

EXPLORING THE DRIVERS OF SCHOOL NON-COMPLETION AMONG VULNERABLE CHILDREN IN BUGUJJU, MUKONO DISTRICT

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DECLARATION

I, LAKUT JOREM HORNARUS, hereby declare that the contents of this research are the result of my own study, efforts and findings expect where stated, and to the best of my knowledge, they have never been presented to any certificate, Diploma, advanced diploma and Degree of any professional award in any higher institution or university of learning.



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APPROVAL

The undersigned certifies that he has read and hereby recommends to accept research entitled Exploring the drivers of school non- completion among vulnerable children in Bugujju, Mukono District in partial fulfillment of diploma in social work and social administration Supervisor.

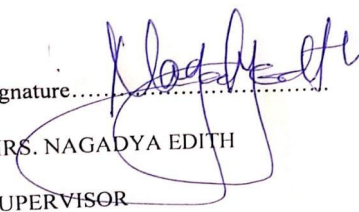
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Child neglect and educational deprivation have been a thorny issue in global matters regarding the wellbeing and development of children, especially ones belonging to vulnerable households. The lack of access to quality education is a significant factor that causes school non-completion globally since it deprives the children of their right to education (UNICEF, 2021). According to the estimates provided by the United Nations, more than 244 million children and adolescents worldwide are out of school by 2023, which proves that the access to education is still uneven across the regions (UNESCO, 2023). Child neglect that can be defined as the inability of caregivers to offer children the necessary emotional, physical, and educational support has been cited as a major factor that disrupts the continuity of children education and the performance of their educational results (Gilbert et al., 2020). Research has shown that children who are neglected have a higher probability of poor school attendance, behavior issues and low academic performance than the children who received adequate parental care (Font & Maguire-Jack, 2021). Historically, international efforts, including the Sustainable Development Goal 4, have sought to provide inclusive and equitable-quality education to all children by 2030, but the vulnerable children are disproportionately impacted (UNESCO, 2023). In Africa, school non-completion among vulnerable children is at its worst because of widespread poverty and family instability coupled with a lack of effective child protection systems. With an estimated 98 million children out of school as of 2022 (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2022), Sub-Saharan Africa hosts the highest number of out of school children in the world. Child neglect and household deprivation are widely reported as the key factor of school dropout across African nations including Kenya, Nigeria, and Tanzania, where children in disadvantaged families tend to struggle to stay in school due to economic factors and the absence of parental support (Oketch & Mutisya, 2019). It has also been found that orphaned and vulnerable children often take part in household chores or take part in labour activities, which disrupt their

participation in education (Bhat, 2020). This has led to the historical trend across Africa, which shows that vulnerable children are at a higher risk of educational exclusion than their counterparts living in stable family backgrounds. The problem of school non-completion in vulnerable children has been reported to persist over the decades in Uganda despite government initiatives to increase access to education. Universal Primary Education (UPE) was introduced in 1997, which greatly boosted the enrolment rates, yet the completion rates have remained rather low (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2018). Recent statistics show that approximately 60 percent of students who enroll in primary school are able to complete the entire primary cycle, an indicator of a long-standing dropout problem. As well, currently, 26 percent of children in Uganda aged between 6-12 years are out of school with the rural communities having higher rates of school dropouts. Poverty, child labour, early marriage, and family neglect are among the factors which still influence the children education process in the country (Nalukwigo & Ssewanyana, 2021). Child protection reports also show an increase in cases of child neglect and abuse in Uganda, with child helplines receiving an average of 50 emergency child protection cases daily (Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, 2025). These trends show that the vulnerable children are still at high risk of not completing school and in the rural districts where the socioeconomic challenges are more pronounced.

1.2 Theoretical Background

The theory behind this research is the Attachment Theory in which the emotional relationship between a child and caregiver affects the development, behaviour and social outcomes of a child. The theory was initially developed by John Bowlby in 1969, which explains the influence of the emotional relationship between a child and caregiver in affecting the development, behaviour and social outcomes of a child. Attachment theory assumes that children need to receive the same level of emotional support, protection and nurturing at the hands of the caregivers so that they will develop secure attachments that will result in psychological stability and healthy development (Bowlby, 1988). Children who grow up with insecure patterns of attachment due to the failure of their caregivers to give them sufficient emotional

and social support may develop with insecure attachment patterns in later life stages, which adversely impact their behaviour, motivation and learning outcomes (Ainsworth, 1978). According to the attachment theory applied to education, children with the experience of neglect or a poor relationship with caregivers may show poorer engagement in school-related activities, poor outcomes, and are more likely to drop out (Bergin and Bergin, 2019). Recent research has gone further to underscore the applicability of attachment theory in the interpretation of educational performance among the vulnerable children. Studies have shown that children brought up in positive and emotionally stable households are likely to have higher self-esteem, more focus, and be more resilient at school than their neglected or inconsistently parented counterparts (Allen, 2018). On the other hand, children who are vulnerable and lack parental guidance, emotional support, and supervision tend to have a difficult time maintaining a consistent school attendance and academic progress (Madigan et al., 2019). Attachment theory can thus be used to offer a helpful framework to explain the effects of child neglect and relationships between caregivers and children on school participation and school completion rates among vulnerable children. In terms of the current study, the idea of attachment can be used to explain how the lack of proper parental care, emotional neglect, and poor family relationships may contribute to school non-completion in vulnerable children in Bugujju, Mukono District.

1.1.3 Conceptual Background

The concept of school non-completion refers to the situation when learners do not complete a prescribed level of education, such as receiving primary or secondary education, before reaching the expected level of educational qualification (UNESCO, 2020). A mix of household, institutional, and social factors often contributes to school non-completion because of their influence on a child to remain in school until completion (Sabates et al., 2018). Child neglect, poverty, parental lack of supervision, and insufficient emotional support are some of the factors that have been identified as key determinants of educational discontinuity among vulnerable children (Evans et al., 2019). Vulnerable children are those who have been exposed to situations that endanger their well-being, such as orphanhood, neglect, abject poverty, or family instability (UNICEF, 2022). Child neglect, parental support and household socioeconomic conditions, which

were expected to affect school non-completion among vulnerable children, were the independent variables of the study. Past studies have shown that children of low-income families tend to have challenges in fulfilling their educational needs of school fees, uniforms, and learning materials, which more likely results in dropout (Nsubuga, 2020). Likewise, inadequate parental oversight and emotional support have been linked with low school attendance and low academic drive among children (Kazeem and Ige, 2017). The moderating variables like community support systems, government education policies and school environment can either enhance or weaken the relationship between the moderating variables and school completion. It is necessary to understand how these variables relate to each other to determine the key determinants of school non-completion among vulnerable children.

1.3 Contextual Background

Although significant strides have been made to enhance access to education in Uganda, school non-completion has remained a big problem especially among vulnerable children in rural communities. Research has indicated that some of the major causes of school dropout in Uganda are economic hardship, family neglect and lack of parental involvement (Ssewanyana & Kasirye, 2020). This is even more in rural districts where households commonly depend on child labour to survive and where educational resources are scarce (World Bank, 2021). According to the national education statistics, the rates of completion of the primary school are rather low, as only about 52% of learners complete the primary school (UNESCO, 2022). The Mukono District, just as many other districts in Uganda, has a significant population of vulnerable children that are faced with socioeconomic conditions that can impede their educational achievements. A community like Bugujju is identified with low-income households, large families, and lack of child welfare services, which may possibly lead to child neglect and non-completion of school. Although a number of studies have been conducted to study the trends of school dropout at national level, there is limited empirical study that specifically examines the drivers of school non-completion amongst vulnerable children in Bugujju, Mukono District. This gap in localized evidence results in a gap in research, which restricts the creation of specific

interventions to address educational vulnerability in the community. Consequently, this paper aims at examining the causes of school non-completion amongst vulnerable children in Bugujju, Mukono District in a bid to produce context specific knowledge that can guide policy and community based interventions.

1.4 Statement of the Problem

Education is widely accepted as a fundamental human right and a major factor contributing to social and economic progress yet many vulnerable children in Uganda are still struggling to get through with their education. The rates of school dropout and non-completion continue to be high in the country, regardless of the attempts of the government, including the provision of Universal Primary Education (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2020). It is estimated that out of ten pupils who join primary school, only about six pupils complete the full cycle, and thousands of pupils drop out of school every year due to socioeconomic and family-related issues. Moreover, the out of school girls in Uganda are estimated to be approximately 26 percent of the children between 6 and 12 years of age. School non-completion has been identified to be caused by poverty, child labour, early marriage, and limited parental support (Nalukwogo & Ssewanyana, 2021). These issues are frequently exacerbated among vulnerable children by neglect, family disintegration, and a lack of adequate emotional and social support systems (Evans et al., 2019). Anecdotal reports by leaders of local communities and local organizations in communities like Bugujju in Mukono District indicate that a large number of vulnerable children find it difficult to stay in school because of lack of funds and neglect by their families. Nevertheless, the empirical studies that explicitly look at the causes of school non-completion among the vulnerable children in this area are limited. Lack of localized evidence renders it hard to make policy, educators, and community stakeholders to design specific interventions to address the unique problems faced by vulnerable children in Bugujju. Therefore, this study seeks to explore the drivers of school non-completion among vulnerable children in Bugujju, Mukono District.

1.5 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the drivers of school non-completion among vulnerable children in Bugujju, Mukono District.

1.6 Objectives of the Study

- 1) To explore the drivers of school non-completion among vulnerable children in Bugujju, Mukono District.

1.6.1 Specific Objectives

- 1) To examine the influence of child neglect on school non-completion among vulnerable children in Bugujju
- 2) To assess the role of household socioeconomic conditions in school non-completion among vulnerable children
- 3) To analyze the influence of parental support on school completion among vulnerable children
- 4) To examine the moderating role of community and institutional support in reducing school non-completion.

1.7 Research Questions

- 1) How does child neglect influence school non-completion among vulnerable children in Bugujju
- 2) What is the role of household socioeconomic conditions in school non-completion among vulnerable children?
- 3) How does parental support influence school completion among vulnerable children?
- 4) How do community and institutional support systems influence school completion among vulnerable children?

1.8 Research Hypotheses

H1: Child neglect has a significant influence on school non-completion among vulnerable children.

H2: The socioeconomic status of households is a major factor which contributes to school non-completion among vulnerable children.

H3: Parental support has a significant effect on school completion of vulnerable children.

1.8 Scope of the Study

1.8.1 Geographical Scope

The research was done in Bugujju, Mukono District in Uganda. The Mukono District was considered since it has both rural and peri-urban population where vulnerable children experience socioeconomic challenges that can impact on their access to education. Also, the district has a significant number of children in low-income families, which is why it is a good place to examine the school non-completion in the vulnerable groups. The research scope was also the drivers of school non-completion among vulnerable children, and was specifically interested in the effects of child neglect, parental support, and household socioeconomic conditions on school non-completion. The choice of these variables is based on the fact that other researchers have found these variables as important predictors of educational achievement among disadvantaged children. The other variables will be viewed as moderating variables as opposed to primary variables (school infrastructure and government policy).

1.8.2 Time Scope

The study will be restricted to the time frame of March to April 2026. This period was chosen as it will provide enough time to collect, analyse and report the data within the academic timeframe of the undergraduate research project. Also, the study is justified by the fact that the non-completion of school by vulnerable children in the

community remains a persistent problem despite the ongoing education reforms and policy interventions.1.8 Justification of the Study

The study is justified by the fact that non-completion of school by vulnerable children in the community is a persistent problem despite the ongoing education reforms and policy interventions. Even though the social and economic impact of children who leave school has been decreasing over the years, many children continue to drop out of school because of social and economic factors (UNESCO, 2022). It has a specific impact on vulnerable children since they frequently experience neglect, poverty, and low parental support, which adversely affect their academic achievement (Evans et al., 2019). It is thus important to understand drivers of school non-completion among this group to design effective interventions that can promote inclusive education.

In addition, the current studies on school dropout in Uganda have largely concentrated on national or regional figures with little emphasis on particular communities like Bugujju in the Mukono District. This research will help to address this gap by offering localized evidence on factors that can influence school non-completion among vulnerable children. It is anticipated that the findings will have a contribution to the academic knowledge, policy making, and community based initiatives of improving educational outcomes of disadvantaged children.1.9 Significance of the Study.

1.9 Significance of the Study

The results of this study will be useful to a number of stakeholders. The knowledge on the underlying factors that cause school non-completion among vulnerable children can inform policymakers and government agencies to implement targeted education policies and child protection programs. The findings can also be used by the educational institutions to establish the supportive learning conditions that can address the needs of vulnerable learners.

The community organizations and non-governmental organizations dealing with vulnerable children will also benefit in the study as they will be able to provide evidence that can guide intervention strategies to improve school retention. The

study will also be relevant to the academic community by enhancing the already established knowledge on the correlation between child neglect and educational achievements in the context of attachment theory.

1.10 Conceptual Framework

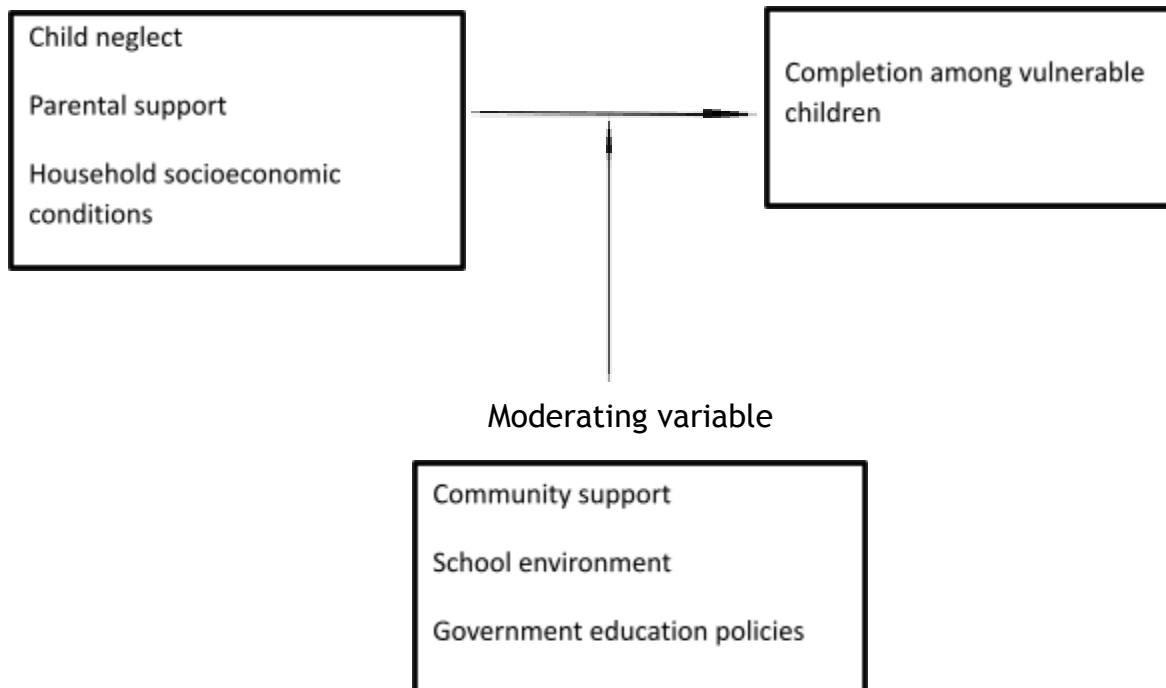
Theoretical Framework

This study is informed by Attachment Theory which was developed by John Bowlby. The theory opines that children need consistent emotional bonds with caregivers in order to achieve secure attachments that facilitate healthy psychological and social development (Bowlby, 1988). Secure attachment helps children to form confidence, emotional stability, and the possibility to interact effectively in the learning environment (Allen, 2018). Children who have been neglected or given inconsistent caregiving may develop insecure attachment patterns, which have negative implications on their behaviour, motivation and academic involvement. When considering this study, the attachment theory can be applied in explaining how lack of proper parental care, emotional neglect and poor associations between the caregiver and the child could lead to influence over the participation of the child in education and the likelihood of the child dropping out of school. Such children who are vulnerable due to lack of supportive family environments may suffer emotional distress, loss of motivation and lack of supervision, which may be translated to irregular school attendance and eventual dropout. Accordingly, the attachment theory can be used as a theoretical perspective through which one can comprehend the relationship between child neglect and school non-completion among vulnerable children.

Conceptual Framework

Independent variable

Dependent variables



CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

The chapter reviewed literature on the drivers of school non-completion of vulnerable children. The review was structured along with the objectives of the study and is focused on the key themes such as child neglect, parental support, household socioeconomic conditions, and moderating effect of community and institutional support on school completion. The reason why the literature has been reviewed was to examine what the current researchers already know, identify trends, and highlight areas of agreement and disagreement among scholars, and determine the research gap that the current study aims to fill. Researchers argue that literature reviews can be useful in placing a new study within the context of prior research as well as identifying research gaps that need to be addressed through the new research (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). It has been demonstrated all over the world that the participation in and completion of education depend on various social, economic, and family-related factors that impact the abilities of children to stay in school until graduation (UNESCO, 2022). Children that are vulnerable in specificity are faced with a lot of challenges such as poverty, instability in the family, and absence of parental support which contribute significantly to the risk of dropping out of school (Evans et al., 2019). Developing country evidence shows that children in disadvantaged households are twice as likely to drop out of school as compared to those in stable households (World Bank, 2021). Thus, an overview of the appropriate literature offers a baseline of the reasons behind school non-completion and helps to address gaps in knowledge that justify the current investigation which focuses on Bugujju in Mukono District.

2.1 Theory.

This paper is informed by Attachment Theory that was formulated by John Bowlby. The theory aids in understanding that children need to have consistent emotional relationships with caregivers to develop secure attachment that helps them to

develop healthy psychological and social development (Bowlby, 1988). Secure attachment helps children to become confident, emotionally stable, and able to engage effectively within learning settings (Allen, 2018). Children who end up developing insecure attachment patterns out of neglect or inconsistent caregiving tend to have behavioral, motivational, and academic involvement that is unsatisfactory. The attachment theory in the context of this study explains how poor parental care, emotional neglect and poor caregiver relationships may affect the educational involvement of a child and predispose a child to non-completion of school. Children who are vulnerable and do not have the support of their families may be emotionally distressed, less motivated, and supervised less often which can result in irregular school attendance and dropout. Hence, it has been well established that child neglect is one of the leading factors which contribute to school non-completion in vulnerable children. The term child neglect defines the absence of proper emotional, physical, educational, and psychological support on the part of parents or caregivers to support a child in his or her development (Font and Maguire-Jack, 2021). On a global scale, studies estimate that about one in four children experience some kind of neglect when they are children, which has a significant impact on their wellbeing and educational performance (Stoltenborgh et al., 2019). The lack of supervision, encouragement, and support in their academic pursuits, often result in poor school attendance and subsequent dropout (Gilbert et al., 2020). Children who have experienced neglect in most developing countries are more likely to be involved in household labour or street activities that disrupt their education (Bhat, 2020). Research carried out in Sub-Saharan Africa suggests that vulnerable children who experience neglect are at increased risk of not attending school on a regular basis due to the lack of parental guidance and protection (Oketch & Mutisya, 2019).

Child neglect is one of the major challenges in Uganda that has an impact on education and health of most children in the country. According to reports by child protection agencies, the cases of neglect and child abuse have been on the rise over the past years due to poverty, breakdown of families and social pressures (Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, 2023). Studies carried out in a number of

districts in Uganda have found that children in careless households tend to have low motivation towards schooling and are more likely to drop out before they reach primary school age (Nalukwigo & Ssewanyana, 2021). Moreover, the Uganda Child Helpline also reports thousands of cases of child neglect and abuse each year, which speaks of the prevalence of the issue (UNICEF, 2022). Neglect also denies the children access to basic educational needs like school uniforms, meals and learning materials which are necessities to school participation (Ssewanyana and Kasirye, 2020). These results indicate that child neglect plays a key role in determining educational persistence among children at risk. However, despite the past research to study child neglect in relation to child welfare, there is limited research conducted to specifically examine how neglect contributes to school non-completion among vulnerable children at the community level in places like Bugujju in Mukono District.

2.2 Research Gap

The literature review reveals that child neglect, household socioeconomic circumstances, parental support, and community support systems have a significant effect on educational outcomes of vulnerable children. Numerous researches carried out all over the world and especially in Africa have focused on the connection between poverty, parental influence, and school dropout. On the same note, studies in Uganda have been used to examine the impact of economic hardship and child neglect on the welfare and education of children. Nevertheless, the majority of these studies are based on the data at national levels or urban areas, with little emphasis put on particular rural communities where vulnerable children may encounter some special challenges. Moreover, very limited studies have been done to determine the interaction of various factors such as child neglect, parental support, and socioeconomic conditions that can affect school non-completion among vulnerable children at the community level. Thus there is still a big gap in localized studies on the drivers of school non-completion in vulnerable children in Bugujju, Mukono District. This gap is significant in creating context-specific evidence that can be used to inform policies and interventions that will improve educational outcomes of vulnerable children. The aim of the current study is to add to the body of knowledge

by delving into the drivers of school non-completion among vulnerable children in Bugujju, Mukono District.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the methodology that was used in conducting the study on the drivers of school non-completion among vulnerable children in Bugujju, Mukono District. The chapter presents the research design, study area, sources of information, population and sampling methods, study variables, data collection processes, data collection instruments, quality control, data processing and analysis, ethical considerations, methodological constraints expected in the study and the work plan of the study. The research methodology was an important aspect that ensured that the study has been conducted systematically and the findings generated by the study are reliable and valid (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). Research scholars indicate that an effective methodology aids the researcher to gather pertinent data that will answer the research questions and fulfill the objectives of the study (Saunders et al., 2019). Methodological rigor is a fundamental notion in the research of social science, creating plausible results that can drive policy and practice, especially in response to complex social problems such as school dropout and child vulnerability (Bryman, 2016).

Research suggests that about 2030 percent of the research results are affected by the selection of the research design and sampling methods used in conducting the study (Neuman, 2017). Hence, the research design that the study will take will be descriptive research design to explore the drivers of school non-completion among the vulnerable children in Bugujju, Mukono District. A descriptive research design suits the studies that aim at describing phenomena, characteristics, and relationships between variables in a given population (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). This design enabled the researcher to obtain in-depth information regarding experiences of vulnerable children, parental support systems and socioeconomic conditions that may affect the school completion. The reason why descriptive research designs are so commonly used in educational and social science research is that it allows the researcher to focus on real life situations without manipulation of variables (Bryman, 2016).

Saunders et al. (2019) suggest that descriptive studies assist the researcher to comprehend the patterns and trends in a population, especially when the researcher is investigating a social issue affecting a given population. Within the scope of this study, the design has helped the researcher to test the relationship between child neglect, parental support and household socioeconomic conditions and school non-completion among vulnerable children. Research has shown that descriptive designs are widely utilized in more than 40% of educational research on the basis that they are used to provide comprehensive information about social phenomena that affect learners (Neuman, 2017). Consequently, this research design suited perfectly to achieve the great goal of investigating the causes of school non-completion among vulnerable children.

3.2 Population and Sampling Techniques

3.2.1 Target Population

The target population of this study involved vulnerable children, parents or guardians, teachers and community leaders in Bugujju, Mukono District. Children who face any of the following conditions, which pose a threat to their wellbeing and educational progress, are considered vulnerable children (UNICEF, 2022). The study population was made up of those who have direct knowledge and experience about the education and welfare of children in the society. Research scholars state that the target population is the complete group of individuals out of which the researcher intends to gather data and make conclusions (Neuman, 2017). Vulnerable children and their caregivers are regarded as the key respondents in most educational studies as they can offer valuable insights on the challenges that affect school participation (Evans et al., 2019).

It is estimated that vulnerable children make up a substantial portion of school-aged groups in rural communities in Uganda, with some reports showing that almost 30 percent of children are experiencing some type of social or economic vulnerability (UNICEF, 2022). Thus, the sample size of the study was about 60 respondents who

were representative of the target population in Bugujju. The sample consisted of vulnerable children, parents or guardians, teachers, and community leaders. Sampling is significant as it allows the researcher to get representative information of a manageable number of respondents rather than studying the entire population (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). Under the research guidelines, an undergraduate study usually equates to 30 to 100 respondents based on the scope of the research study (Saunders et al., 2019). A sample of 60 respondents is deemed appropriate as it will yield a meaningful data and will be manageable within the time and resource constraints of the study. Research indicates that small community-based educational research studies tend to use sample sizes between 50 and 80 respondents to study social problems that impact children and families (Bryman, 2016). The reason why the sample size chosen was 60 respondents is this: According to Creswell (2018) and Saunders et al. (2019), a typical undergraduate research project uses a sample size of 30 to 100 respondents.

A sample of 60 is: Manageable within time and resource constraints Adequate to meaningful analysis Consistent with similar community-based studies.

3.2.2. Determining Study Population

The estimated population size in the study in the Buguju Sub-County is as follows:
 Vulnerable children = 120 Parents/Guardians = 80 Teachers = 40 Community leaders = 20
 Total population = 260 respondents
 3. Sample Size Per Category (Proportionate Sampling Formula used) Calculated: sample per category = (x total sample size
 Vulnerable Children x 60 =30 Parents/Guardians x 60=15 Teachers x60=10 Community Leaders x 60=5

3.3 Justification of Data Collection Methods Questionnaires:

These will be used with vulnerable children and teachers to gain access to standardized responses Interviews: Interviews will be used with parents and leaders because of their expertise and experience

Key Informant Interviews: These will be used with parents and leaders due to their expertise and experience. **Justification of Sampling Techniques** Simple random sampling (60 respondents) was chosen according to the research guidelines of undergraduate research. The sampling was done proportionately to make sure all categories of respondents are fairly represented. Simple random sampling was applied as a method of sampling a vulnerable group of children who do not continue to school, in order to reduce bias in the study and also as a means of selecting the key informants, such as parents, teachers, and leaders of the communities in which the vulnerable children live. Key informants were the teachers, community leaders, and parents who possess knowledge and experience pertaining to the education of vulnerable children and this was done by purposive sampling. Purposive sampling gives the researcher the freedom to select respondents, who in his or her opinion are the most relevant respondents to the research objectives (Saunders et al., 2019). To select vulnerable children involved in the study to ensure that each child has an equal opportunity of being included, simple random sampling was employed. Random sampling lessens bias and enhances the representativeness of the sample (Neuman, 2017). It has been found that purposive and random sampling techniques are best combined to enhance the quality of social science research since the combined approach will enable the researcher to obtain both specialized and general views (Bryman, 2016). Therefore, these sampling techniques enabled the researcher to obtain balanced and relevant information regarding school non-completion among vulnerable children.

3.4 Study Variables and Indicators

The study involved both independent and dependent variables. The independent variables were child neglect, parental support and household socioeconomic conditions. The dependent variable will be school non-completion among vulnerable children. Variables that were moderated were community support systems and school environment. The factors of mental health among the vulnerable children will be the emotional wellbeing, the stress levels, feelings of belonging in school, and the capacity to focus on the academic activities. The importance of mental health

indicators lies in the fact that psychological wellbeing is a key factor affecting children in terms of academic engagement and school retention (WHO, 2021). According to research, it is estimated that about 13 percent of children around the world experience mental health issues that influence their learning and participation in school (WHO, 2021). Moreover, children who are exposed to neglect or family disruption have a higher chance of experiencing emotional distress and lack of motivation to pursue education (Madigan et al., 2019). Thus, the measurement of these indicators assisted the researcher to comprehend the way psychological wellbeing and social factors interact to determine school completion among vulnerable children.

3.5 Measurement Levels

Depending on the type of variables being measured, the study employed different levels of measurement such as nominal, ordinal and interval measures. Variables like gender and respondent category were measured using nominal measurement because these variables are measured using categories rather than numerical values (Neuman, 2017). Some of the variables that were measured using ordinal measurement included the level of parental support or how frequent school attendance, where the responses can be categorized as low, medium or high. The interval measurement will be used on such variables where numerical values are involved like age or years in school. Research scholars note that the selection of the right levels of measurement is significant since it defines the type of statistical analysis that can be conducted in the process of data analysis (Saunders et al., 2019).

Research has shown that nominal scales are often used in combination with ordinal scales as they enable researcher to effectively analyze social features and attitudes (Bryman, 2016). Thus, data collection consisted of a number of steps to make sure that the research is done systematically and in an ethical manner. To begin with, the researcher got an introduction letter of the university to request permission of the local authorities and school administrators in Bugujju. The researcher met the potential respondents and informed them about the purpose of the study after getting

the permission. The respondent was made aware of the voluntary nature of their participation and their right to withdraw any time during the study. The researcher then used questionnaires and interviewed the selected respondents to gather pertinent information. Research scholars believe that the data collection processes were clearly defined, which helped to reduce the number of errors and provide consistency in the information retrieved through respondents (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). Research indicates that the reliability of the research findings is enhanced by the fact that structured data collection procedures involve asking all respondents similar questions in a standardized fashion (Saunders et al., 2019). Thus, questionnaires and interview guides were the primary data collection tools used in the study of driving forces of school non-completion in vulnerable children. The vulnerable children and parents were administered questionnaires to seek information about their experiences, socioeconomic status, and challenges in education.

The use of questionnaires is common in social research since it enables the researcher to collect data on a large number of respondents in a relatively limited amount of time (Bryman, 2016). Interviews will be conducted with teachers and community leaders through interview guides to gain more in-depth information on the factors that influence school completion among vulnerable children. Interviews present in-depth qualitative data that can inform the explanation of the views and experiences of the respondents (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). It was also equipped with such things as notebooks, pens, and digital recorders that were used to record the responses made during the interviews. Studies show that the combination of questionnaires and interviews will enhance the quality of data since the researcher will be able to collect both quantitative and qualitative data (Saunders et al., 2019).

3.6 Sample Size

The study involved a sample size of approximately 60 respondents selected from the target population in Bugujju. The sample included vulnerable children, parents or guardians, teachers, and community leaders. Sampling is important because it enables the researcher to obtain representative information from a manageable number of

respondents instead of studying the entire population (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). According to research guidelines, undergraduate studies typically use sample sizes ranging between 30 and 100 respondents depending on the scope of the study (Saunders et al., 2019). A sample size of 60 respondents is considered adequate for generating meaningful data while remaining manageable within the time and resource constraints of the study. Studies show that small community-based educational research projects often use sample sizes between 50 and 80 respondents to examine social issues affecting children and families (Bryman, 2016). Therefore, the selected sample size provided sufficient information for analyzing the drivers of school non-completion among vulnerable children.

Category of respondents	Study population	Sample size	Method of data collection	Sampling techniques
Vulnerable children	120	30	Simple random sampling	Questionnaire
Parents/ guardians	80	15	Purposive sample	Interviews
Teachers	40	10	Purposive sample	Interviews
Leaders	20	5	Purposive sample	Interviews
Total	260	60		

3.6.1 Determining the Total Sample Size

The study adopted a total sample size of 60 respondents, which is justified by research guidelines:

According to Creswell (2018) and Saunders et al. (2019), undergraduate research typically uses 30-100 respondents

A sample of 60 is:

Manageable within time and resource constraints

Adequate for meaningful analysis

Consistent with similar community-based studies

3.6.2. Determining Study Population

The estimated study population in Buguju Sub-County is grouped as follows:

Vulnerable children = 120

Parents/Guardians = 80

Teachers = 40

Community leaders = 20

Total population = 260 respondents

Calculating Sample Size per Category (Proportionate Sampling)

Formula used:

$$\text{sample per category} = \left(\frac{\text{category population}}{\text{total population}} \right) \times \text{total sample size}$$

Vulnerable Children

$$\frac{120}{260} \times 60 = 30$$

Parents/Guardians

$$\frac{80}{260} \times 60 = 15$$

Teachers

$$\frac{40}{260} \times 60 = 10$$

Community Leaders

$$\frac{20}{260} \times 60 = 5$$

3.7 Justification of Data Collection Methods

Questionnaires: Used for vulnerable children and teachers to collect standardized responses

Interviews: Used for parents and leaders to obtain deeper insights

Key Informant Interviews: Specifically for leaders due to their expertise and experience

5. Justification of Sampling Techniques

Simple Random Sampling:

Used for vulnerable children

Ensures equal chance of selection

Reduces bias

Purposive Sampling:

Used for parents, teachers, and leaders

Selects individuals with relevant knowledge

Appropriate for qualitative insights

3.8 Final Justification Statement

The sample size of 60 respondents was determined based on established research guidelines for undergraduate studies. Proportionate sampling was used to ensure fair representation of all respondent categories. Simple random sampling was applied to vulnerable children to minimize bias, while purposive sampling was used to select key informants such as parents, teachers, and community leaders due to their knowledge and experience regarding school non-completion among vulnerable children.

3.9 Quality/Error Control

To ascertain the quality and minimize any errors in the study, the researcher will carry out a pilot test of the data collection instruments before an actual data collection process. Pilot testing is also useful to spot questions that are not clear and to enable the researcher to make appropriate changes to enhance the reliability of the instruments (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). The researcher also made sure that all the questionnaires are duly filled and then the respondents are left to minimize missing data. Moreover, the respondents will be given standardized instructions to make sure that the way the questions are interpreted is the same across all the respondents. Research shows that research errors can be minimized by up to 30 percent during pilot testing and proper supervision of the data collection process in social science studies (Saunders et al., 2019). Thus, the strategy of data processing and analysis assisted in enhancing the reliability and validity of the research findings by organizing and processing the gathered data to be analyzed. All the quantitative data derived out of questionnaires were coded and keyed in the statistical software like Microsoft Excel or SPSS to analyze. The data was summarized using descriptive statistics like frequencies, percentages, and tables, and present the findings. Descriptive statistics is an educational research method most often used to describe patterns and relationships within a dataset (Bryman, 2016). Thematic analysis in which the responses were categorized into themes in accordance to the study objectives was used to analyze qualitative data gathered through interviews. Thematic analysis assists the researcher to identify the themes and meanings within the qualitative data (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). Research points out that the ethical considerations were of major concern in ensuring that the research was done responsibly and that the rights of the participants are not violated (Saunders et al., 2019).

3.10 Ethical Considerations

The ethical considerations were critical in ensuring that the research is conducted responsibly and that the rights of the participants are not violated (Saunders et al., 2019). All the respondents gave an informed consent to the researcher prior to data collection. The participants were made aware of what the study was all about, the

procedures, and their right to discontinue the study without any adverse effects. The confidentiality was achieved in the sense that personal information given by respondents is not given to unknown persons. Following the guidelines of research ethics, the protection of the privacy of participants and their participation in the study on a voluntary basis are the essential principles of the research in the social sciences (Resnik, 2020). Also, special consideration was given to vulnerable children who were involved in the research to ensure that their safety and wellbeing was not compromised in the course of research. One of the limitations was lack of time and money that limited the possibility to obtain information of a big number of respondents. The other difficulty was unwillingness of some respondents to give information because they were fearful of being stigmatized or feared giving up their privacy. Furthermore, there were communication barriers like language barriers, which influenced the clarity of some participants. Studies have shown that most community-based studies are faced with difficulty in availability of respondents and limited resources (Bryman, 2016). Nonetheless, the researcher has overcome these hurdles by planning on how to collect the data, maintain confidentiality and seek the help of the community leaders in the area when need be.

3.11 Work Plan / Timeline

The work plan summarized the key activities that would be involved in the research process and the time that each activity would take. By organizing the research activities within a specified time frame, one can ensure that the study will be accomplished in the necessary academic time frame (Saunders et al., 2019). Research indicates that proper time management enhances the productivity of research and helps to minimize delays in the creation of academic projects (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). Thus, the suggested timeline helped the researcher to complete the study in a systematic way within the time frame of March to April 2026.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS, PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETYATION OF RESULTS

4.0 introduction

This chapter presents the findings, analysis, interpretations, captures the response rate, demographic characteristics of the respondents. The findings and results are presented in the form of narratives and tables to demonstrate the demographic findings.

4.1 Data analysis and presentation of findings

4.1.0 The response

The study captured a sample size of 60 respondents from Bugujju village, Mukono district. Where 30 were for questionnaire and 30 for interview guides totaling to 60 respondents of the 60 respondents both questionnaire and interview guides were successfully completed. The responses were obtained from parents, teachers, vulnerable children and local leaders within the community of Bugujju providing insights about the drivers of school non completion among vulnerable children in Bugujju, Mukono district. Out of the 60. Out of the 30 interview guide completed responses, 10 interviews were conducted in Luganda, the spoken local language of the area, 4 interviews were conducted in ateso, 16 conducted in English, 30 questionnaires were conducted in English this helped to obtain the information from the respondents

4.1.1 Analyzing the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents

The following information was collected according to the demographic data of the respondents and when the respondents were requested to write their age in years, the respondents were proved to be around age of 11 years and 15 years old. Below down information reading the age of respondents from the filed

Table 1: showing age of respondent

Variable	Number	Percentage(%)
Age		
11-12	11	36.7%
13-14	15	50.0%
15	4	13.3%
Total	30	100%

From table 4.1, the majority of respondents fell into age of 13 to 14 which is 15 participants representing 50% of the respondents. While 11 to 12 were 11 making a percentage of 36.7 and then the last one having 4 respondents totaling to 13.3 percent. Although there were a total of 30 potential respondents from questionnaire as it is reflected in the table above.

4.1.3 Demographic information on gender

The other information on demographic circle was collected on gender, the gender of the respondents was of a key determinant factor in analyzing the related to Drivers of school non completion among Vulnerable Children in Bugujju. All the participants and respondents were male and female children who suffer from school challenges and mainly the reply here was from parents

Table 2: showing the gender of respondents (key informant interview guide)

Respondents	Numbers(n)	Male	Female	Percentage(%)
parents	15	8	7	50%
Teachers	10	3	7	33.3%
leaders	5	2	3	16.7%
Total	30	13	17	100%

Table 4.2 shows that parents formed the largest group of respondents (50%), indicating that the study mainly relied on information from parents. Teachers account

for 33.3%, while local leaders made up the smallest proportion at 16.7%. in terms of Gender, females were the majority (56.7%), while males constituted 43.3% of the respondents were more represented in the study than males.

Table 3: showing main source of livelihood in household

Status	Number	Percentage(%)
Farming	13	43.3%
Small business	3	10.0%
Casual labor	2	6.7%
Formal employment	10	33.3%
Others	2	6.75
Total	30	100%

Table 4.3 shows that farming is most primary source of livelihood total of 13 accounting to 43.3% of the households, formal employment represents the second category which is 10 giving a percentage of 33.3% of respondents, 3 respondents had small business representing 10.0% and both casual labor and others at 2 represent the low percentage of the percentage which is 6.7% of the data from respondents collected.

Table 4: showing care givers of vulnerable children

Care giver	Number(n)	Percentage(%)
Both parents	23	76.7%
Single parents	3	10.0%
Guardians/relatives	4	13.3%
Alone	0	0.0%
Others	0	0.0%
Total	30	100%

The findings in table 4 illustrate the primary caregiver structures for vulnerable children within the study area where the vast majority of children is 23 giving 76.7% for both parents, single parents being 10 accounting to 10.0% percentage of the respondents, guardians/ relatives out of 4 leveraging to 13.3% and lastly alone and others give 0.0% of care givers.

Table 5: showing class level of children's

class level	Number(n)	Percentage(%)
P3-P4	6	20.0%
P5-P6	8	26.7%
P7	16	53.3%
Total	30	100%

The findings in table 5 categorize children according to their current level of primary education. The data shows that more than half of the children which is 16 take a percentage of 53.3% are in P7 which is a final year of primary education, children between P5 and P6 which are 8 represent 26.7% of respondents, then P3 to P4 which is 6 represent 20.0% of children in that level.

4.2 Child Neglect and School Non-Completion among Vulnerable Children

Child neglect is widely recognized as one of the major factors influencing school non-completion among vulnerable children. Child neglect refers to the failure of parents or caregivers to provide adequate emotional, physical, educational, and psychological support necessary for the development of a child (Font & Maguire-Jack, 2021). Globally, research estimates that approximately one in four children experience some form of neglect during childhood, which significantly affects their wellbeing and educational outcomes (Stoltenborgh et al., 2019). Neglected children often face emotional distress, lack of supervision, and limited encouragement in their academic activities, which may result in poor school attendance and eventual dropout (Gilbert et al., 2020). In many developing countries, children who experience neglect are more likely to be engaged in household labour or street activities that interfere with their education (Bhat, 2020). Studies conducted in Sub-Saharan Africa indicate that vulnerable children experiencing neglect are at higher risk of missing school regularly due to lack of parental guidance and protection (Oketch & Mutisya, 2019).

In Uganda, child neglect remains a significant challenge that affects the education and wellbeing of many children. Reports from child protection agencies indicate that cases of neglect and child abuse have increased in recent years due to poverty, family breakdown, and social pressures (Ministry of Gender, Labor and Social Development, 2023). Research conducted in several districts of Uganda found that children from neglectful households often experience low motivation toward schooling and are more likely to drop out before completing primary education (Nalukwago & Ssewanyana, 2021). Additionally, the Uganda Child Helpline receives thousands of reports annually related to child neglect and abuse, highlighting the widespread nature of the problem

(UNICEF, 2022). Neglect also limits children's access to basic educational necessities such as school uniforms, meals, and learning materials which are essential for school participation (Ssewanyana & Kasirye, 2020). These findings suggest that child neglect significantly influences educational continuity among vulnerable children. However, although previous studies have explored child neglect in relation to child welfare, limited research has specifically examined how neglect contributes to school non-completion among vulnerable children at the community level in areas such as Bugujju in Mukono District.

Child labor is closely linked to poverty and is a major barrier to school completion among vulnerable children. In Bugujju, many children are involved in various forms of labour, including farming, brick making, domestic work, and small-scale trading. While some forms of work may be considered part of socialization, excessive involvement interferes with schooling. Children engaged in labor often wake up very early, work long hours, and arrive at school tired and unable to concentrate. Others miss school entirely on market days or during peak agricultural seasons. This irregular attendance disrupts learning continuity and makes it difficult for children to keep up with the curriculum. The immediate financial rewards from child labor can make education seem less valuable in the short term. Families may prioritize income over schooling, especially when faced with financial crises. In some cases, children themselves choose to continue working rather than attend school because they feel responsible for supporting their families.

Over time, the combination of fatigue, absenteeism, and poor academic performance leads to discouragement and eventual withdrawal from school. Child labor also exposes children to exploitation and harsh working conditions, further affecting their physical and mental well-being. Therefore, it significantly contributes to school non-completion.

4.3 Household Socioeconomic Conditions and School Non-Completion

Household socioeconomic condition is a critical indicator on whether children continue with school or drop out before finishing with school. Socioeconomic status denotes the level of income, employment, education and social resources available in a household that determine the quality of life and opportunities of family members (Bradley and Corwyn, 2017). It has been shown that children with low-income families encounter several barriers to education such as inability to pay school fees, access to learning materials, and poor living conditions that impede academic performance (World Bank, 2021). Out-of-school children globally are more likely to be the children of the poorest households, which proves the close correlation between poverty and school dropout (UNESCO, 2022). Poverty also compels many children to work in labour markets to support their families, which reduces the time that children have to attend school and work on their academic assignments (Evans et al., 2019). Household poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa has been cited as one of the most crucial factors that drive school non-completion among children. The research in Kenya, Tanzania, and Nigeria demonstrates that children of economically disadvantaged families are prone to dropping out of school in comparison to children of financially stable families (Oketch & Mutisya, 2019). Rural families have a hard time covering the expenses of basic education despite the efforts of the government to enhance access to education (Bhat, 2020). Poverty is a significant problem in Uganda that impacts the level of education among the children. According to national statistics, about 20% of Ugandans live below the poverty line, and children in such families are often not able to complete school because of financial constraints (World Bank, 2021). It has also been found that the families that struggle with economic hardship might focus on their immediate survival needs over the long-term educational investment of their kids (Nsubuga, 2020).

Consequently, poor children are more susceptible to skip school, take up classes again or end up dropping out of school before completing their education. Nevertheless, despite a number of studies having been conducted to establish the correlation between poverty and educational attainment, very few studies have been done

specifically to determine how the socioeconomic conditions within the homes of vulnerable children affect school non-completion. Poverty has been widely known as the most over-powering and latent factor causing school non-completion among the vulnerable children in Bugujju, Mukono District. Despite the fact that in Uganda primary education is officially free under the Universal Primary Education (UPE), there are numerous hidden and indirect costs that families need to cover. These consist of school uniforms, exercise books, pens, lunch, transport and in some cases contribution to school development. To families whose income falls below the poverty line, these expenses are daunting. This situation can compel parents and guardians to make tough choices regarding allocation of resources. In most instances, education is compromised with the immediate needs that are related to survival like food, shelter and medical services. Children of such families often miss schooling as they lack basic needs such as casual labor, farming or street selling to sustain their families. This is a divided attention in work and school and this negatively influences academic performance and attendance. With time, constant absenteeism translates to frustration, low performance, and ultimate dropout.

The situation is made even worse by the instability in incomes in Bugujju where many households rely on subsistence agriculture and informal employment. With economically tough times, like drought or loss of jobs, children face a greater risk of being pulled out of school. Thus, poverty not only reduces access to education, but also directly leads to non-completion because of the long-term deprivation and economic stress.

4.4 Parental Support and School Completion among Vulnerable Children

Another factor that affects school completion of children is parental support. Parental support is the emotional support, monitoring, advice, and material support that parents or other caregivers offer to children as part of their educational journey (Hill and Tyson, 2018). Research has shown that children with good parental support are more likely to hold positive attitudes towards education and perform better in school in comparison to children who lack parental support (Fan & Chen, 2017). Parental

engagement in school processes like checking of homework, school meetings and promotion of regular attendance is a key factor in enhancing educational outcomes (Jeynes, 2018). The studies conducted around the world have shown that when parents are engaged, students can achieve higher academic success by up to 20 percent and a much lower chance of dropping out of school (Hill & Tyson, 2018).

The parental involvement in the education of the children in many African communities might be limited by the poverty, the low levels of literacy and the demanding working schedules. In a study carried out in a number of African countries, it was found that many parents cannot adequately support their children in their studies due to limited knowledge about the school curriculum and due to the lack of time to oversee the studies of their children (Oketch & Mutisya, 2019). Parental participation in education activities in Uganda is highly dissimilar in both urban and rural societies. Research has found that children whose parents constantly monitor their school performance and offer positive reinforcement are more likely to stay in school than children who receive little or no parental support (Ssewanyana & Kasirye, 2020).

Moreover, absenteeism and low academic achievements in vulnerable children have been linked to parental negligence and a lack of supervision (Nalukwigo & Ssewanyana, 2021). Although these findings have been made, few studies have been done on the role of parental support in influencing the school completion of vulnerable children in particular communities like Bugujju in Mukono District. Stability and family structure is very important in the educational process of a child. In Bugujju, a large number of vulnerable children are a result of broken homes, single parent families, or a result of domestic violence, substance abuse or neglect. Such irregular surroundings have adverse effects on the capability of a child to attend school. In such families children usually do not receive emotional support, guidance and supervision. Parents or guardians might have other priorities other than education since they might be facing other challenges like poverty, illness, or even lack of education. In other instances children are left to care either themselves, or their younger siblings, which is a hindrance to school attendance.

Domestic violence and in fighting in the home produces a stressful environment which influences the mental health and concentration of the child in school. Such exposure may result in behavioral issues among children exposed, lack of interest in education, or avoidance of school altogether. In the worst scenario children can run away or be turned into street children and totally give up their education. Child-headed families, which frequently occur as a result of the death of parents, also have a very high burden on children, making them prematurely take up the role of adults. The conditions greatly elevate the chances of missing out on school completion. One of the factors that have been instrumental in ensuring that children remain in school and attain their education is parental involvement. In most of the vulnerable families in Bugujju, the parents or guardians either cannot or do not want to be actively involved in the education of their children. Other parents are not aware of the significance of education particularly when they themselves did not go to school. Consequently, they might not be observing attendance, tracking academic progress, or even giving them the necessary support like helping them with their homework. This inactivity may make children feel that education is not treasured.

4.5 Moderating Role of Community and Institutional Support

The systems of community and institutional support will also play a significant role in influencing the educational outcomes of vulnerable children. Social networks, local organizations, religious institutions, and non-governmental organizations are considered community support and assist disadvantaged children and families (Putnam, 2020). These support systems can offer financial aid, mentorship programmes, school resources and psychosocial support that enable vulnerable children to stay in school (UNICEF, 2022). Research has indicated that communities that have good social support networks are less likely to have high school dropout rates than communities with weak social cohesion (Evans et al., 2019). School completion among vulnerable children can also be influenced by institutional support like government education policies and school programs. The example is the introduction of such initiative as Universal Primary Education in Uganda to make

education more accessible to children of poor households (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2018).

Despite the fact that such programs have positively influenced school enrolment, the issues in the quality of school education, school resources, and family poverty still impact the completion rates (World Bank, 2021). Some cases have seen the significant involvement of non-governmental organizations and community-based programs to support vulnerable children by providing them with scholarship programs and sponsorships of educational programs (UNICEF, 2022). Nonetheless, accessibility and functionality of these support mechanisms are not the same in all communities. In communities where there are weak community support structures, vulnerable children might not get the support they need to stay in school until they finish. Thus, the knowledge of how the community and institutional support can moderate the relationship between the family factors and the school non-completion is significant in addressing the educational vulnerability.

As time goes by, these drawbacks build up resulting in low performance and subsequent dropout. Findings on the Influence of Child Labour. The findings established that without attention to poverty, attempts to increase school completion rates among vulnerable children may not be successful in the long term. A lot of children have to work to earn the living of their families; they do such works as farming, vending, and household work. This can be of short term financial gain but this greatly disrupts their education. The children who are subjected to labour tend to get tired and they are not in a position to be active in class. They can also skip school on a regular basis particularly during the best working seasons like the planting or the harvesting time. This inconsistent school attendance disturbs the learning process and makes them find it hard to match their school peers in terms of education and learning. Other children get used to money-making and become disinterested in education altogether. This results in a progressive un-involvement in the education system. The study has therefore noted that early marriages and teen pregnancies are major reasons as to why children fail to complete their education mostly in girls. Family cultures and economic constraints usually push families to marry off their girls

at tender ages. In others, this is interpreted as a measure to lessen financial responsibility or acquire bride price. School dropout is also caused by teenage pregnancy because of the stigma, lack of support and increased responsibilities. Even though there are policies that enable young mothers to resume school, majority do not do so due to societal prejudice and the need to take care of the child. This has the irreversible effect of disrupting their education. Early marriage also restricts the opportunities of girls since their tasks are no longer those of students, but rather wives and mothers. It is assumed that they have to take care of the home and children, leaving no or little time to go to school. The results highlight the importance of the community sensitization to the need to have better access to reproductive health education to reduce the challenges.

4.6 Family instability and parenting difficulties

It was found that family instability was one of the key factors that influenced the ability of children to attend school. A significant number of vulnerable children are brought up in homes that are characterized as being in conflict, being neglected or lacking the support of their parents. These climates cause emotional and psychological stress, which adversely impacts academic performance. Children in low-income families tend to lack guidance and supervision and are thus more likely to indulge in risky behaviors or drop out of school. They have to in certain instances assume the role of adults like taking care of their siblings or even contributing to the household income. This restricts their capacity to concentrate on education. Another significant finding of the study was the parental attitudes toward education which was found to be the determinant of whether children remain in school or not. Parents who do not attach importance to education are less likely to aid learning of their children. This highlights the importance of strengthening family support systems and promoting positive parenting practices to improve school completion rates.

4.7 School Environment and Institutional Factors.

The study revealed that school-related factors significantly influence students' ability to complete their education. This is because poor infrastructure, overcrowded classroom and absence of teaching materials provide an unfavorable learning

environment. These difficulties decrease the quality of schooling and make students unwilling to remain in school. Other teacher related problems like absenteeism, low motivation and poor training also influence the learning outcomes. Failure by students to get the right kind of teaching will make them find it easy to underperform, and lose interest in going to school anymore. This makes dropout a possibility, particularly among young children, who have to walk long distances every day. This translates to fatigue and absenteeism. Findings of the study indicated that gender inequality has a great influence on non-completion of school. Cultural aspects that require the girls to be responsible at home rather than in school make them have more problems. They are usually obliged to assist them in house chores and this restricts them in getting time to attend school. Conversely, the boys can be encouraged to participate in income generating ventures which in turn influences their education. But, girls have higher risks of dropping out because of early marriage and pregnancy. This has resulted in a gender disparity in education. The situation is also aggravated by cultural beliefs that do not value the education of girls. Certain communities have considered that girls do not need education and hence have put less investment in girl education. Health and Psychological Factors Health issues were found to be significant factors contributing to school non-completion. Repeat sickness will cause absenteeism and interfere with learning. When children are frequently ill, they are unable to cope with the schoolwork thus poor academic performance. Another significant problem is malnutrition, particularly in children with poor families. Poor nutrition impacts concentration, memory and overall cognitive development. This makes them less capable of doing well in school. Learning is also influenced by psychological factors like stress, trauma and low self-esteem. The children with challenging backgrounds might not be confident and motivated, and it will be more difficult to remain in school. The results point to the necessity of the integrated systems of support that would take care of both the health-related and emotional well-being.

4.8 Conclusion

This study finds that school non-completion among vulnerable children in Bugujju is a complex phenomenon, which is interrelated and can be divided into numerous

factors. Such factors are poverty, child labour, early marriage, family instability, and poor school conditions. All these are factors which contribute in various ways but tend to strengthen the other factors. The biggest factor is poverty, which influences access to, as well as retention in school. Social and cultural influences, especially those that influence girls, are also influential factors. The problem is augmented by institutional issues in schools which lowers the quality of education. The study also finds that to correct non-completion of schools a holistic approach that extends beyond the education sector is required.

The interventions should be based on the underlying factors, such as economic deprivation and social conventions. The study provides a recommendation that a multi-sectoral intervention involving the government, schools, families, and communities should be implemented to deal with school non-completion. The government ought to invest more in education in order to curb the hidden costs and better their schools. It must also implement legislation against child labour and early marriages and increase social protection efforts to vulnerable families. Schools ought to work on the quality of teaching offered, guidance and counselling services to be provided, and the enabling learning environment to be provided. The needs of girls (such as the availability of sanitary facilities) should be given special attention. Parents and guardians need to be sensitized on the importance of education and be encouraged to ensure their children learn. Community leaders ought to encourage good cultural practices and discourage the bad practices. The vulnerable children should be assisted by the non-governmental organizations in form of scholarships, awareness programs, and child protection initiatives.

4.9 Future research Suggestions

Future research should examine the long-term effect of school non-completion on individuals and communities. The impact of dropout on employment, income, and social well-being can help shed more light on the effects of this issue. The researchers are also supposed to assess the effectiveness of available interventions on the school dropout reduction. This will assist in determining the best practices, and areas of

improvement. Comparison of various regions could also be a good source of information on the differences between contexts. Future studies may target a particular group of people such as children with disabilities or those living in urban slums. The growing activities of research in these directions will help get a more complete picture of school non-completion.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

5.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents a comprehensive discussion of the findings derived from the study on the drivers of school non-completion among vulnerable children in Bugujju, Mukono District. It interprets the results in relation to the study objectives and links them to existing literature and real-life experiences within similar contexts. The chapter also provides conclusions that summarize the key issues identified during the research process. In addition, practical recommendations are proposed to address the identified challenges and improve school completion rates among vulnerable children.

The purpose of this chapter is not only to restate findings but to critically analyze them and show their implications for policy, education systems, and community practices. It highlights how economic, social, and institutional factors interact to influence children's ability to remain in school. The chapter also emphasizes the need for a multi-sectoral approach involving government, schools, families, and communities. Furthermore, it identifies gaps that future research can explore to deepen understanding of school dropout issues. Overall, this chapter provides a bridge between research findings and practical solutions.

5.1 Discussion of Findings

The study revealed that school non-completion among vulnerable children in Bugujju is influenced by a combination of interconnected factors rather than a single cause. These findings demonstrate that children's educational experiences are shaped by their economic conditions, family environments, school systems, and broader societal norms. The interaction of these factors creates a cycle of disadvantage that makes it difficult for vulnerable children to complete their education.

The discussion also shows that while policies like Universal Primary Education have increased access to schooling, they have not fully addressed retention and completion challenges. Many children enrolling school but fail to progress or complete due to persistent barriers. The findings further indicate that vulnerability increases the likelihood of dropout, especially for children from poor households or unstable families. This suggests that targeted interventions are necessary to support at-risk groups. Moreover, the results highlight the importance of looking beyond the school environment and considering the wider social context in which children live. Issues such as poverty, cultural practices, and gender roles significantly influence educational outcomes. Therefore, effective solutions must address both in-school and out-of-school factors to ensure sustainable improvements in school completion rates.

5.1.1 Poverty as a Central Driver

The study identified poverty as the most significant and pervasive factor influencing school non-completion among vulnerable children. Despite the implementation of Universal Primary Education, families are still required to meet various indirect costs such as uniforms, books, meals, and transportation. For low-income households, these costs are often not affordable, leading to regular attendance or complete withdrawal from school.

Poverty also creates competing priorities within households, where basic needs such as food, shelter, and health care take precedence over education. As a result, parents may choose to keep children at home or send them to work instead of attending school. This situation is particularly common in rural and semi-urban areas like Bugujju, where income levels are generally low and unstable.

Furthermore, poverty contributes to other challenges such as malnutrition, which affects children's concentration and academic performance. It also limits access to learning materials, reducing the quality of education received. Over time, these disadvantages accumulate, leading to poor performance and eventual dropout. The

findings confirm that without addressing poverty, efforts to improve school completion rates may not achieve lasting success.

5.1.2 Influence of Child Labour

The findings revealed that child labour is a major factor contributing to school non-completion among vulnerable children. Many children engage in income-generating activities such as farming, vending, and domestic work to support their families. While this may provide short-term financial benefits, it significantly interferes with their education.

Children involved in labour often experience fatigue and lack the energy needed to participate actively in class. They may also miss school frequently, especially during peak working periods such as planting or harvesting seasons. This irregular attendance disrupts learning and makes it difficult for them to keep up with their peers, child labour creates a mindset where immediate income is valued more than long-term educational benefits. Some children become accustomed to earning money and lose interest in schooling altogether. This leads to a gradual disengagement from the education system. The study therefore highlights the need to address child labour not only as a social issue but also as a key barrier to educational attainment.

5.1.3 Early Marriage and Teenage Pregnancy

The study found that early marriage and teenage pregnancy are significant contributors to school non-completion, particularly among girls. Cultural norms and economic pressures often encourage families to marry off their daughters at a young age. In some cases, this is seen as a strategy to reduce financial burden or gain bride price.

Teenage pregnancy also leads to school dropout due to stigma, lack of support, and increased responsibilities. Although policies exist to allow young mothers to return to school, many do not do so because of societal judgment and child care obligations. This results in a permanent interruption of their education. Early marriage further limits girls' opportunities by shifting their roles from students to wives and mothers.

They are expected to manage households and care for children, leaving little or not for schooling. The findings emphasize the need for community sensitization and improved access to reproductive health education to reduce these challenges.

5.1.4 Family Instability and Parenting Challenges

Family instability was identified as a major factor affecting children's ability to complete school. Many vulnerable children come from homes characterized by conflict, neglect, or absence of parental support. Such environment creates emotional and psychological stress, which negatively affects academic performance.

Children in unstable families often lack guidance and supervision, making them more likely to engage in risky behaviors or skip school. In some cases, they are required to take on adult responsibilities such as caring for siblings or contributing to household income. This limits their ability to focus on education.

The study also found that parental attitudes toward education play a crucial role in determining whether children stay in school. Parents who do not value education are less likely to support their children's learning. This highlights the importance of strengthening family support systems and promoting positive parenting practices to improve school completion rates.

5.1.5 Gender Inequality and Social Norms

The study found that gender inequality plays a significant role in school non-completion. Girls face more challenges due to cultural expectations that prioritize domestic responsibilities over education. They are often required to help with household chores which limits their time for school. In contrast, boys may be encouraged to engage in income-generating activities which also affects their education. However, girls are more likely to dropout due to early marriage and pregnancy. This creates a gender gap in educational attainment.

Cultural beliefs that undervalue girls' education further worsen the situation. Some communities view education as unnecessary for girls, leading to lower investment in

their schooling. Addressing these gender disparities requires both policy interventions and community-level awareness programs.

5.1.6 Health and Psychological Factors

Health challenges were identified as important contributors to school non-completion. Frequent illness leads to absenteeism and disrupts learning. Children who are often sick struggle to keep up with school work, resulting in poor academic performance.

Malnutrition is another major issue, especially among children from poor households. Lack of proper nutrition affects concentration, memory, and overall cognitive development. This reduces their ability to perform well in school. Psychological factors such as stress, trauma, and low self-esteem also affect learning. Children from difficult backgrounds may lack confidence and motivation, making it harder for them to stay in school. The findings highlight the need for integrated support systems that address both health and emotional well-being.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Conclusion

The study concludes that school non-completion among vulnerable children in Bugujju is a complex issue influenced by multiple interrelated factors. These factors include poverty, child labour, early marriage, family instability, and poor school conditions. Each of these factors contributes in different ways but of tenure in forces the others.

Poverty remains significant driver, affecting both access to and retention in school. Social and cultural factors, particularly those affect in girls, also play a major role. Institutional challenges with in schools further compound the problem by reducing the quality of education.

The study also concludes that addressing school non-completion requires a holistic approach that goes beyond the education sector. Interventions must target the root causes, including economic hardship and social norms. Without such comprehensive efforts, progress in improving school completion rates will remain limited.

6.2 Recommendations

The study recommends a multi-sectoral approach involving government, schools, families, and communities to address school non-completion.

The government should increase funding for education to reduce hidden costs and improve school infrastructure. It should also enforce laws against child labour and early marriage while expanding social protection programs for vulnerable families.

Schools should focus on improving teaching quality, providing guidance and counseling services, and creating a supportive learning environment. Special attention should be given to girls' needs, including provision of sanitary facilities.

Parents and guardians should be sensitized on the importance of education and encouraged to support their children's learning. Community leaders should promote positive cultural practices and discourage harmful ones.

Non-governmental organizations should support vulnerable children through scholarships, awareness programs, and child protection initiatives. Collaboration among all stakeholders is essential for achieving sustainable change.

6.3 Suggestions for Further Research

Future research should explore the long-term impact of school non-completion on individuals and communities. Understanding how dropout affects employment, income, and social well-being can provide deeper insights into its consequences.

Researchers should also evaluate the effectiveness of existing interventions aimed at reducing school dropout. This will help identify best practices and areas for improvement. Comparative studies between different regions can also provide valuable information on contextual differences. Future studies could focus on specific groups such as children with disabilities or those in urban slums. Expanding research in these areas will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of school non-completion.

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APPENDICES

QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear respondent,

My name is Ilakut Jorem Hornarus. I am student of Uganda Christian University pursuing a Bachelor in Social Work. I am conducting a study on the “Drivers of School Non-Completion among Vulnerable Children in Bugujju, Mukono District”. You have been selected to participate in this study.

Your responses will be confidential and will only be used for academic purposes. Do not indicate your name anywhere on this questionnaire. Please answer honestly by ticking (✓) the option that best describes your experience.

TOPIC: “*Exploring the Drivers of School Non-Completion Among Vulnerable Children in Bugujju, Mukono District*”

Section A: Background Information

1. Age: _____

2. Gender:

☐ Male

☐ Female

3. class level:

☐ P1-P2

☐ P3-P4

☐ p5-p6

☐ p7

4. Who do you live with?

☐ Both parents

- ☐ Single parent
- ☐ Guardian/relative
- ☐ Alone
- ☐ Others (specify): _____

5. Main source of livelihood in household:

- ☐ Farming
- ☐ Small business
- ☐ Casual labor
- ☐ Formal employment
- ☐ Others (specify): _____

SECTION B: Influence of Child Neglect on School Non-Completion among vulnerable children in Bugujju, Mukono district.

Please tick (✓) the appropriate box using the scale below. **Scale, 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Not Sure, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree.**

No	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
1	My basic needs are adequately provided at home.					
2	I often lack essential school items.					
3	Poor care from caregivers affects my school attendance					
4	Neglect reduces my motivation to remain in school					

SECTION C: Role of household Socioeconomic Conditions on School**Non-Completion among vulnerable children in Bugujju, Mukono district.**

Please tick (✓) the appropriate box using the scale below. **Scale, 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Not Sure, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree**

No	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
1	Financial challenges frequently affect my schooling.					
2	Lack of money leads to missing school.					
3	Domestic work affects my school attendance.					

SECTION D: Role of parental support on School Non-Completion among vulnerable children in Bugujju, Mukono district.

Please tick (✓) the appropriate box using the scale below. **Scale, 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Not Sure, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree**

No	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
1	My parents provide adequate educational support.					
2	My school progress is regularly monitored at home.					
3	Parental support contributes to school completion.					

SECTION E: Role of Community and Institutional Support on School Non-Completion among vulnerable children in Bugujju, Mukono district.

Please tick (✓) the appropriate box using the scale below. Scale, 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Not Sure, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree

No	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
1	The community supports vulnerable children's education.					
2	Schools play a strong role in supporting learners.					
3	Institutional support reduces school non-completion					

Section F: Additional Views

30. Other factors contributing to school non-completion

.....

31. Suggestions to improve school completion

.....

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW GUIDE (KII)

Dear respondent,

My name is Ilakut Jorem Hornarus. I am student of Uganda Christian University pursuing a bachelor in Social Work. I am conducting a study on the Drivers of School Non-Completion among Vulnerable Children in Bugujju, Mukono District. You have been selected to participate in this study.

Your responses will be confidential and will only be used for academic purposes. Do not indicate your name anywhere on this questionnaire. Please answer honestly by ticking (✓) the option that best describes your experience.

Gender

Male ☐ Female ☐

Respondents

Parents ☐ Teachers ☐ Local leaders ☐ Civilians ☐

Interview Questions

1. In your view, what are the main factors contributing to school non-completion among vulnerable children in Bugujju?

.....
.....
.....

2. How do household conditions (such as poverty, family structure, or parental support) influence children's ability to complete school in this area?

.....
.....
.....

3. Can you describe any school-related factors (such as teaching quality, school environment, or policies) that may contribute to children dropping out?

.....
.....
.....

4. What role do community and cultural practices play in influencing whether vulnerable children complete their education?

.....
.....
.....

5. What interventions or strategies do you think could effectively improve school completion rates among vulnerable children in Bugujju?

.....
.....
.....

INTRODUCTORY LETTER



**UGANDA CHRISTIAN
UNIVERSITY**

A Centre of Excellence in the Heart of Africa

April 10, 2026

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Dear Sir/Madam

Re: **INTRODUCTORY LETTER FOR RESEARCH**

This is to introduce to you **Ilakut Jorem Hornarus** Registration number **B23B15/069**, a student of Uganda Christian University, pursuing Bachelor's degree in Social Work and Administration. He is expected to carry out research in the final year under the guidance of a university supervisor in partial fulfillment for the requirements of the above-mentioned award.

Topic: "Exploring the drivers of school non-completion among vulnerable children in Buguju, Mukono District."

The purpose of this communication is to request your office to allow him collect data from your organization. Any assistance rendered to him will be highly appreciated.

Yours faithfully,

 10 APR 2026

Doreen Kukugiza
Coordinator, Research & Fieldwork Programmes
Tel: 0773395349
Email: dkukugiza@ucu.ac.ug

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