attendance of students in community secondary schools located in Dar es Salaam City, Tanzania. Data was gathered from headteachers, academic masters and mistresses, disciplinary masters and mistresses, and students using a descriptive study method. The results showed that 46% of pupils had been denied permission to attend school because their parents or guardians had not given them their support. Unfortunately, the survey did not include parental viewpoints, which would have provided information about the exact amount of money parents actually paid for each student's

transportation as well as their attitudes regarding this expenditure. Furthermore, the study did not take into account how student retention in schools might be impacted by the payment or nonpayment of transportation costs. In order to illustrate how transportation costs affect parents' inclination to retain their children in primary school, the current study examined the opinions of parents themselves.

According to Dzombo's (2015) research, one of the factors contributing to the rise in student dropout rates in Kenya's Kilifi County was fee-related. choosing the target population by combining purposive and snowball sampling techniques. Teachers and students were interviewed by the researcher. The results showed that in addition to tuition, the county's schools continued to impose additional costs on parents. Parents were financially strained as a result of these payments, and the majority of them were unable to pay. Parents kept their children at home due to the county's rising rate of poverty. The research also revealed that the parents faced significant difficulties in being able to pay the fees the school assessed them due to the high rate of poverty in the county, which was caused by the absence of a significant source of income. The previous study solely used interviews propelling the new study to use both qualitative and quantitative methodologies to measure parents' willingness to maintain their children in government-aided primary schools despite user fees.

Okumu et al. (2008) also used a logistic model analysis of data from the 2004 National Service Delivery Survey to do research on poverty in Uganda. The study sought to identify household socioeconomic factors that impact students who receive free education from dropping out of school as well as potential policy approaches to reduce student dropout rates. The findings supported the notion that factors impacting the likelihood of student dropout include parental education, household size, and the percentage of economically active family members. However, the use of secondary data for service delivery, which is prone to recall bias, diluted

the findings. In order to ascertain parents' attitude in this case, their readiness to keep their children in primary school despite poverty and user fees, the current study examined primary data from parents themselves.

Furthermore, it was shown that households' ability to pay for at-home private tutoring was substantially correlated with students' performance in an Indian study by Kingdon and Teal (2005) linking payment for private tutoring with students' performance. This implies that children from households unable to pay for the cost of at-home instruction generally did not do well in school and experienced delays in their academic development. Therefore, economic gaps may result in educational inequities even when parents from low-income homes are willing to pay. Nevertheless, the study was unable to ascertain how home-coaching expenses would affect students' retention rates. The current study adopted a scientific approach to investigate how cost for school coaching as user fees affected parents' willingness to keep their children in primary school.

However, Carlos (2014) looked into the things that prevented parents from participating in school activities in Arusha, Tanzania. The following research questions were addressed using a combination of Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and guides: What laws and policies now in place encourage parental involvement in schools? How can the involvement of parents in schools be enhanced? Which socioeconomic variables prevent parents from being involved in their children's education? The majority of parents do not realize their obligations regarding their children's education, according to the findings. It was also discovered that the majority of these parents were not giving their kids the education that the schools required of them. The qualitative methodologies employed in this study limited the researchers' capacity to draw conclusions regarding the extent to which the costs of school requirements affected students' retention in school. In order to determine the degree to which costs associated with school

requirements, such as user fees charged by schools, affected parents' willingness to keep their children in primary school, which is a retention indicator, the current study utilized both qualitative and quantitative methodologies.

Furthermore, a study conducted in 2013 by Kirera looked at the internal and external challenges to education that children in Meru County, Kenya, faced as they moved from primary to secondary school. The impact of tuition fees on students' transition rates, the influence of parents' educational attainment on their children's transition to secondary schools, and the relationship between academic performance in the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) and secondary school transition rates were some of the study's goals. The study's findings demonstrated that students who couldn't afford the test costs or whose parents couldn't support their academic goals didn't make it into secondary school. Therefore, it was recommended that the government implement policies that change parental attitudes towards education and allocate financial resources for students from poor households. Nevertheless, the study was limited because it did not address the key issues of the current study, which was how examination fees affected parents' willingness to retain their children in elementary school.

Wilder (2014) conducted a meta-synthesis regarding the effect of parental involvement on students' academic performance. The study found a favourable correlation between students' academic success and parental participation. Parental involvement significantly improved students' performance as measured by cycle completion and retention. However, the study could not link these findings to the school costs incurred by parents for their children to remain in primary schools, which can contribute to their failure to complete the primary education cycle. The current study took a step further to link the costs that parents have got to incur towards educational achievement with their level of involvement, which is an indicator of their willingness to keep their children in primary schools.

When parents discovered that the government was providing free primary education, they stopped supporting their child's school, according to Ogola's (2010) study on the situation of free primary education in Kenyan government primary schools. Some parents stopped being involved because they thought the government could take care of their children's educational needs or because they could no longer afford to do so. However, delays in disbursement of funds to primary schools have seen some schools charging user fees for parents to pay, leading to increased school dropout rates in the event of failure to do so and hence low retention rates of pupils. This study targeted free primary education in Kenya, meaning that the findings might not be applicable to Apac district in northern Uganda, which was the focus of the current study.

2.3. User Fees and Completion of Primary Education Cycle by pupils

In the Kenyan county of Nairobi, Adong et al. (2023) studied the impact of fees on students' retention in private universities located in the Langata sub-county. Examining the role that fees have in influencing students' completion of private universities was the aim of the study. Using a mixed method approach, the researchers included 218 professors, 394 students, 2 deans of students, and 1 registrar from each of the Langata universities in their sample. The study's conclusions proved that tuition costs had a big impact on how many students graduated from private colleges in the Langata subcounty. The survey found that, among other things, the primary fees were those for tuition, lodging, food, and transportation. The report went on to suggest that student costs had to be periodically evaluated and made more reasonable. However, the study examined how fee charges impacted students' completion of university level education and in private institutions, but the present study investigated how such fee charges affected pupils' completion of primary education level in government-aided primary schools in Apac district.

An empirical study by Hapompwe et al. (2020) examined the impact of socioeconomic, environmental, and pedagogical factors on student retention in public primary schools in Lusaka, Zambia. The study aimed to characterize the pedagogical processes that result in low retention rates among students in public primary schools, investigate school environmental factors that may contribute to these low retention rates, and assess the socioeconomic factors that underlie these low retention rates. A descriptive paradigm was incorporated into the survey procedure. The survey included headteachers, deputies, senior instructors, and class teachers among its total sample of 100 respondents. The main conclusions on socioeconomic factors were that the most common barriers to children's perseverance in climbing the educational ladder were family poverty, malnutrition, child labour, and the death of parents or guardians. Despite government policy not to pursue any child on such grounds, some head teachers sent away such children after it was discovered that some parents were unable to purchase uniforms and pay user fees like PTA funds and sport fees. The study concluded that educators and decision-makers should take serious measures and act quickly to address the challenges presented here. This study, however, was conducted in Lusaka, Zambia, yet the present study was carried out in Apac district in northern Uganda.

In order to address the needs of rural Appalachian community students, Hlinka (2017) studied retention theories and discovered that fees have an impact on college students' retention in Kentucky. The study used a qualitative methodology in which students' viewpoints were collected based on the Tinto integration model's theoretical framework. Following a qualitative analysis of the data, a qualitative technique was used to convey the findings. The researcher was able to generalize the target population thanks to the huge sample size that was employed. The study suggested giving towns more economic clout to improve student retention and completion rates in nearby colleges. The study did not, however, employ the quantitative

approach that the present research used to find out the effects of user fees on the completion of the primary education cycle by pupils in government-aided primary schools.

In addition, Paulson (2012) examined non-academic variables that may influence the transfer of underprepared community college students to college-level coursework. She made use of secondary cross-sectional data regarding students' advancement through the college cycle. According to the study, students' ability to transition and finish their college cycle was significantly impacted by their ability to pay for school supplies. However, family income was not taken into account in this study, which would have affected the cost of school supplies needed for a student to finish their college cycle. In order to ascertain the degree to which the former influences the latter, the current study examined potential home expenses related to buying school supplies and also examined how these costs affected students' completion of the primary education cycle.

In addition, Thompson and Hayford (2008) conducted a study in Ghana on the importance of user payments in education over the last two decades. The findings implied that user payments were significant in improving financing of schools as well as increasing parents' participation in the education of their children due to the high costs involved for them. However, the question that remains unanswered is whether the parents are in a position to pay, and for how long? The current study was to ascertain if parents can keep their children in school until they complete primary education in face of user fees.

Additionally, Williams (2013) used focus group discussions and interviews to examine household expenditures associated with attending school in Rwanda even after the country's free basic education policy was implemented. In this case study, student and parent perspectives were gathered regarding the following topics: household expenses at the school

level, the ways in which school costs impact students' completion of the educational cycle, and the impact of school costs on households and the community. The results of this survey demonstrated that households were still having to pay for the school feeding program. As a result, these expenses had an impact on kids finishing their basic schooling. Therefore, Williams (2013) suggested that in order to ensure that students' completion rate is unaffected, the government should rewrite the 12 Year Basic Education (12YBE) policy, set aside funds for students who cannot afford these expenses, inform households about the school feeding policy strategy, and establish a robust monitoring and evaluation system. The study's identified knowledge gaps included the following: the case study approach employed was unable to fully account for all costs incurred in various parts of Rwanda; the study did not exclusively demonstrate the impact of the mentioned costs on students' retention and completion of the primary education cycle; and the estimated costs incurred by each family are minuscule in comparison to fluctuations in market prices. In order to ascertain the extent and shared significance of these expenses on pupils' completion rate, the current study expanded on these findings by gathering information from parents and school administration.

Muthuri and Kirera (2013) looked into the internal and external school difficulties that affected students' transition from primary to secondary school in Meru County, Kenya. The primary goals were to determine how the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) academic performance affected the number of students who transferred to secondary institutions. The majority of children were unable to transfer to secondary schools, according to the study's findings, because of their low KCPE scores. It was also demonstrated that students did not proceed to secondary school if their parents did not pay the necessary examination fees because of their unfavourable opinions. Therefore, it was suggested that the government implement policies to alter parents' attitudes about education and provide financial aid to kids from low-

income families. However, the lack of information regarding how much examination fees affected students' completion rate, which was the current study's main focus, made the study weaker.

Furthermore, secondary school principals in Munda and Odebero's (2014) study indicated that measures to improve academic performance are motivated by a school's secured financial base. While not all schools required students to be able to pay fees in order to be admitted, school levies were crucial to the continuation of educational programs. According to this study, user fees were a major factor in students' erratic attendance and eventual school dropout, endangering their capacity to finish their education. However, principals believed that school success could not be maintained without adequate revenue collection. This study was constrained by the fact that it was done in secondary schools, yet this present study focuses on primary schools, which provide basic education, hence a gap to be filled by this current study.

Lastly, in Uganda, Kavuma et al. (2017) surveyed on how districts were supplementing UPE Capitation Grants (funds) perceived to be inadequate to run school programs. Some districts, including Wakiso, stated that they had added local user fees as a supplement to UPE funding. However, many districts, including Hoima, Nakapiripirit, and Amuria, confessed having raised very little local revenue and thus lacked the funds to augment the UPE Capitation Grant in order to enhance teaching and learning. Nevertheless, this study only sought the consent and used the views of school administrators and excluded parents who are supposed to pay these user fees. Thus, it does not give a good picture of how much money is exactly raised from user fees. The current study sought to establish the views from both parents and school headteachers and relate them to pupils' completion of primary education in government-aided primary schools. This gave a good picture of how user fees impacted the completion of the primary education cycle by pupils.

Njoroge (2020) looked into how well government tuition fees in some secondary schools in Kenya's Naivasha sub-county helped children finish their secondary education. The goal of the study was to determine why fewer children are completing secondary school even though the government offers free tuition. All of the public secondary school principals, instructors, and students in the Naivasha sub-county provided data. The results showed that some pupils who are sent home for fees never return to school. The investigation came to the conclusion that the Naivasha sub-county's public secondary school receives insufficient and inconsistent government support. The report went on to suggest that in order for secondary school financing to keep up with market rates, the government should raise it on a regular basis. It is the only way school principals may maintain seamless operations without having to bear excessive costs in the form of user fees. However, this study was carried out at Kenya's Naivasha sub-county's secondary schools. Yet the present study was carried out in primary schools in Apac district, thus a gap that was filled to adequately picture the effects of user fees on completion of primary school level by pupils in government-aided primary schools.

2.4. The perception and experiences of headteachers and parents regarding the influence of user fees on pupils' retention in government aided primary schools

Mugiraneza (2018) conducted a study on hidden costs and their impact on students' participation in basic education in Rwanda. The objectives of the study were; to establish the impact of school –based costs on students' intake rate in basic education in Rwanda, to assess the effects of school –based costs on students' transition rate in Rwanda and to determine the impact of home- based costs on students' intake rate in Rwanda. It used convergent parallel mixed method design. The sample size comprised 394 parents and all the headteachers of 12YBE in Kicukiro and Kirehe districts of Rwanda. The study findings from parents' and headteachers' perception and experience revealed that school- based costs such as for

supporting school activities and participating in examinations had more impact on students' intake rate in 'O' level of 12YBE and recommended that education stakeholders should ensure that identified hidden costs are addressed to allow full participation in tiers of basic education. This study was conducted in Rwanda yet the current study is carried out in Apac district in Uganda. Peoples' perceptions and experiences differ geographically.

Noncebo et al (2022) studied the views of headteachers on top up fees in free primary education in selected schools in Eswantini. The study found that headteachers perceptions on top up fees varied but many saw them as a double edged sword in education. While these fees could improve quality of providing essential resources like books and infrastructure they also create significant barriers to access particularly for children from poor households leading to lower attendance and completion rates. Although the context of this study was outside Uganda, it motivated the current study to investigate the perception of headteachers and parents.

In Botswana, Pansiri and Bulawa (2013) also investigated the perception and experiences of head teachers on parents' participation in public primary schools. Results showed that out of the 745 respondents, 82% of the head teachers indicated that parents were unwilling to pay any fee if requested. Parents viewed user fee such as text book fees, compulsory uniforms, exam fees among others as pervasive and a serious obstacle to their children's enrollment and completion of primary education in Botswana. In addition, these charges added to their household cost of primary education. As a result, learners were sent back home more than thrice a term. Consequently, this prompted an investigation into Apac district case. This study thus investigated the impact of user fee on retention of pupils.

Documentary evidence by Mwebi and Maithya (2016) on perceptions of parents on the practice of private tuition in public learning institutions in Kenya showed that out of 40 participants, 83.4% believed that charges such as teachers welfare contribution enabled learners to access additional attention from teachers, ensured improved learning styles, improved performances, personalized relationship and involvement of parents in education of their children. 16% of the parents were however not happy with any private fee structure charged in public schools as it negatively impacted on their children's learning and millions of children drop out of school. Education is a vehicle through which society transforms its culture and talent to the youth. This implies that young people should attend and complete school. This study informed the current study to explore the perception of head teachers and parents.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the methodology that was used to guide the study. It includes the study design, study area, study population, sampling techniques and sample size, research instruments, quality control measures, data analysis techniques, research procedure, and ethical consideration.

3.1. Research Design

An explanatory concurrent mixed method cross-sectional design was used. Both the quantitative and qualitative data collection was done at the same time. In the mixed method, the quantitative approach was the dominant method. Specifically, quantitative approach was used to examine the effect of user fee on retention of pupils in government-aided primary schools in Apac district. It gave the numerical evidence which was quantified and statistically processed to support or deny the phenomenon under investigation (Watson, 2015). The qualitative strand explored the perception and experiences of Headteachers and parents regarding the influence of user fee on retention of pupils in government-aided primary school in Apac district. It provided detailed information, meaning and explanation which was triangulated with quantitative data (Apuke, 2017).

3.2 Study Area

The study was conducted in Apac district. Apac district is bordered by Kole district in the north, Kwania district in the east, Masindi in the south, and Oyam district in the west.

3.3 Study Population

The study population comprised of primary school pupils, parents and headteachers of government-aided primary schools in the study area. While the pupils were targeted for the quantitative strand, parents and headteachers were targeted and included in the qualitative strand of the study.

3.4 Sampling Techniques

3.4.1 Cluster and Simple Random Sampling

For primary schools, both cluster and simple random sampling techniques were used to select government aided primary schools in Apac district. According to Magnani (1997), the cluster sampling is appropriate to studies that use different administrative units with pre-defined boundaries which is the case of the different sub-counties in Apac district. In this study, the clusters were based on the different sub-counties within Apac district. From these clusters, schools were then selected using simple random sampling to ensure that each school had an equal chance of participating in the study.

Within each selected school, participants shared similar characteristics in terms of exposure to the government -aided primary school system. To capture variations across the district, schools were selected from different sub -counties, representing both rural and peri urban contexts as well as schools of different sizes. This enabled diversity into the sample, allowing comparisons across different settings.

3.4.2 Systematic Random Sampling

For the choice of pupils' participants, a systematic random sampling was performed. According to Makwana et al. (2023), systematic random sampling method is effective since it is organized

and can be executed in a controlled and systematic manner. As such, the researcher randomly picked the first participants from p5, p6, and p7 and maintained an interval for the next choice of participants depending on the enrolment of a particular class. In some classes an interval of 4 pupils was used while others an interval of 6 pupils and above was applied to systematically get participants.

3.4.3 Purposive Sampling

For headteachers and parents, the approach of the purposive sampling technique was applied. Iker et al. (2016) assert that purposive sampling is appropriate in this kind of study due to the specific information required from persons who have lived the experience and have expertise on the subject. Therefore, the researcher interviewed 10 headteachers and 30 parents of sampled primary schools within Apac district.

3.5 Sample Size

The sample size was determined using the Krejcie & Morgan (1970) table of sample size as in table 3.1 below.

Table 3. 1: Showing study population, Sample size, and sampling technique

Population Category	Targeted Population	Sample size	Sampling Technique
Headteachers	10	10	Purposive sampling
Parents	30	30	Purposive sampling
Pupils	240	150	Systematic Random Sampling
Total	280	190	

These were the actual participants for the quantitative study using a questionnaire according to their sex and class, as shown in the tables below.

Table 3. 2: Class and sex of respondents

Class of respondents	Number of males	Number of females	Total number of respondents per class	Percentage (%)
P.7	49	42	91	60.7
P.6	26	14	40	26.7
P.5	11	08	19	12.7
Total	86	64	150	100

Table 3.1 shows that 86 participants were male pupils ($n = 86$), representing 57.4 percent (57.4%), while the female participants were 64 pupils ($n = 64$), representing 42.6 percent (42.6%). This showed that the information collected was not biased in terms of sex composition; therefore, data was collected from perceived mixed-sex ideas.

In the qualitative strand of data, the researcher considered the interview return rate as displayed in the table below.

Table 3. 3: Respondents' Interview Return Rate

Respondents	Male	Female	Total
Head teachers	8	2	10
Parents	21	08	29

Table 3.2 shows that a total of ten (10) head teachers from the 10 selected schools for the study were interviewed from Apac district. After interviewing eight (8) head teachers, data got saturated because of repeated statements. However, two (2) more were interviewed for the benefit of doubt. On the side of parents, thirty (30) were interviewed, implying that 3 parents per sampled school. However, the data got saturated on the 26th participant, but the researcher went ahead and interviewed four (4) more to verify the previous information.

Ten schools were selected for this study to ensure that the sample was both manageable and representative of government aided primary schools within the district.

3.6 Data Collection Instruments

The researcher used three instruments to collect data. These were the pupils' questionnaire, the parents' and head teachers' interview guides, and the school document review on enrolment of pupils, especially in upper primary level.

3.6.0 Pupils' Questionnaire on User Fees

The pupils' questionnaire comprised of three sections: Section A had respondents' demographic information. Section B was made up of questions using a five-point Likert scale to rate the opinion of pupils concerning user fee charges in government-aided primary schools, and Section C also rated pupils' opinion regarding their retention in school (Appendix ii). It provided quantitative data from the larger participants of pupils regarding their knowledge about user fees and retention in primary school. This method was used since it allows the collection of a lot of data from a large number of respondents within a short time. It caters for confidentiality, is cheap, and is flexible (Kothari, 2010).

3.6.1 Interview Guide for Head Teachers on User Fees

In this study, interviews with head teachers were conducted to collect qualitative data on user fees. These interviews explored and described the impact of user fees on pupils' retention in government-aided primary schools. According to the three study objectives, the interview guide included three questions arranged from the study's first question to the third question. There were follow-up questions that probed further into the answers to aid the researcher in evoking discussions while gathering the data. (See Appendix iii).

Since the headteachers are in charge of overseeing the implementation of UPE policy, an interview with them was suited for the study. Additionally, they supported the introduction of user fees and are aware of how much it affects pupils' attendance, parents' willingness to keep their children in school, and pupils' completion of the primary education cycle. Furthermore, using this kind of instrument is recommended for gathering data from a small number of respondents, as was the case with this study (Creswell, 2018).

3.6.2 Interview Guide for Parents and Guardians

An interview with parents was appropriate in this study because they are the education stakeholders with key information on user fees. They were the right respondents with knowledge about the forms of user fees, modes of payment, and the resultant consequences. They were the people who actually felt the pinch of the payment (see Appendix iv).

3.6.3 School Documents' Review Guide on Pupils' Retention

In order to gather secondary information on pupils' retention in primary schools, a document review guide was used as a tool. This informed this study on school enrolment, which is an indicator of retention a dependent variable in this study. Therefore, pupils' enrolment in P.5, P.6, and P.7 from 2018–2019 and 2022 was collected and also analyzed. The academic years 2020 and 2021 were interfered with by the Corona Virus Disease (COVID-19) pandemic (Appendix V).

The document review guide was relevant for this study since it provided information to the researcher on retention of pupils in primary schools. The responsiveness, authenticity, reliability, and significance of the documents to this study were taken into consideration while evaluating these documents. Because these factors are predictors of pupils' retention, the study of school documents identified measures of pupils' school attendance as well as pupils'

completion of the primary education cycle, which were indicators of pupils' retention in primary schools (Mogalakwe, 2006).

3.7 Validity

As per Amin (2005), validity describes the level to which data gathered using research instrument items precisely reflects the real topic area of investigation and provides authentication that the collecting equipment is measuring what it's expected to be measuring. The validity of the instrument was ascertained by expert judgment by the help of the two supervisors such that the coefficient of validity is at least 0.7 as stated by Amin (2005). Therefore, the research instruments were considered valid only if the validity index was equal or greater than 0.7. The researcher made advantage of a Content Validity Index (CVI) to measure the validity of the instrument given by;

$$CVI = \frac{\text{No. of items declared valid}}{\text{Total No. of items}}$$

$$CVI = \frac{22}{26} = 0.85$$

It can be concluded that the questionnaire was valid for data collection since the CVI of 0.85 was above the recommended value of 0.7 according to Amin (2005).

3.8 Reliability

Reliability refers to the consistency with which a research instrument produces stable and dependable results when applied repeatedly under similar conditions. In this study, the reliability of the questionnaires was tested using Cronbach alpha coefficient. A reliability coefficient of 0.7 or above was regarded as acceptable for social science research.

A pilot study was conducted and the instruments yielded a Cronbach alpha value of 0.74 which confirmed that tools were reliable. Reliability was computed using the statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS) and scores were evaluated.

Table 3. 4: Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.744	22

The results from Cronbach's Alpha test present a coefficient value of 0.744 which is above the recommended value of at least 0.7, thus deeming the research instrument reliable for the study.

Control of extraneous variables

In this study, several extraneous variables that could influence pupils' retention independently of user fees were identified and controlled to enhance the validity of findings. These included socio economic factors such as parental income and educational level, school related factors such as teacher quality, availability of learning materials and school infrastructure and community factors such as distance to school and cultural practices. To control for these variables, the schools and study participants were randomly sampled from both the peri urban and rural setting to give equal chance of participation to all schools, pupils, parents and head teachers. Pupils were also selected using inclusion criteria that minimized variability due to age, grade level for instance only pupils of primary 5,6 and 7 were included.

Additionally, standardized data collection procedures were employed across all participating schools, ensuring uniform administration of questionnaires and interviews. Data was also collected during the same season that is the third term of the school calendar across all the schools.

3.9 Data Collection Techniques

The process of data collection began after respondents had given their permission. When the request was approved, data was collected during the 3rd term of the school calendar. Due to the mixed-methods approach used in this study, both quantitative and qualitative data was collected. Quantitative data was collected from pupils. Structured questionnaires were distributed and read through by the research assistant to sampled pupils, filled and collected instantly by the research assistant. Qualitative data was collected using interviews with sampled head teachers and parents. To gather qualitative data, the researcher employed note-taking and audio recording techniques (Cohen et al., 2007).

3.9.1 Quantitative Data Analysis

Following the administration of a standardized questionnaire to the pupils, the quantitative data was reviewed for accuracy and comprehensiveness. Raw data was recorded and cleaned up using SPSS version 20, the Statistical Package for Social Sciences. Frequencies were run for each question, and the trend of missing data was looked at to ensure that there were no errors in the data submission. The researcher then verified that all of the data were reliable and that all interval-level variables adhered to the normalcy assumption.

Analyses were conducted on the following relationships: user fees and pupils' attendance (area one); user fees and parents' willingness to keep their children in primary schools (area two); and user fees and completion of primary education cycle (area three). For each hypothesis, the Pearson product moment correlation was employed. Descriptive statistics were also utilized to look at user fee payments, pupils' attendance, parents' willingness to keep their children in primary school, and pupils' completion of the primary education cycle.

3.9.2 Qualitative Data Analysis

A thematic analysis was performed on the interview data. Data was arranged in accordance with study objectives and categorized into themes. Braun and Clark (2006) agree that the thematic approach is suited for qualitative data because it can be used to locate and report themes or patterns within the data. The systematic process of thematic analysis was followed, that is, the researcher familiarized herself with the data by listening to the audios and reading the notes over and over again. Codes were then developed to give labels that describe the contents of the data. From these codes, themes were generated, reviewed, and named, thus giving meaning to each theme and integrating the themes in explaining the study objectives. The findings were then presented in the write-up with direct quotes from interviews with headteachers and parents used to explain the identified themes.

Triangulation of findings

To draw conclusions from the results, triangulation of findings from the quantitative strand and the qualitative was done during the discussion in chapter five. However, the findings were presented concurrently with the qualitative findings providing explanatory information to the quantitative findings.

3.10 Research Procedure

The data collection procedure entailed the researcher obtaining an introductory letter from Kyambogo University Directorate of Research and Graduate Training authorizing her to go to the field. The researcher also sought permission from the headteachers of sampled schools that allowed her to administer the questionnaires to sampled pupils. They also consented on behalf of parents of sampled pupils who were below 18 years of age. The researcher and the assistant gave ample time to pupils to fill out the questionnaires that were collected instantly.

Interviews with headteachers were conducted using face-to-face, in-depth interviews on the same day a primary school was visited. The researcher sought secondary data after interviewing every headteacher in the form of enrolment of pupils in upper classes for the years 2018, 2019, and 2022, which were recorded in text form. The researcher then proceeded to interview sampled parents from their homes after their consent was sought.

3.11 Ethical Considerations

The researcher followed all the necessary ethical processes before gaining access to the research site, approaching the participants, and collecting, analysing, and disseminating data.

The ethical procedures followed included:

Prior to gathering data, consent was sought from parents and head teachers upon being fully informed about the study purpose, its procedures and any expected risks and benefits involved. Participants were also made aware that they had the right to withdraw from the study whenever they felt like. Since children were also involved in the study, their voluntary participation was equally sought through assent. Additionally, parental consent was also sought.

Confidentiality and privacy were also guaranteed throughout the study to ensure its ethical component. There were defined protocols to make sure that all pieces of information were kept private and only used for their intended purpose. In addition, respondents' names and other identification information were not required during data collection. Interviews with head teachers and parents took place in a secured, confidential setting where conversations could not be overheard. Individuals not directly involved in the research activities were not at any one occasion permitted to be present when interviews were taking place.

While reporting the study findings, the researcher did not fabricate data, findings, or conclusions. The researcher reported a complete range of results and diversity of standpoints about the topic, including findings that had been contrary to the researcher's expected theme.

3.12 Study Limitations

The structured questionnaire that was used in this study was prone to recall bias. To overcome this, participants were given ample time to reflect on the questions before giving their responses. In addition, each of the questions was read three times to sampled pupils.

The qualitative findings were also affected by the presence of the researcher during interviews. This might have led to falsification of responses by the participants, especially the parents, to impress the researcher and in fear of perceived repercussions.

3.13 Delimitation of the Study

This study on user fees and retention of pupils in government-aided primary schools was conducted in selected primary schools in Apac district. Its findings were only limited to the selected primary schools and study participants. The findings of the study cannot therefore be accurately generalized to the general population due to the few schools, the numbers of participants, and the selection of samples from a single district.

The study also focused on pupils in government-aided schools only; it could however derive more perspectives from the privately owned primary schools, which have more user fees.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents findings of the study, analysis, and interpretation as set out in the research methodology and study objectives. This study aimed to comprehend how user fees affect pupils' retention in government-aided primary schools in Apac district. It was guided by four objectives: (i) to examine the relationship between user fees and school attendance by pupils in government-aided primary schools in Apac district. (ii) to examine the relationship between user fees and parents' willingness to keep their children in government-aided primary schools in Apac district. (iii) to assess examine the relationship between user fees and the completion of primary education cycle by pupils in government-aided primary schools in Apac district and (iv) to explore the perceptions and experiences of headteachers and parents on the influence of user fees on pupils' retention in government aided primary schools in Apac district. This chapter starts by presenting the quantitative findings in logical order of the study objectives, specifically opening with the descriptive statistics for each variable followed by the inferential statistical findings. This is then followed by the qualitative findings.

4.1 Descriptive statistics

The descriptive statistics have scores where strongly agree (SA) score and agree (A) are grouped to represent agree. While strongly disagree (SD) scores and disagree (D) score represent respondents who disagreed. In addition, the undecided (U) score represents respondents whose opinions were undecided. The mean > 3.00 reveals agree scores, and the mean > 3.00 reveals disagree.

Table 4. 1: Descriptive Statistics for User Fees

User Fees question	SD	D	U	A	SA	Mean	SD
My parent always pays for PTA/ community contribution	0 (0%)	7 (4.7%)	2 (1.3%)	1 (0.7%)	140 (93.3%)	4.83	.673
My parent always pays for participating in building school rooms.	22 (14.7%)	43 (28.7%)	0 (0%)	5 (3.3%)	80 (53.3%)	2.39	1.247
My parent always pays for boarding fee	46 (30.7%)	20 (13.3%)	0 (0%)	3 (2%)	81 (54.0%)	3.35	1.854
My parent always pays for school feeding at this school	22 (14.7%)	43 (28.7%)	0 (0%)	5 (3.3%)	80 (53.3%)	3.52	1.670
My parent always pays for examination fees and report card	4 (2.7%)	1 (0.7%)	0 (0%)	1 (0.7%)	144 (96%)	4.87	.692
My parent always pay for teachers' welfare	17 (11.3%)	1 (0.7%)	0 (0%)	43 (28.7%)	89 (59.3%)	4.51	1.278
My parent always pays for teachers' extra-time /school coaching	2 (1.3%)	0 (0%)	2 (1.3%)	20 (13.3%)	126 (84%)	4.79	.597
My parent always pays for school uniform	63 (42%)	7 (4.7%)	2 (1.3%)	6 (4%)	72 (48%)	3.11	1.923
My parent always pays for photocopying paper	61 (40.1%)	8 (5.3%)	0 (0%)	11 (7.3%)	70 (46.7%)	3.14	1.904

As shown in Table 4.1, the majority of respondents (94.0%) agree with the statement that their parents always paid for PTA/community contribution, also indicated by a mean of 4.83. The respondents felt that parents below average always paid for participating in building school rooms. (mean = 2.39) with 56.6% in agreement and 43.4% disagreeing.

On the other hand, the majority (54.0%) agreed that their parent always paid for the boarding fee (mean = 3.35). also (86.6%) agreed that their parent always paid for school feeding (mean = 3.52). In finding out whether parents always paid for examination fees and report cards for their children, 96.7% agreed that their parents always paid for examination fees and report cards (mean = 4.87).

Further still, the findings show a high perception that parents always paid for teachers' welfare (88%) (mean = 4.51). These findings revealed a very high agreement that parents always paid for teachers' extra-time/school coaching (97.3%) with a mean of 4.79. This study also revealed a relative agreement that parents always paid for school uniforms (52%; mean = 3.11). About whether parents always paid for photocopying paper, the study revealed high agreement to the statement (54%) (mean = 3.14).

Table 4. 2: Descriptive Statistics for School Attendance by Pupils

School Attendance	SD	D	U	A	SA	Mean	SD
My school attendance is irregular due to user fees	20 (13.3%)	33 (22%)	17 (11.3%)	38 (25.3%)	42 (28%)	3.33	1.426
I sometimes miss school days partially or fully due to user fees	22 (14.7%)	24 (16%)	9 (6%)	34 (22.7%)	61(40.7%)	3.59	1.507
I sometimes miss assessment due to issues regarding user fees	44 (29.3%)	32 (21.3%)	10 (6.7%)	40 (26.7%)	24 (16%)	2.79	1.504

Table 4. 2 shows feedback provided by the respondents on school attendance. A slight majority of the respondents, which is 53%, agreed that their school attendance was irregular due to user fees (mean = 3.33), while 35.3% disagreed and 11.3 percent (11.3%) were undecided. Also, 63.4 percent agreed that they sometimes miss school days partially or fully due to user fees (mean = 3.59), and only 30.7 percent (30.7%) disagreed. This means that a slight majority of the respondents agreed that their school attendance was irregular due to user fees.

Table 4. 3: Descriptive Statistics for Parents' Willingness to Keep Children in Primary School

Parents' willingness to keep children in primary school	SD	D	U	A	SA	Mean	SD
My parent is willing to bring me to school because they	8 (5.3%)	18 (12%)	20 (13.4%)	24 (16%)	80 (53.3%)	4.00	1.280
My parent is always willing to keep me at school regardless of	5 (3.3%)	6 (4%)	24 (16%)	24 (16%)	91 (60.7%)	4.27	1.079
My parent wants me to stay in schools so I can grow up to be	3 (2%)	10 (6.7%)	21 (14%)	21 (14%)	95 (63.3%)	4.30	1.067

As shown in Table 4. 3, the majority of respondents, 69.3 percent (mean = 4.00), agreed that their parents were always willing to keep them in primary school because they wanted them to study, 15.3 percent disagreed, and 13.4 percent were undecided. Also, the majority (76.7 percent (mean = 4.27%) agreed that their parents were always willing to keep them at school regardless of the cost, 7.3 percent disagreed, and 16 percent were undecided. Results also showed that 77.3 percent agreed that their parents wanted them to stay in schools so they could grow up to be independent irrespective of the costs, 8.7 percent disagreed, and 14 percent were undecided. Based on this result, the majority of respondents were in agreement with the willingness of their parents to keep them in primary school. This means that many parents are always willing to keep their children in government-aided primary schools in spite of the user fee charge.

Table 4. 4: Descriptive Statistics for Completion of Primary Education Cycle

COMPLETION	SD	D	U	A	SA	Mean	SD
I will be able to complete my primary in time	1(0.7%)	2(1.3%)	16(10.7%)	29(19.3%)	102(68%)	5	
I have always been able to progress to the next class without repeating a class	21(14%)	42(28%)	3(2.%)	26(17.3%)	58(38.7%)	3.39	1.558

Table 4. 4 shows feedback provided by the respondents on completion of the primary school cycle. The respondents, 68 percent (68%) agreed that they were able to complete their primary education on time, while 32 percent (32%) disagreed. Also, 56 percent (56%) of the pupils agreed that they had always been able to progress to the next class without repeating class. In addition, 44 percent (44%) disagree with this statement. This means that the majority of the respondents agreed that they were able to complete their primary education cycle in government-aided primary schools in spite of user fees.

4.2 Inferential statistics

The relationship between the variables is presented herein in the order of relationship between user fees and school attendance, user fees and parents' willingness to keep their children in school, and user fees and completion of primary education cycle by pupils, respectively.

4.2.1 The Relationship between User Fees and School Attendance by Pupils in Government Aided Primary Schools in Apac district

As shown in table 4.5 below, the correlation results showed a negative and insignificant relationship between user fees and school attendance by pupils ($r=-0.082$, $\text{Sig}=0.320$). The relationship is statistically insignificant because the calculated p-value is greater than 0.05 level of significance; therefore, we reject the alternative hypothesis. This finding implies that parents' payment of user fees did not affect pupils' school attendance.

Table 4. 5: Pearson Correlation between User Fees and School Attendance by Pupils in Government- Aided Primary Schools in Apac district.

User fees	Pearson Correlation	1	-
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.32
	N	150	150
School Attendance	Pearson Correlation	-.082	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.320	
	N	150	150

4.2.2 The Relationship between User Fees and Parents' Willingness to Keep their Children in Government Aided Primary Schools in Apac district.

As shown in Table 4.6 below, the correlation result showed a weak positive correlation between user fees and parents' willingness to keep their children in government-aided primary schools ($r = 0.340$, $\text{sig} = 0.000$). The relationship was statistically significant since the calculated p-value was less than 0.05 level of significance. We therefore maintain the alternative hypothesis implying that user fees had a significant effect on parents' willingness to keep their children in government-aided primary schools.

Table 4. 6: Pearson Correlation between User Fees and Parents Willingness to Keep their Children in Government Aided Primary School

User fees		Willingness to keep children in school	
User fess	Pearson Correlation	1	.340**
	Sig. (2- tailed)		.000
	N	150	150
Willingness to keep children in school			
	Pearson Correlation	.340**	1
	Sig. (2- tailed)	.000	
	N	150	150

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

4.2.3 The Relationship between User Fees and Pupils' Completion of Primary Education Cycle in Government Aided Primary Schools in Apac district

As shown in Table 4.7, the Pearson correlation result showed a weak positive correlation between user fees and pupil completion ($r = 0.384^{**}$, $\text{Sig} = 0.000$). The relationship was statistically significant since the calculated p-value was less than 0.05 level of significance. We therefore maintain the alternative hypothesis, implying that parents' payment of user fees had a significant effect on pupils' completion of the primary education cycle.

Table 4. 7: Pearson Correlations between User Fees and Completion of Primary Education Cycle by Pupils

User fees		Completion/Retention
	Correlation	1
		.384**
	Sig.(2-tailed)	.000
	N	150
Completion	Pearson	
	Correlation	.384**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	150

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

4.3 Qualitative Findings

This chapter presents and interprets the findings from the qualitative phase. This is presented as perceptions and experiences of headteachers and parents with user fees in relation to its impact on school attendance, parents' willingness to keep their children in the schools and completion of primary education cycle by pupils.

4.3.1 The Perceptions and Experiences of Headteachers and Parents on the Impact of User Fees on Pupils' School Attendance

The following themes and sub themes were identified.

Table 4. 8. Themes for User Fees and School Attendance

Theme	Sub theme
1. Approach for user fee collection	1. Indirect approach <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Denial of services to pupils (segregation) b. Use of committees 2. Direct sending of pupils back home
2. Pupils and parents' response to user fee collection approaches	1. Periodic attendance 2. School drop out

Headteachers were asked how user fees affected school attendance despite the UPE policy that does not allow them to stop pupils from attending school due to non-payment of the user fee. They reported that school administrators had devised other means to make the payments realized. The findings revealed that schools used different approaches to collect user fees. While some dared to directly send away pupils due to non-payment of user fees, other headteachers took less directive approaches, such as denial of access to services. One headteacher had this to say:

In my school, pupils are not stopped from attending school but are denied access to whatever they have not paid for, like lessons, examinations, report cards, and food. (HT 01)

Another headteacher also advanced his view in that regard below.

Parents who do not cooperate and comply with the resolutions made during the parents' meeting about user fee payment, their children are segregated at school. They are made to sit under the tree or in a separate class room while lessons are going on for those who have paid. This is, however, not good, but it has become a necessary evil. (HT 06)

This means that some pupils whose families could not afford to pay user fees may decide to attend school but do not benefit from the services that the school should provide for his/her primary education.

The approach of choice in some schools was the use of fee collection committees who were members of the SMC. The decision to use such committees was dependent on the decision reached by the school headteachers and the SMC members over what to be done. A headteacher reported:

It is the SMC committee members who are supposed to mobilize how such money (user fees) can be collected from parents without sending pupils back home. However, some parents become aggressive when followed home. They use vulgar language and may want to fight the committee members. This makes the only peaceful method to be sending pupils back home to collect the fees. (HT 07)

This approach also had its shortcomings, as it became risky for the committee members to follow parents home due to the aggressive behavior of some parents when approached at their homes. Most of the fee collection committees have since failed, as shown below:

In my school, the committee members neglect their duty of following parents' home to collect user fees. Many parents became aggressive and picked pangas and axes to fight committee members. So as a last resort, I send their children back home (HT 04)

On the other hand, there were some primary schools whose headteachers dared sending pupils back home in time of need for user fees. This resulted in periodic missing school as reported by a headteacher when asked how he went about with pupils who did not pay user fees:

Since pupils are the ones that school administration can access easily, there is no option, but they have to be sent back home to collect user fees needed by the school. When we send them back home, some of them do not attend school for that period of school time and only wait to come and sit examination at the end of term when paid for. (HT 03)

Besides, some of the headteachers, when asked about the number of pupils who had failed to register at their school because of user fees, for example, a headteacher reported:

Pupils attend school well at the beginning of the term when payments are not yet being asked for, but when school begins to ask for user fee payment, pupils disappear. Many end up dropping out of school completely, but I can't tell the exact number. (HT 02)

Nonetheless, contrary to this kind of behavior towards school attendance by pupils, another headteacher stated:

In term three, many pupils pay user fees, and school attendance is good due to promotion to the next class, which is done in term three (HT 05)

This means that many pupils who had not been attending school in terms one and two resumed school in term three to be promoted to the next class.

However, when asked whether the pupils transfer to other private schools or stay home, a headteacher reported:

These pupils do not move to any other school; they stay at home and are engaged by their parents as laborers. They then come back to promote themselves to the next class after failing to study well in terms one and two due to non-payment of user fees. This category of pupils usually drops out of school in primary seven term one without sitting PLE. (HT 08)

To confirm that there were pupils who finally stopped attending school due to non-payment of user fees from parents' experience, a parent, when asked about pupils whose parents failed to pay user fees, reported:

My two children were repeatedly sent back home by the headteacher because I did not pay user fees and their attendance was so irregular that I decided to stay with them home since this year has been bad financially for my family. When I get money, they will resume school next term (P 07)

It was therefore clear in this study that user fees had impacted indirectly on pupils' school attendance in government-aided primary schools. The pupils attend school periodically and are segregated from benefiting from the services their parents did not pay for from school. This was because many headteachers feared government policy that does not allow them to send pupils back home over user fees.

4.3.2 The Perceptions and Experiences of Parents and Headteachers on the Impact of User Fees on Parents' Willingness to Keep their Children in Government – Aided Primary Schools

The following themes and sub themes were identified;

Table 4. 9: Themes for Willingness to Keep Children in School

Theme	Sub theme
Willingness	Affordability
	Numerous payments regardless of UPE policy
	Poor performance
	Low perceived value of education
	Poor infrastructure

When asked how they felt about user fee payment and their willingness to keep their children in school, some parents reported being overwhelmed by the numerous fees demanded by schools. These have become expensive for low-income earning parents, as reported by P 03, P 08, P 15, and P 25, who were in agreement, and specifically P 03 said:

I am willing to keep my children at school, but the school headteacher and SMC members have included so many payments to be made, and this has made primary education expensive, such that a peasant farmer like me with many children cannot afford to pay even when I am willing.

This view was also compounded by another statement made by parents on their ambivalence to pay user fees due to the conflicting UPE policy, which is against making payment of user fees compulsory by school administrators. Parents P 02, P 16, P 22, and P 27 all confirmed, and especially P 02 stated:

For me, I am willing to keep my children in school because the president said that the government spends money to cater for the education of our children, but school administrators continue to demand user fees be paid, yet we are also poor and do not have the money. So, when the school sends back home my children, I have no option.

This means that many parents believe that primary education is free, but school administrators and SMC members just want to benefit more by collecting money from them in the form of user fees. As a result, they would want to dodge it as much as possible.

On the other hand, there were parents who complained that user fees were so burdensome to parents with many children, and it affected their willingness to keep children in primary school. For instance, parents P 01, P 05, P 14, and P 28 were in agreement, and most especially P 14 said:

I am willing to keep my children in school, but I have five children in primary school. The least amount of money that I have to pay for each is about 27,000 shillings. When I imagine other costs like feeding them at home and medical treatment for those children, it becomes unaffordable for me. So, some children, especially those in lower classes, always remain without their fees being paid, although I may be willing to.

This means that if user fees were absent in primary schools, parents were going to keep their children in government-aided primary schools without complaining a lot. There were parents who expressed that their willingness to pay user fees and keep their children in school was negatively affected by poor performance in government-aided primary schools. These parents, when asked about their willingness, P 10, P 23, and P 28 confirmed, and specifically P 23 said:

Sometimes it is difficult to make these payments of user fees demanded by the school because our children are even not performing well academically. My children cannot speak English, and the headteacher keeps on asking for money for school coaching, teachers' welfare, examination fees, etc., yet my child cannot perform well. Then why should I be wasting my money?

Besides, there were parents who no longer saw the value of education today, and hence user fee payment affected their willingness, as expressed by a headteacher when asked if there were parents that had withdrawn their children from primary school because of user fees, and he said:

There are parents whom I believe do not see the value of education today. They say that the educated are doing nothing in the village, and others are even being employed by the uneducated businessmen. So, there are no jobs in Uganda for educated people, thus no need to spend on education that will not benefit them. (HT 10)

This means that payment of user fees was tagged to benefits that accrued to individuals after schooling. Thus, without it, parents' willingness was affected negatively.

On the contrary, there were parents who showed positive interests in paying user fees and felt there was nothing wrong with making such payments. For instance, some parents, when asked how they felt about user fees and their willingness to keep their children in primary school, P 11, P 26, and P30 were in agreement, and especially P 26 stated:

I feel that I must pay the money that the school charges because the government does not renovate its structures like school pit latrines and urinals, which are essential for our children's health. I cannot wait for the government to do everything for our children to study well.

This was in line with the views of other parents like P 12 and P 29, and specifically P 12, who said:

If the parents continue to say that we are very poor and cannot afford, the government is also not coming to our rescue. Our children shall lag behind in education, and no one will care if not ourselves. So, we must make those petty payments to school for the academic progress of our children.

It therefore implies that many parents are willing to keep their children in government-aided primary schools despite the user fees they are expected to pay. Their major problem was poverty, causing financial constraints limiting them from effecting such payments. Other parents also feared being arrested for keeping children at home during school days. Thus, if payment of user fees were removed, parents would have no complaints about school administration and government.

4.3.3 The Perceptions and Experiences of Headteachers and Parents on the Impact of User Fees on Completion of Primary Education Cycle

The perceptions and experiences of Headteachers and Parents on the impact of user fees on completion of the primary education cycle by pupils in government-aided primary schools was analyzed and interpreted. The headteachers were asked if there were pupils who had failed to complete the primary education cycle because of user fees. Only one theme was identified and named *failure of completion due to user fees*, as represented below:

I do confirm that about 30 percent of pupils who enroll in primary school are not retained in school every year to complete the primary education cycle. This is due to the non-payment of user fees demanded from their parents by the school. (HT 01)

Another headteacher, when asked the same question, stated:

From my experience, about 40 percent of pupils who enroll in primary one do not complete primary seven (HT 05)

Additionally, still on the same view, a headteacher was asked a similar question, and he said:

I can estimate that about 20 percent of pupils do not complete their primary education cycle. (HT09)

This means that many pupils who got tired of being segregated and denied lessons, examinations, report cards, and meals at school due to non-payment of user fees lost interest in continuing with studies and did not complete the primary education cycle.

When asked the major reason why pupils were not able to complete the primary education cycle, another headteacher reported:

There are pupils whose parents cannot just afford to pay user fees and thus cannot complete their primary education cycle. Most parents survive on peasantry farming, and families with many children cannot afford to pay the required user fees by the school (HT 04)

It was clearer that many children from poor families failed to complete their primary education cycle due to non-payment of user fees.

When asked which period of the school term or year most pupils dropped out of school, another

headteacher stated:

When boarding for upper primary classes like P.5-P.7 or even P.7 only is made compulsory, that is when many children are not retained in primary school to complete their education cycle. This is primarily because of the high boarding cost of about 100,000 Shillings and above. Other pupils also disappear during examinations after failing to pay the exam fee and report card. (HT 02)

Nevertheless, many primary schools had their P.7 pupils in boarding, and their enrolment was less compared to when they were in P.5 and P.6 classes. Many headteachers seemed not to care about those who could not come for boarding because they also were made to sign performance agreements with the district education officer and were protecting their positions.

According to parents' perspective on completion of primary education cycle by pupils, parents were also asked if there were pupils, they knew that had dropped out of school completely because of user fees, and P 04, P 07, P 17, and P 21 agreed, and especially P 07 stated that:

There are many pupils who are no longer going to school in this village due to non-payment of user fees. Their parents are not able to pay user fees because of over drinking alcohol. Other parents have many children in school that they cannot afford to pay their fees.

Many pupils had failed to complete their primary education cycle even from the parents' experience. This was also due to the fact that some parents had neglected their family responsibility of looking after their children's education.

In this chapter, findings revealed that user fees had an indirect impact on pupils' school attendance; they made pupils attend school periodically. Many parents were also willing to keep their children in government-aided primary schools despite user fees but were constrained by the high poverty level in the region. The pupils who kept on attending school periodically were being segregated from services that they had not paid for from school decided to drop out of primary school when they reached upper classes, like from primary five to seven, before sitting PLE.

4.4 School Document Analysis

From secondary strand of data, primary schools' enrollment was analyzed and presented as follows;

Table 4. 10 Showing school enrollment for p5, p6 and p7 pupils of Apac district

SCHOOL	SEX	CLASS ENROLMENT PER YEAR								
		2018			2019			2022		
		P.5	P.6	P.7	P.5	P.6	P.7	P.5	P.6	P.7
SCHOOL A	M	57	54	34	57	46	40	56	42	30
	F	42	37	18	30	37	27	21	33	16
SCHOOL B	M	43	34	21	30	39	17	33	34	21
	F	21	16	17	27	22	16	20	13	12
SCHOOL C	M	39	27	16	44	29	21	31	20	16
	F	31	23	20	32	27	23	30	23	19
SCHOOL D	M	31	20	23	42	33	18	36	20	16
	F	33	27	21	31	23	12	20	11	07
SCHOOL E	M	33	30	22	37	23	17	43	34	21
	F	13	18	14	25	28	21	20	14	07
SCHOOL F	M	45	30	23	38	39	20	23	30	20
	F	20	10	14	21	16	15	29	16	18
SCHOOL G	M	26	20	23	47	38	20	40	38	21
	F	20	17	09	27	10	11	24	16	11
SCHOOL H	M	41	33	24	42	30	26	46	45	26
	F	26	27	19	23	29	08	30	21	10
SCHOOL I	M	30	32	19	39	31	19	39	34	21
	F	18	22	08	21	16	07	26	17	05
SCHOOL J	M	45	33	19	47	40	33	31	24	27
	F	20	19	11	37	23	09	38	19	06
TOTAL ENROLMENT		667	529	384	696	573	380	636	504	330

As shown in table 4. 10 in Apac district, the enrolment of pupils decreased by 393 from primary five to six, and those who progressed to primary seven decreased by 512 pupils. Between the years 2019 and 2022, there was a great decline in enrolment of pupils by 179. Meanwhile, pupils who progressed from primary five to six also declined by 192 and primary six to seven by 243, respectively.

The above results therefore showed low retention of pupils as they progressed to the upper class of primary seven. This means that as many pupils kept attending school periodically, missing examinations, and performing poorly academically, they failed to pass the pre-registration test for PLE and eventually dropped out of school. Besides, many government-aided primary schools have their P7 pupils in boarding, which most parents could not afford the cost.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Introduction

This chapter discusses the key findings according to the specific objectives of the study and evaluates the implications of the research findings in comparison with the findings from previous studies conducted by other scholars and theoretical framework work.

5.1 User Fees and School Attendance by Pupils in Government-Aided Primary Schools

Findings from the quantitative study showed that there was no significant relationship between user fees and school attendance by pupils in government-aided primary schools. This means that whether a pupil has paid or not paid user fees, it did not affect their school attendance. The absence of a relationship between these variables in this particular objective might be due to the fact that the majority of participants in this study seemed not to be victims of being sent back home due to failure to pay user fees required by the school. Correspondingly, there could be a general lack of insight among participants in how they had been missing school periodically or being segregated by making them sit under a tree at school or in a different classroom and wait for time to go back home. These reasons therefore overshadowed their judgment and perceived individual participation in teaching and learning processes at school.

The qualitative finding of this study also showed that school attendance was periodic and varied according to the school term of the academic year. In term three, many parents pay user fees, and school attendance is better compared to other terms because it is a promotional term for the next class or level of education.

Noncebo et al (2022) in their study similarly revealed that headteachers viewed user fees as a double edged sword in education. While these fees could improve quality of providing essential resources like books and infrastructure they also create significant barriers to access

particularly for children from poor households leading to lower attendance and completion rates.

The findings from both quantitative and qualitative data were in line with Uganda's education policy, which discourages primary school headteachers from sending pupils away from school for any kind of fee payment. This is inferred from the fact that most of these user fees are regarded as voluntary contributions to be made by parents according to UPE policy (GoU, 2008).

However, the quantitative finding of the current study showed that findings in Arinaitwe and Agaba (2024) in Uganda were in contrast regarding primary school attendance. It indicated that the failure to pay user fees by parents led to a decrease in pupils' school attendance. Their findings revealed a significant positive correlation between user fees and school attendance by pupils in primary schools.

Nevertheless, user fees negatively impacted pupils' school attendance since the pupils attended periodically. They were even denied the opportunity to benefit from the teaching and learning processes that took place at school due to segregation over payment by the headteachers.

The current study findings aligned with the study theory the Education Function Production model which elucidates that user fees constitute a key input with direct implication for retention, an output. High and frequent user fees may be an additional burden to parents hence act as a financial barrier that deter financially vulnerable pupils from attending school regularly.

5.2 User Fees and Parents' Willingness to Keep Their Children in Government-Aided Primary Schools

The findings from this study showed that there was a significant relationship between user fees and parents' willingness to keep their children in primary schools. The absence of user fees had been associated with the willingness of parents to keep their children in primary schools.

The qualitative finding of the current study also showed that the majority of the parents did not understand their responsibilities towards their children's schooling expenses. Most of them reported being willing to pay user fees yet not acting because of poverty. It was also revealed that parents think that it is solely the responsibility of the government to cater for the education of their children.

This finding is in tandem with a study by Emurugat et al. (2022) in the Busoga region of Uganda. They analyzed the views of children on the partnership roles played by their parents that best promote their retention at school. Findings revealed that parents were willing to keep their children in school, but because of the viscous cycle of poverty, they were not able to pay fees and provide other requirements needed by primary schools.

Besides, the qualitative findings of this study are in line with those from another qualitative study that was carried out by Carlos in 2014 in Arusha, Tanzania. It investigated factors hindering parental participation in school activities, and findings revealed that the majority of the parents had neglected their responsibility of providing for their children's schooling needs, leaving it to the government. It was also found out that most of the parents were not willing to provide school uniforms and writing materials, among other scholastic materials, for their children in primary schools.

The perception and experiences of headteachers on parents' willingness to pay user fees and actively participate in school activities in public primary schools in Botswana was investigated by Pansiri and Bulawa (2013). Their findings aligned with those of this current study, it showed that out of the 745 respondents, 82% of the headteachers indicated that parents were unwilling to pay any fee if requested.

However, the fact from the current study remains that schools were collecting user fees from parents for supporting school activities like renovating pit latrines, teachers' houses, and processing examination and report cards. Nevertheless, education stakeholders agreed that the impact of collected user fees could only contribute to increased parents' willingness when controlling for socio-economic status of parents. This concurs with the findings by Wilder (2014) that parents' payment of user fees would have a positive impact on their willingness to keep their children in primary schools, as they would own the primary schools where their children are studying.

The above finding is in line with Uganda's education policy that encourages parental involvement in schools. As such, School Management Committees (SMCs) have been set up at the primary school level to ensure that whatever contribution is needed from parents is discussed during committee meetings and agreed upon by the parents themselves. Such payments are regarded as voluntary by UPE policy (GoU, 2008). This means that since user fees are voluntary payments, it significantly influences parents' willingness to keep their children in primary schools.

5.3 User Fees and Completion of Primary Education Cycle by Pupils in Government-Aided Primary Schools

The quantitative result showed a significant relationship between user fees and completion of the primary education cycle by the pupils in government-aided primary schools. This means that the absence of user fees led to more pupils completing, while its imposition caused few pupils to be able to complete. Since user fees in this study are seen to determine the completion rate of the primary education cycle, the higher the cost of the user fees, the lower the completion rate of the primary education cycle. (Katan and Burnett 2004).

This finding is in line with that from a study by Muthuri and Kirera (2013) in Kenya that investigated the internal and external factors hindering completion of the primary education cycle and transition of pupils from primary to secondary schools in Meru County. It showed a significant relationship between user fees and completion of the primary education cycle. The study revealed that households continued to incur costs for their children to complete the primary education cycle, which eventually led to a low completion rate for pupils whose parents were unable to pay.

Additionally, from this current study, the finding is in agreement with a report by UNICEF (2017) that children from the poorest families are three times less likely to be in school and complete education than their wealthier counterparts worldwide. Families that survived on peasantry farming and with many children could not afford to pay the required user fees by the school. Most parents in this category gave priority to other family needs like food and medical care, leaving their children in primary schools to drop out of school.

Besides, this finding is also in tandem with the Education Production Function Model which posits that user fees are like educational inputs which have direct influence on retention and completion of the primary education cycle, an output (Bowless, 1970). In the event of failure

by parents to pay user fees, only individuals who can afford to pay will be able to enrol and continue with their education. Many pupils after being segregated for long from education services eventually decide to drop out of school in upper primary level.

All in all, completion of the primary education cycle by pupils in government-aided primary schools was hampered by the presence of user fees that most parents were unable to pay. This led to periodic school attendance, poor academic performance, and an eventual lack of completion of the primary education cycle by many pupils.

5.4 Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of user fees on retention of pupils in government-aided primary schools in Apac district. In line with this study objectives, this section provides the conclusion from the findings.

5.4.1 User Fees and School Attendance by Pupils in Government-Aided Primary Schools

The study showed that user fees such as PTA contribution, teachers' welfare fees, examination and report cards' fees and boarding fees among others, did not affect pupils' school attendance. Headteachers confirmed that they used other mechanisms to collect user fees other than sending pupils back home and were only sent back as a last resort. However, the mechanisms included segregating those who had not paid from accessing the paid services at school, which eventually affected their retention at school. It is concluded that user fees may not affect attendance directly but eventually lead to pupils' lack of retention and completion of the primary education cycle.

5.4.2 User Fees and Parents' Willingness to Keep Their Children in Government-Aided Primary Schools

The study revealed that many parents of pupils in primary schools are willing to keep their children in schools despite the user fee payment that they are supposed to make. But their problem was poverty, which had financially constrained many families from achieving such payments. Parents with many children also gave priority to other family needs like buying food and medical care for the children, neglecting education. Others also still believed that UPE meant free education. This study then concluded that user fees had a significant influence on parents' willingness to keep their children in government-aided primary schools.

5.4.3 User Fees and Completion at Primary Education Cycle by Pupils

This study showed that user fees such as PTA contribution, teachers' welfare fees, examination and report cards' fees and boarding fees for pupils in primary seven significantly affected completion of the primary education cycle. It was established by headteachers that there were a number of payments that parents had to make when pupils reached P.7. That when emphasis was put on boarding for the pupils to perform well in PLE, many pupils dropped out of school completely before sitting PLE. Therefore, this study concluded that user fees are the major cause of failure by pupils to complete their primary education cycle.

5.5 Recommendations

In this section, based on the findings and conclusions around each study objective, the following are the recommendations:

It was established that though pupils were not sent back home due to fear of UPE policy by school administrators, pupils who had not paid user fees were segregated, made to sit under a tree or a different classroom, and denied lessons, examinations, and report cards, which eventually led to a lack of their retention in primary schools. It is recommended that school

administrators should ensure that these user fees are not so expensive to pupils whose families are financially unable to pay or give them a bursary. This will enable even pupils from very poor households to have equal opportunities to attend school with their counterparts from wealthy households.

The study also showed that user fees had made many parents unable to keep their children in government-aided primary schools even when they were willing due to poverty. It is recommended that the district education department establish mechanisms that sensitize parents/guardians and other stakeholders on their support of the school amidst the UPE program. This will eventually bring parents on board to own school activities and contribute funds willingly to support school processes and programs.

The study further established that many pupils are not retained in primary schools, especially at the upper primary level. That very few pupils sit for PLE compared to their number when they enrolled in primary one. It is recommended that school administrators and policymakers supplement the UPE structure put in place by the government of Uganda with a sustainable program of pupils' financial assistance. Also, the government of Uganda should increase the existing Capitation Grant per child by 30,000 shillings to cover school building maintenance costs. This gesture will ensure that pupils from poor families are able to remain in school and complete their primary education cycle.

5.6 Recommendation for Further Research

Basing on the following study's identified gaps and limitations, the following recommendations for further research are made;

- i. Further studies should be done employing a larger sample size to enhance the generalizability of findings.
- ii. In this study, data was collected from headteachers whose time was very limited

because of their managerial position. It would be therefore beneficial to conduct a study that involves both school academic and administrative staff to best understand the availability and impact of user fees on pupils' retention in government-aided schools.

- iii. In this study, the concept of pupils' retention was limited to concepts of pupils' attendance and completion of the primary education cycle. Whereas this can also be explained through other concepts. Therefore, studies should be carried out to examine the impact of the aforementioned user fees on pupils' participation, promotion, and repetition rates in the primary education cycle in Uganda.
- iv. The study could not consider the concept of opportunity costs, which can be a noteworthy determinant of pupils' retention in primary schools. These costs can refer to the benefits that the household could have gained by involving their children in income-generating activities besides sending them to school. Therefore, studies should be carried out to examine the impact of opportunity cost on pupils' retention in primary schools.

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Appendices

Appendix i: Consent Form for Participants

Introduction: I am Akello Pamela, a master student of Kyambogo University, Reg. No.18/U/GMEF/19792/PD. I am carrying out a research on the topic “User fees and Retention of Pupils in Government-Aided primary schools in Apac District”. The study has been cleared by the research committee of Kyambogo University.

Voluntarism and withdrawal from the study: Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are free to participate or withdraw at any time.

Privacy and confidentiality: Your identity will not be revealed anywhere during or after this study. Any information gathered from you in this study will be kept confidential.

Benefits to participants: There are no direct financial benefits or material benefits to you in this study. However, data and information obtained from the study may be beneficial in influencing policies to improve on the internal efficiency of primary education.

Risks: There will be no health risks as you participate in this study.

Compensation for participation: All activities of this study will be conducted at your most convenient time without unduly interfering with your work or other schedules. Hence, there will be no monetary or material compensation for your time.

You are requested to sign below to show that you have understood and therefore consent to take part in the study.

I have read the above informed consent document and understand the information provided to me regarding my participation in this study. I do hereby give consent to take part in the study and will sign in the space provided.

Signature..... **Date**.....

Name of person providing consent.....

Appendix ii: Proposed Pupils' Questionnaire on User Fees

Dear respondent,

I am Akello Pamela, a master of education student of Kyambogo University, Reg.No.18/U/GMEF/19792/PD. I am carrying out research on the topic: User Fees and Retention of Pupils in Government-Aided Primary Schools in Apac District. This questionnaire is part of the study being carried out. It is intended to find out user fee charges that parents pay despite Universal Primary Education Policy. The information drawn from this questionnaire will be confidential and only be used for study purposes. Please answer the questions freely and fairly as much as possible.

SECTION A: USER FEE CHARGES IN PRIMARY EDUCATION

Using the key; Strongly Agree (SA) =5, Agree (A) =4, Undecided (U) =3, Disagree (D) =2, or Strongly Disagree (SD)=1, rate your opinion regarding user fees at your school

DF	USER FESS					
DF1	My parents always pay for PTA/community contribution	5	4	3	2	1
DF2	My parent always pays for participating in building school rooms	5	4	3	2	1
DF3	My parent always pays for accommodation and food (boarding fee)	5	4	3	2	1
DF4	My parent always pays for school feeding at this school	5	4	3	2	1
DF5	My parent always pays for examination fees	5	4	3	2	1
DF6	My parent always pays for teachers' welfare	5	4	3	2	1
DF7	My parent always pays for teachers' extra-time/ school coaching	5	4	3	2	1
DF8	My parent always pays for my school uniform from school	5	4	3	2	1
DF9	My parent always pays for photocopying paper	5	4	3	2	1

SECTION B: RETENTION OF PUPILS

Using the key; Strongly Agree (SA) =5, Agree (A) =4, Undecided (U) =3, Disagree (D) =2, or Strongly Disagree (SD) =1, rate your opinion regarding retention of pupils at your school

SA	SCHOOL ATTENDANCE					
SA1	My school attendance is irregular due to user fees	5	4	3	2	1
SA2	I sometimes miss school days partially or fully due to user fees	5	4	3	2	1
SA3	I sometimes miss assessment due to issues regarding user fees	5	4	3	2	1
WN	WILLINGNESS TO KEEP CHILDREN IN SCHOOL					
WN1	My parent is willing to bring me in school because they want me to study	5	4	3	2	1
WN2	My parent is always willing to keep me at school regardless of the costs	5	4	3	2	1
WN3	My parent wants me to stay in school so that I can grow up to be independent irrespective of the costs	5	4	3	2	1
CM	COMPLETION					
CM1	I will be able to complete my primary education circle in time	5	4	3	2	1
CM2	I have always been able to progress to the next class without repeating a class	5	4	3	2	1

Appendix iii: Proposed Interview Guide for Headteachers on User Fees

Dear respondent,

I am Akello Pamela, a master of education student of Kyambogo University Reg.No.18/U/GMEF/19792/PD. I am carrying out research on the topic: **User Fees and Retention of Pupils in Government-Aided Primary Schools in Apac District**. This interview guide is part of the study being carried out. It is intended to find out user fee charges that parents pay despite Universal Primary Education Policy.

The information drawn from this interview will be confidential and only used for study purpose. Please answer the questions freely and fairly as much as possible.

SECTION A. Introduction;

1. How long have you been the headteacher of this school?

SECTION B:

1. a) How have user fees affected attendance by pupils in this school?
- b) Are there pupils who have failed to register at this school? Please explain the causes regarding financial needs that the school requires from them.
- c) What is the number; sex and age of pupils who mostly fail to come to school because of the above reason?

SECTION C:

- a) Are there parents who have withdrawn their children from this school because they were not willing to pay user fees?
- b) What is the number; sex and age of pupils who mostly fail to come to this school because their parents are not willing?
- c) In your opinion, are they always transferred to private schools or they drop out of school completely? If transferred, are those private schools cheaper than the government aided ones.

SECTION D:

- a) Are there pupils who have failed to complete primary education cycle because of user fees
- b) In your opinion, why do you think schools have to collect money from pupils at school to fund the various school programmes?
- c) How do you go about pupils who fail to pay user fees in cash?

- c) What possible strategies can you suggest to be put in place to ensure that all pupils are retained at all level of basic education in Apac District?

END GOOD LUCK

Appendix iv: Interview Guide for Parents of Primary 5, 6 and 7 Pupils on their Willingness to Keep their Children in School

- 1) How many children do you have in primary schools?
- 2). What are some of the items you normally pay for your child or children in primary schools? Do they include the following?
 - a) PTA/Community contribution
 - b) Teachers' Incentive
 - c) School feeding
 - d) Text book
 - e) Uniform
 - f) Boarding fee
 - g) Mock examination
 - h) National examination
 - i) Passport size photo
 - j) Report card
 - k) Teachers' extra time/ coaching
 - l) Transport
 - m) Holiday package n) Computer fees
- 1) How much do you pay for some of those items and how do you get the money?

- 3) Do you pay in cash or in kind?
- 4) How do you feel about those payments?
- 5) Are there some pupils who have failed to go to school or dropped out completely because their parents did not pay?
- 6) What do you suggest the following should do to improve retention of pupils in government aided primary schools?
 - a) Government
 - b) Parents
 - c) The school
 - d) The community

END

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME

Appendix v: School Document Review Guide

School code: Document type:

Purpose of the document:

School years	2018		2019		2022	
	Qty	%	Qty	%	Qty	%
Pupils' enrolment in P.5, P.6 & P.7						

Appendix vi: Researcher's Proposed Work Plan 2022

ACTIVITIES	EXPECTED OUTCOME	TIME FRAME
Proposal writing	Proposal submitted for ethical approval.	July, 2022
Approval of proposal by Research committee of Graduate school	Proposal approved by research committee	July-August, 2022
Data collection	Data collected and securely Stored	September 2023
Data processing	Data analyzed and presented	November 2023 to January 2024
Report writing	Report written and approved by supervisors for submission	October 2025
Submission of report	Approved report submitted in the agreed format.	October 2025

Appendix vii: Budget Estimate

S/N	ITEMS	QUANTITY	UNIT COST (SHS)	TOTAL (SHS)
1	Stationaries			
	a) Reams of paper	04	20,000	80,000
	b) Pens	10	1000	10,000
	c) Note books	03	5,000	15,000
	d) Flash disc	01	30,000	30,000
2	Secretarial service			
	a) Typing	92 pages	1000	96,000
	b) Photocopying	92 pages	100	9.600
	c) Printing	92 pgs x 6 copies	200	1,152,000
	d) Binding	6 copies	12,000	72,000
3	Research assistant	02	200,000	400,000
4	Communication		50,000	50,000
5	Contingencies		150,000	150,000
	Total			2,064,000/=

Appendix viii: Introductory Letter

