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## **NON-SCHOOL FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH SCHOOL DROPOUTS IN UGANDA**

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### **Abstract**

*Currently numerous studies have concerned themselves with reducing school dropout rates premised on school environment. This has resulted into limited impact of interventions fronted to reduce the high school dropout rates. If schools are to register high retention rates commensurate to the high enrollment levels, there is need for studies and interventions to look*

*beyond school related factors which don't influence school attendance in isolation but operate alongside other factors such as the individual characteristics of the children and their parents especially the household head, household structure and composition as well as the community factors. Therefore, this study aimed at determining non-school factors associated with school dropouts in Uganda. Assessment was done using the probit regression model and secondary data from Uwezo Uganda National Learning Assessment 2014 survey. Children aged 6-16 were assessed based on their household setting and supplementary data obtained through related surveys of their households, local communities and selected local schools where majority of the children in the community were enrolled. The likelihood of a child dropping out of school increased with the child's age and reduced with; increase in years of preschool attendance and household heads education level. Furthermore, school dropouts were more likely among the disabled children and children with no biological parents in the household. The study recommended focusing on pupil retention, parent sensitization regarding the merits of formal education and the need to promote mandatory pre-school education where children's' reading, writing and numeracy can be nurtured at an early age. There is need to explore further the effect of other non-school factors that could influence school dropout directly or indirectly or interactively with school related factors including peer social capital, student loan scheme programmes, government education policies to curb school absenteeism and commitment to their implementation, migration among others.*

### **Keywords**

School Dropout, Uganda, Probit Regression, Education

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## **1. Introduction**

Education is essential to the growth and progress of the lives of young people worldwide hence its identification as a priority area by internationally agreed development goals including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the World Programme of Action for Youth (United Nations, 2013). Additionally, education is a principal instrument in awakening the child to cultural values, in preparing him/her for later professional training and in helping him to adjust normally to his environment (Pobjoy, 2017; Oakes, Lipton, Anderson, Stillman, 2016). Besides, education is central in eliminating poverty and hunger and in promoting sustained, inclusive and equitable economic growth and sustainable development hence increased efforts towards education accessibility, quality and affordability are central to global development

efforts (United Nations, 2013). Young people who drop out of school early are vulnerable to unemployment, poverty, teen marriages, teen pregnancies and involvement in risky behaviors. Worldwide, 10.6 percent of young people are illiterate, lacking basic numerical and reading skills and as such lack the means to be able to sustain a living through full and decent employment with youth unemployment and underemployment at persistently high levels worldwide threatening social inclusion, cohesion and stability (United Nations, 2013).

Goal Four of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SGDs) focuses on ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promotion of life-long learning opportunities for all with one of its targets being ensuring that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education, leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes. Although the right to education is a fundamental human right which every individual is entitled to, unfortunately the majority of children who enroll do not realize their right to education as most of them dropout eventually.

The education sector in Uganda has witnessed policy reforms including the adoption of the most fundamental and far reaching programme, the Universal Primary Education (UPE) in 1997. Primary education sector in Uganda runs for seven years, from Primary One (P.1) to Primary Seven (P.7). Admitted to P.1., on average, are children aged six. The UPE made an immediate impact on primary school enrollment levels from 2.8 million in 1996 to 8,485,005 in 2014. Unfortunately, low quality education evidenced by low learning achievement (literacy and numeracy), low survival rate standing at 32.1% for grade seven, repetition at 10.91% and teacher absenteeism (NPA, 2015) have persisted as challenges to the education sector in Uganda. In Uganda, although dropouts occur across the primary school cycle, the highest rates occur during transition from Primary One (P.1) to Primary Two (P.2) and from Primary Six (P.6) to Primary Seven (P.7) resulting into low survival and completion rates for primary school education estimated at 33% (NPA, 2015) and has been mainly attributed to lack of interest (43%) by learners. This implies that the current school environment is not very attractive to the majority of pupils with other causes including teenage pregnancies, early marriages, child labour and poor sanitation facilities (particularly for girls). The majority of other factors affecting school dropout rates lie outside the direct influence of the school and education policy but within communities and households (NPA, 2015).

School dropouts are affected by both school related factors including few classrooms, poor latrines, teacher absenteeism, difficulties faced in study subjects, desire for a different

school (Soares, Fernandes, Nobrega & Nicolella, 2015), quality of teachers (Klaharn, 2017), adoption of new teaching methods (Laadem, 2017; Pace, 2017), involvement in extracurricular activities (Tanja , Euđen & Jelena, 2017) among others and non-school related factors including household work, lack of parental guidance in studies, large family size, poor economic condition of the family, failure in examination, lack of time for study, punishment by teachers, lack of interest in studies as some of the factors influencing school dropout (Baruah and Goswami, 2012). Others include perception of better job opportunities if studies are completed (Soares et al., 2015), gender and parental socioeconomic status, household wealth and mother's and father's education, geographical location (Kazeem, Jensen, Stokes, 2010).

## **2. Problem Statement**

Lately numerous studies have concerned themselves with reducing school dropout rates premised on school environment but paying less attention to the nature of communities and households where children reside. This has resulted into limited impact of interventions fronted to curb and reduce the high school dropout rates. If schools are to register high retention rates proportionate to the high enrollment levels, there is need for studies and interventions to look beyond school related factors which have been reported to influence school enrollment and completion. These factors don't influence school attendance in isolation but operate alongside other factors such as the individual characteristics of the children and their parents especially the household head, household structure and composition, knowledge, attitudes and practices of both household members and communities towards education, social and family capital among others. Therefore, this study sought to venture into exploring the effect of other household and individual related factors in contributing to increasing or reducing school dropout rates.

## **3. Theoretical Framework**

The Health Care Utilization Model (Andersen, 1995) can help provide a theoretical explanation of how household and community related factors influence school dropouts since education and health services just like any other services tend to have similarities in regards to factors influencing their uptake and abandonment. The model consists of predisposing, enabling and need factors though the variable scope of the study was limited to the predisposing and enabling factors.

Predisposing factors include demographic and socio-structural characteristics which may influence one's desire to attend school, attitude and perception towards school and the ability to cope with many challenges that may arise in pursuing education such as the children's age, gender, disability status, number of siblings, region of residence, biological parents alive and present in the household as well as the gender of the household head to which they belong.

Enabling factors which refer to conditions that may be changed by an individual and social efforts (Kim & Lee, 2016) such as access to water and electricity, meals had in the household, pre-school attendance and the education level of the household head may also influence school dropout. Enabling factors relate to and are an indicator of the economic standing of a household and may influence or be influenced by the wealth status and income of the household members, especially the heads.

#### **4. Research Objectives**

The following were the specific objectives of the study:

- To assess the influence of the household head's education level on a child dropping out of school.
- Ascertain the effect of number of children in household on a child dropping out of school.
- Establish the influence of number of meals eaten in a household on a child dropping out of school.
- Determine the effect having both biological parents living in a household on a child dropping out of school.

#### **5. Methodology**

##### **5.1 Data Source**

The study was based on the Uwezo Uganda National Learning Assessment 2014 survey. Children aged 6-16 were assessed in their household setting. Supplementary data were obtained through surveys of related households, communities and schools where majority of the children were enrolled (Uwezo, 2016). Household characteristics were recorded by interviewing heads or representatives of households where assessments were conducted. Basic indicators on the local communities or enumeration areas (EAs) were obtained through interviews with local council

leaders. School indicators were obtained from school heads and through direct observation. Overall, 3,347 EAs, 3,347 schools and 51,835 households were visited (Uwezo, 2016).

A two-stage cluster sampling design was adopted in the assessment within the 112 districts, with households as the elements and EAs as the clusters. In the first stage, 30 EAs were selected per district using the probability proportional to size (PPS) strategy. Thus, EAs with larger numbers of households had a greater chance of being selected. The second and ultimate sampling stage was the simple random selection of 20 households from each of the selected 30 EAs in each district; which provided a self-weighted sample of households was up to the district level. Within the selected households, all available children in the age range 6-16 years were assessed and relevant information both on the children and on their households obtained.

## **5.2 Data Analysis**

Data was analyzed using STATA Version 14.2 at three stages. First: using frequency distributions, a descriptive summary of all possible independent variables (predictor and enabling) was elicited. Secondly: using Pearson's chi-square test, association between school dropout and plausible independent variables was tested. Independent variables that were significant ( $p \leq 0.05$ ) at this level were considered for further analysis. Finally, for multivariate analysis, due to the binary nature of the outcome variable, plausible model fits were tested using the Akaike Information Criteria (AIC) and the probit regression model turned out to be the best fit (i.e. probit regression model had the lowest AIC).

## **6. Results**

### **6.1 Description of Study Participants**

Table 1 presents a description of the characteristics of children considered in the study. The majority of respondents were school going (97.09%) while the minority had dropped out of school (2.91%). The highest proportion of children was aged 6 to 7 years (22.26%), males (50.18%) and had never attended pre-school (34.18%). Majority of the pupils were not disabled (92.18%), resided in households headed by females (59.54%) whose highest level of education was primary (56.86%). The highest proportion of households had 1 to 2 children (23.21%). The majority of households had two meals a day (57.34%), access to electricity (83.71%) and direct access to water (51.8%).

**Table 1: Characteristics of the Children Studied**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>School dropout</b>		
No	27,329	97.09
Yes	818	2.91
<b>Child's age</b>		
6-7 years	6,265	22.26
8-9 years	5,521	19.61
10-11 years	4,995	17.75
12-13 years	5,245	18.63
14 plus years	6,121	21.75
<b>Child's gender</b>		
Male	14,125	50.18
Female	14,022	49.82
<b>Disability status</b>		
No	25,945	92.18
Yes	2,202	7.82
<b>Preschool attendance</b>		
None	7,143	34.18
One year	3,873	18.53
Two years	4,368	20.9
Three years plus	5,517	26.4
<b>Household head gender</b>		
Male	10,624	40.46
Female	15,634	59.54
<b>Household head education</b>		
None	5,740	21.63
Primary	15,087	56.86
Secondary	4,589	17.3
Higher	1,117	4.21

<b>No. of children in hh</b>		
1-2 children	6,533	23.21
3 children	6,283	22.32
4 children	5,752	20.44
5-6 children	4,496	15.97
7 plus children	5,083	18.06
<b>No. of meals eaten / day</b>		
One meal	2,773	10.01
Two meals	15,891	57.34
Three meals	9,051	32.66
<b>Biological parents living</b>		
None	1,735	6.59
One	5,098	19.37
Both	19,480	74.03
<b>Electricity access</b>		
No	23,563	83.71
Yes	4,584	16.29
<b>Water access</b>		
No	13,568	48.2
Yes	14,579	51.8

## 6.2 Plausible Independent Factors and School Dropouts

Table two provides a summary of the association between school dropouts and the plausible independent variables. Apart from household head gender and number of children in the household, the rest of the plausible independent variables had a significant association ( $p \leq 0.05$ ) with school dropouts in Uganda. The highest proportion of dropouts was among children aged 14 and above (7.32%) and generally reduced with age. Similarly, dropouts were highest among males (3.24%) and children; with disability (4.50%), who attended three years plus (1.89%) of preschool, resided in households where the head had no formal education (3.76%), that had one meal a day (3.86%), with one biological parent present in the household (3.92%), with no electricity access (3.05%) and no direct water access (2.63%) in their homes.

**Table 2: Factors Associated with School Dropouts**

Variables	School dropout	
	No	Yes
<b>Child's age</b>		
6-7 years	98.93	1.07
8-9 years	98.64	1.36
10-11 years	98.32	1.68
12-13 years	97.25	2.75
14 plus years	92.68	7.32
	$\chi^2=571.2269$ Pr=0.000	
<b>Child's gender</b>		
Male	96.76	3.24
Female	97.43	2.57
	$\chi^2=10.8915$ Pr=0.001	
<b>Disability status</b>		
No	97.23	2.77
Yes	95.50	4.50
	$\chi^2=21.3962$ Pr=0.000	
<b>Preschool attendance</b>		
None	96.78	3.22
One year	97.29	2.71
Two years	98.21	1.79
Three years plus	98.11	1.89
	$\chi^2=33.8873$ Pr=0.000	
<b>Household head gender</b>		
Male	96.89	3.11
Female	97.24	2.76
	$\chi^2=2.6406$ Pr=0.104	
<b>Household head education</b>		
None	96.24	3.76

Primary	97.15	2.85
Secondary	97.86	2.14
Higher	98.57	1.43
	$\chi^2=33.6664$ Pr=0.000	
<b>No. of children in hh</b>		
1-2 children	96.86	3.14
3 children	97.33	2.67
4 children	97.08	2.92
5-6 children	97.42	2.58
7 plus children	96.83	3.17
	$\chi^2=5.3731$ Pr=0.251	
<b>Meals eaten</b>		
One meal	96.14	3.86
Two meals	96.90	3.10
Three meals	97.78	2.22
	$\chi^2=26.2684$ Pr =0.000	
<b>Biological parents</b>		
None	96.37	3.63
One	96.08	3.92
Both	97.55	2.45
	$\chi^2=36.3816$ Pr=0.000	
<b>Electricity access</b>		
No	96.95	3.05
Yes	97.84	2.16
	$\chi^2=10.8137$ Pr=0.001	
<b>Water access</b>		
No	96.79	3.21
Yes	97.37	2.63
	$\chi^2=8.3496$ Pr=0.004	

### 6.3 Predictors of School Dropouts

Table 3 provides details of the relationship between school dropouts and plausible independent variables, namely: age, disability status, preschool attendance, household head education and biological parents present in household. Pertaining to child's age, for children aged 8 to 9 years, there was 0.19 increase in the predicted probability of dropping out of school compared to children aged 6 to 7 years other factors constant. A significant increase was also reported for children aged, 10 to 11 years, 12 to 13 years and was highest for children aged 14 years and above. Regarding disability status, for disabled children, there was a 0.27 increase in the predicted probability of dropping out of school compared to non-disabled children other factors constant. As regards pre-school attendance, for children who attended for two years, there was a 0.27 decrease in the predicted probability of dropping out of school compared to children who never attended pre-school other factors constant. Similarly, a decrease was reported for children who attended for three years plus. Concerning the household head's education, children from households with heads that attained at most primary education had a 0.16 decrease in the predicted probability of dropping out of school compared to those from households whose heads had no formal education other factors constant. Likewise, there was a 0.20 decrease for children from households where head had at least secondary education compared to those from households where heads had no formal education other factors constant. Regarding biological parents present in household, for children residing in households with two biological parents present, there was a 0.17 decrease in the predicted probability of dropping out of school compared to those residing in households with no biological parent present other factors constant.

**Table 3: A Model Fit of School Dropout**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Coefficients</b>	<b>Std.Error</b>	<b>z</b>	<b>P&gt; z </b>	<b>95% C.I</b>	
<b>Child's age</b>						
6-7 years	Reference					
8-9 years	0.19	0.09	2.02	0.04	0.01	0.37
10-11 years	0.24	0.09	2.59	0.01	0.06	0.42
12-13 years	0.47	0.08	5.63	0.00	0.31	0.64
14 plus years	0.95	0.08	12.50	0.00	0.80	1.10
<b>Child's gender</b>						

Male	Reference					
Female	-0.07	0.04	-1.53	0.13	-0.15	0.02
<b>Disability status</b>						
No	Reference					
Yes	0.27	0.06	4.19	0.00	0.14	0.40
<b>Preschool attendance</b>						
None	Reference					
One year	-0.03	0.06	-0.58	0.56	-0.15	0.08
Two years	-0.27	0.07	-4.04	0.00	-0.40	-0.10
Three plus years	-0.20	0.06	-3.37	0.00	-0.31	-0.10
<b>Household head education</b>						
None	Reference					
Primary	-0.16	0.05	-3.05	0.00	-0.30	-0.10
Secondary	-0.20	0.07	-2.83	0.01	-0.30	-0.10
Higher	-0.22	0.13	-1.63	0.10	-0.50	0.04
<b>Meals eaten</b>						
One meal	Reference					
Two meals	-0.04	0.07	-0.56	0.57	-0.18	0.10
Three meals	-0.12	0.08	-1.53	0.13	-0.27	0.03
<b>Biological parents</b>						
None	Reference					
One	0.06	0.08	0.79	0.43	-0.09	0.22
Two	-0.17	0.07	-2.39	0.02	-0.31	-0.00
<b>Electricity access</b>						
No	Reference					
Yes	0.08	0.07	-1.17	0.24	-0.20	0.05
<b>Water access</b>						
No	Reference					
Yes	-0.07	0.04	-1.72	0.09	-0.16	0.01

## **7. Discussion**

This study provides an insight into the influence of predisposing and enabling factors originating from households and communities in which children dwell, with regards to the likelihood of the children dropping out of school or staying on to pursue their education further. The likelihood of dropping out increasing with a child's age was consistent with findings by Hunt (2008), Woldehanna, Jones & Tefera (2006) and Lewin (2008) who reported that children especially those above the average age for a given grade were more likely to drop out. This can be attributed to the late entry of children into the formal education system resulting into them being above the maximum age for a given grade as well as absenteeism which results into high levels of grade repetition and subsequently dropout.

The significance of disability is consistent with findings by Kishore & Shaji (2012) who reported physical disorders as the most common reason for dropout. This can be attributed to lack of proper facilities in schools tailored to cater for needs of persons with disabilities such as walking ramps, toilets and desks discouraging regular attendance and eventually result into dropout. Preschool attendance significance was consistent with findings by American Psychological Association (2012) who reported that recipients of high quality early childhood education (i.e., consisting of a holistic, nurturing, consistent, and stimulating curriculum) exhibited lower rates of grade retention, higher levels of academic achievement, fewer special education services and a stronger commitment to graduate from high school.

The significance of household head's education is consistent with findings by Sibanda (2004) and Woldehanna, Jones & Tefera (2006) who reported household head's level of education as a strong predictor of dropping out; i.e. the lower the household heads highest level of education the more likely the child from the household will drop out. Contrary to Sibanda (2004), household head gender and number of children in the household were found to be insignificant. The significance of having both biological parents in household on reducing school dropouts can be attributed to the fact that children from such households tend to have higher standards of living, social capital from parents in form of emotional support, encouragement, everyday assistance hence encouraging them to stay in school as a result of household stability (Amato, Patterson & Beattie, 2015).

Contrary to Hunt (2008) and Woldehanna, Jones & Tefera (2006), gender of a child had no significant effect on school dropout but findings were consistent with (Pandya & Bora, 1997;

Soares et al., 2015) who reported no significant differences in dropout rates between boys and girls. This can be attributed to the low effect of gender specific risk factors on school dropout such as traditional beliefs that tend to value education of the boy child at the expense of the girl child.

## **8. Conclusion**

The motivation of this study was to determine the factors outside the school environment that influence school dropouts in children with specific emphasis on predisposing and enabling factors. Based on the study findings, the likelihood of a child dropping out of school increased with their age and reduced with increase in years of preschool attendance and household heads' education level. Furthermore, school dropouts were more likely among the disabled children compared to the non-disabled and children with no biological parent present in the household compared to those with two biological parents in the household. Based on the findings, the following recommendations are fronted: firstly, government should not only focus on increasing enrollment in Universal Primary Education (UPE) supported schools but also tackle the high dropout rates. This can be through engaging parents and members of communities in which students reside to appreciate the importance of formal education as opposed to giving off their children into early marriages, engaging them in household chores, farming activities among others and ensuring that all children are engaged in school during schooling hours. Secondly, there is need for government to invest in setting up schools under the UPE programmes to support disabled children from relatively poor households who may not afford costs charged by private schools specializing in educating children with disabilities. Thirdly, parents should be educated about the importance of having stable homes especially to enable young children have a conducive environment in which they can be nurtured and raised to become productive citizens in the future as well as enable them concentrate on pursuing their studies without distraction. Finally government should come up with a framework and policies to promote mandatory pre-school education where children can be nurtured at an early age in skills such as reading, writing and numeracy to enable them compete favorably as well as learn at a relatively similar pace with their counterparts.

There is need to explore further the effect of other non-school factors that could influence school dropout directly or indirectly or interactively with school related factors including peer social capital, student loan scheme programmes, government education policies to

curb school absenteeism and commitment to their implementation, household expenditure on education, willingness of parents to pay for education, allocation and distribution of household chores among children in the household as well as time spent carrying out these chores, migration among others.

There were limitations to the data especially with regards to failure to distinguish clearly between the geographical locations of both the schools and households children belong to. Although, most children attend schools within their communities, with the high levels of rural urban migration and given that most high performing schools are based in the Central region of Uganda, majority of students from other regions of the country will tend to relocate to the Central region so as to attend school there and preferably in boarding schools. Secondly, the data source didn't capture complete information on household wealth which is a key determinant of school attendance even for pupils going to government aided schools were parents are still tasked to purchase scholastic materials for their children.

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