



STUDENT RETENTION IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH IN EAST KENYA UNION CONFERENCE

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ABSTRACT

The study assessed students' retention in secondary schools of the SDA Church in EKUC. It employed a concurrent mixed methods research design and adopted an exploratory approach using a descriptive survey. The subjects of the study included students, principals, the Conferences/Field Education Directors and the Board of Management (BoM) chairpersons. Based on expectancy theory of motivation, the study adopted the concurrent mixed methods research design. The target population was the twenty Seventh-day Adventist Church maintained Secondary Schools in EKUC. The unit of analysis was eleven secondary school principals, five education directors and, eleven chairpersons of the school boards of management (BOM) and 335 students. Cluster sampling technique was used to get the samples. The target population was divided into five clusters (principals, students, education directors and, board chairpersons). Samples were obtained from each of these clusters. The instruments used for data collection were questionnaires for students. Interview schedules were organized for education directors, the school BoM chairpersons and the principals for triangulation. Observation schedule was also organized. This targeted the school infrastructure and generally all what goes on in the school. The school learning facilities and the behavior of teachers in school was also captured here. The other instrument used was the tool for document analysis to collect data for 8 years. Students (335) were required to fill the provided questionnaire, but the eleven principals, five education directions and eleven BoM chairpersons were subjected to interviews. Documentary analysis method was used to get information on KCSE performance for the same period of eight years. The data collected was analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations. Documentary analysis was done on records about teacher retention. Content analysis was done on responses from interviews and in open-ended questions. The findings show that there were high numbers of students in Form 2 and 3 who dropped within the year and those who joined. Students were being replaced as they dropped out in some of the years. All in all, there were high annual turnover rates. This could affect the learning processes as well as students' academic performance. The study recommends the need for schools to put in place strategies for ensuring that students learning facilities were available. Students should also be motivated to remain in school. Bursaries and sponsorships for students from poor backgrounds should be availed. Spiritual guidance, work programs and flexible fees payment mechanisms should also be instituted so as to support children from poor background to remain in school.

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

I. INTRODUCTION

Schools the world over grapple with challenges related to poor students' retention. Furger (2008) articulates that it was difficult to retain all students in school due to academic hurdles, wrong turns or because some students missed steps in their academic ladder. Retention of students means they were able to stay and complete a program by either self-motivation, school interventions or through counselling.

Student retention, in high school, according to Deborah et al. (2014), benefited the student in preparation for college studies. At the same time, it benefited the school from the fees paid by the student. Dropouts showed the school's inability to meet the student's need, hence a debit to the school for losing a customer. Each school should come up with strategies to ensure the enrolled students do not drop, on the way. A successful high school made sure proper assessment of the factors which help students to complete a program, were in place to avoid possibilities of attrition and turnover.

The success of education, according to Furger (2008) is associated with the retention of students. In California, students' dropout was at an alarming state, since over a million kids dropped from school every year without earning a high school diploma. Among the reasons for dropping out of school is social economic challenges, boredom, and peer pressure.

Lau (2003) observed that the process of student retention is dependent on institutional experience. The formal and the informal school structure were key to make the students have the desire to stay. Students with negative interactions and negative experience stood a high chance of withdraw. Orientation of new students had a big impact on



whether students were stay or leave. It helped them to adjust to the new learning environment and to develop an attitude of making the decision to remain until the achievement of the academic certificate.

Farrell (2009) argued that student departure could not be attributed to personal inability. Schools were to blame for student failure, if the structures and systems were not on the ground to attract their stay. Schools existed for the students and not students for the school. Students should not be admitted for the good of the school. Schools should admit students to benefit them and not to benefit of the school.

In South Africa, the importance of student retention could not be overemphasized. Subotzky and Prinsloo (2011) advised that schools should device systems to detect early signs of student attrition so as to address them on time. Barriers to academic success, such as domestic responsibilities and psychological stress, brought about by economic challenges, should also be addressed, on time, since they contribute to low student retention. Other challenges included the HIV epidemic, sub-standard schooling systems and the admission of students who were under prepared for secondary school education.

The study by Griffins (2007) revealed that illiteracy was one of the contributors of poverty in East Africa. To invest in education helped to improve human capital, which was of great value in making wealth, as well as the improving the economic wellbeing of an individual. This become a reality when students remain in school to learn and succeed in education. However, students got forced by circumstances to quit school before they achieved their academic goals. Socioeconomic barriers were key to low student retention. Those who were unable to raise fees dropped from schooling before the completion of a school program. There was a need to have career guidance in every school to direct learners into making career choices. This was essential in keeping them on course until they finished their academic ladder. When well guided, students developed personal initiative in setting goals to make them invest time in their studies.

Griffins (2007) confirmed further that because of the competition between girls and boys in school, there was a need for East African countries to have an affirmative action during the admission of the girl child in high school. Girls were more vulnerable to dropping out of school than boys. They suffered challenges of early marriages, early pregnancies, competing household chores, low self-esteem, sexual harassment, as well as parental indifference. In order to enhance student retention, they should be assigned mentors to guide and direct them toward being persistent until they acquire education.

In Kenya, according to Ndege (2010), student retention was a measure of internal efficiency in a school. It is enhanced by collaborative learning, student-teacher interaction and supportive campus environment. Improved student experience in school promoted learning and persistence. Gituriandu (2010) said the challenge of learners dropping out of school, before completing a school program was a common occurrence in the country. One of the reasons was socio-economic challenge, either for child labor employment, to care for their siblings or in some cases as sex workers. Some young people dropped to help in the looking for domestic animals. Although the reasons for dropping out were different, the consequences were the same. School dropouts got less income compared to those who completed high school. They got bad health in their retirement age and were likely to end up in jails. They later became a burden not only to their families, but also to their neighbors and the government.

Acom (2010) stated that the low retention raises concern among parents, school administrators and all other education stakeholders. Not much had been studied about teacher and student retention in private religious schools yet they played a great role in educating the youth in the whole world (Omar, 2004).

The Seventh-day Adventist Church runs private schools, all over the world, yet not without the challenge of teacher and student retention. In the United States of America, Thayer (2008) said that the challenge of students' low retention in the church schools has been felt. Suggestions, to that effect, had been made on the need to reposition the Adventist Education System for a better future. A serious financial challenge seems to be the underlying factor affecting the retention of students within the Adventist Education. Among the suggested ways for a better system of education is to look for ways of funding the schools, either from the Union Conferences or from the local Conferences. However, the lasting solution for funding the schools is by increasing enrolment and retaining the students, hence increase of school fees. As a result, ways were being sought to ensure that the two-thirds of the Adventist students who do not attend Adventist Schools do so soonest possible. This would yield enough funding to the schools and enable the students to access the holistic education.

The SDA Church Schools in Kenya are not exceptional, particularly in East Kenya Union Conference (EKUC). They suffered constant loss of students and teachers (EKUC Education Statistics, 2015). My experience as the director of education, for ten years (2005 to 2015), in the Central Kenya Conference (CKC), which was under EKUC revealed that there was a challenge of low teacher/student's retention. There was, therefore, a need to tackle the issue to ensure that the admitted students remained in school, while the recruited teachers stayed in the profession.



It was on this background that this study it was set to assess the status of the teacher and student retention in Adventist Secondary Schools within the East Kenya Union Conference (EKUC), of Seventh-day Adventist Church in Kenya.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Low retention of students is a major problem in schools within developed and developing countries (World Bank, 2004). The challenge of low student retention was also experienced in SDA Church schools of East Kenya Union Conference (EKUC). The statistics of the year 2015, showed that student retention had been of concern. This could affect not only the budgeting of a school but also the academic performance because the new students might have had a challenge of either catching up with the rest or covering the syllabus.

Basing on the statistics from EKUC schools, on student retention, there is a need to account for such a trend. The only way to unearth such was through a research. In the absence of empirical evidence regarding the student retention, the forces behind the low retention remained unidentified/attended and the challenge remains unresolved. This study was, therefore, set to examine low student retention, in schools, and come up with some possible ways for high retention.

1.2 Research Questions

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

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Framework

This study was based on expectancy theory of motivation. Tinto (2007) stated that the theory was proposed by Victor Vroom of Yale School of Management in 1964. It stated that an individual behaves in a certain way because of the expected outcome. It enables people to choose or to make choices in life on how to behave in anticipation of deserved rewards by the recipients. It enables individuals in decision making process, where value is associated with an outcome or a reward, on the faith that better performance results into a reward.

Demetriou (2011) posited that an effort results into a performance, while performance results into the valued outcomes. This theory was applied to help students to put effort in their studies with anticipation of better results in Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE), which enables them to join the university or a college program. After graduation, they get competitive jobs with good pay, hence better life. With this in mind students should be motivated to work hard for them to do well in their final exams. Termly continuous assessment prepares them as they wait to sit for their final, Form IV exams (KCSE). The theory is good for retaining students in school as they anticipate to get good results and better employment. It elaborates teacher retention as the ability to retain a teacher in the same school or in the same profession for a long time with the effort of making students to perform in their academics. They should do this in anticipation for promotions and satisfaction of the success of the students.

The advantage of expectancy theory in this study was that students use it hard in their studies so as learn and pass well in KCSE; a thing which should make them achieve maximum satisfaction and minimize dissatisfaction, with emphasis to maximize pleasure and minimize pain.

2.2 Students in School

According to Wild and Ebbers (2002), student retention is paramount for there can be no school without students. Once the students are enrolled, other personnel follow. There should be ways to ensure students achieve the purpose for which they came to school. It is easy to recruit students but difficult to retain them. Among the suggested ways is to help them complete a program. Students do not come to live in school. They have their homes. So school leaders need to device policies which ensure the enrolled students are guided to finish the program on time and as intended. The school administration should ensure that there is careful monitoring of students' behavior or academics, and intervene when necessary. Policies should be devised to ensure the enrolled students persistently remain in school within the period programmed for their completion. They need to be committed with their interest aroused towards completion of the education.

In their studies Loeb, Kalogrides, and Beteille (2011) stated that students have goals which they work toward. For them to remain in course, they need to be motivated with things like sports, as they study. At the same time, they need to anticipate better paying jobs after school. Such students value and will do everything possible to remain. However, there are those who fail to maintain the academic performance and are unable to cope with the school rules. Such are likely to drop out before completing a program. Other underlying factors for low retention of students are as



a result of social environment. Reacting on the same, Deborah, et al. (2014) argued that student retention benefited individuals by achieving certificates at the end of a school program and prepares them for college/university admission.

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

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

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

2.3 Student Retention

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

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

In support of this Tinto (2007) stated that due to increase in student attrition and turnover, their retention has become a huge business not only for researchers, but for educators as well as entrepreneurs. This is because without students there can be no school. As a result, many schools opt to admit qualified students because the unqualified ones are more prone to leave than high academic achievers. The other reason for student retention is the ability to assimilate and integrate into the institution. Every school should eliminate social retention barriers which hinder students from enrolling and staying. Instead, they should make their students have cultural connections. These should be through social cultural groups. If these cultural groups reflect their cultures of origin, chances of student retention are very high, especially when they are allowed to carry their identity into the learning institutions. Such students are more likely to persist until the completion of a school program.

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

The students attend school to finish a program, earn a certificate and proceed to the next level of education. Once they earn degrees, after school, their lives get changed and they get better earnings. This means education enhances quality of life and increases employment. With this in mind, every effort should be put to ensure all the students who enroll in a program remain in school until the completion of the same. Schools should have retention programs where students are oriented to persist until they reap the benefits of being in school. Among the retention



programs is the professional peer tutors, making learning centers to be more welcoming and the involvement of the staff members. Face to face orientation is said to work better, once the needy students have been identified. Such should be assigned advisors who have intensive advising sessions before the face to face interactions (Gargia and Thornton 2014).

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

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

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

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

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

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

Tinto (2007) wonders why student retention is one of the most studied area in education, yet the results have been sophisticated. Why some students leave, while others persist to the completion of the program still remains a dilemma. Initially dropping out of school was wholly blamed on students that they were less able, lacked self-motivation and that they were less willing to enjoy the benefits of education. Students failed not the institution. Today, however, it could no longer be a guess work. Student retention is a big business with consulting firms in place to educate schools on the best ways on how to retain their students.

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



became who they are. Students should be carefully listened to and given all the attention that they require so that they can open up in sharing the possible challenges which make them leave school before completing.

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

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the concurrent mixed methods research design. In this design, both quantitative and qualitative data are collected. Thereafter, the data collected are mixed concurrently. In this study, quantitative data was collected using questionnaires while qualitative data was collected using interviews. The target population was the twenty Seventh-day Adventist Church maintained Secondary Schools in EKUC. The unit of analysis was eleven secondary school principals, five education directors and, eleven chairpersons of the school boards of management (BOM) and 335 students. The school principals' manner of administration could influence the retention, while the education directors make the policies which are responsible for retaining teachers in school. The SDA church maintained secondary schools were targeted because they struggle with retaining students with the few students who enroll transferring to other secondary schools.

Cluster sampling technique was used to get the samples. In this sampling technique, the target population was divided into five clusters (principals, students, education directors and, board chairpersons). Samples were obtained from each of these clusters.

The instruments used for data collection were questionnaires for students. Interview schedules were organized for education directors, the school BoM chairpersons and the principals triangulation. Observation schedule was also organized. This targeted the school infrastructure and generally all what goes on in the school. The school learning facilities and the behavior of teachers in school was also captured here. The other instrument used was the tool for document analysis to collect data for 8 years.

Students (335) were required to fill the provided questionnaire, but the eleven principals, five education directions and eleven BoM chairpersons were subjected to interviews. The researcher conducted interviews to the school principals during the visit after the questionnaires were administered, filled and returned. All the chairpersons and education directors were interviewed. Whereas four chairpersons were interviewed in their offices, seven were interviewed over telephone discussions. At the same time, three education directors were interviewed in their offices while the rest (two) were through telephone interviews. Those interviewed through telephone discussions could not be reached by the researcher, at the time of data collection. Some students (ten per school) were also interviewed for triangulation purpose. Observations were also done during the visits in schools. Documentary analysis method was used to get information on KCSE performance for the same period of eight years.

The data collected was analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations. Documentary analysis was done on records about teacher retention. Content analysis was done on responses from interviews and in open-ended questions to identify the emerging themes.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Response Rate

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



4.2 Demographic Profile of Students

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

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

Table 1

Sex of Students

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

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

Table 2

Boarding Status

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

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

Table 3

Year of Joining the School

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

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

Table 4

KCPE Score

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



4.3 Descriptive Statistics on Students' Intention to Remain

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

However, majority of respondents could not encourage their siblings and neighbors to join the school (mean of 2.49). The dilemma remained on how students could remain in the school yet they would not encourage others to join them. The possibility is that the SDA schools suffered both low retention and low enrolment because students who study in them discourage others from joining. This is evidenced by the fact that Form 2 students were 30 per school, on average, a total of 335, instead of 990 Form 2 students within the schools under investigation.

Table 5

Descriptive Statistics on Students' Intention to Remain

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

N = 335

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

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

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

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

4.4 Students' Turnover and Attrition (2008 – 2015)

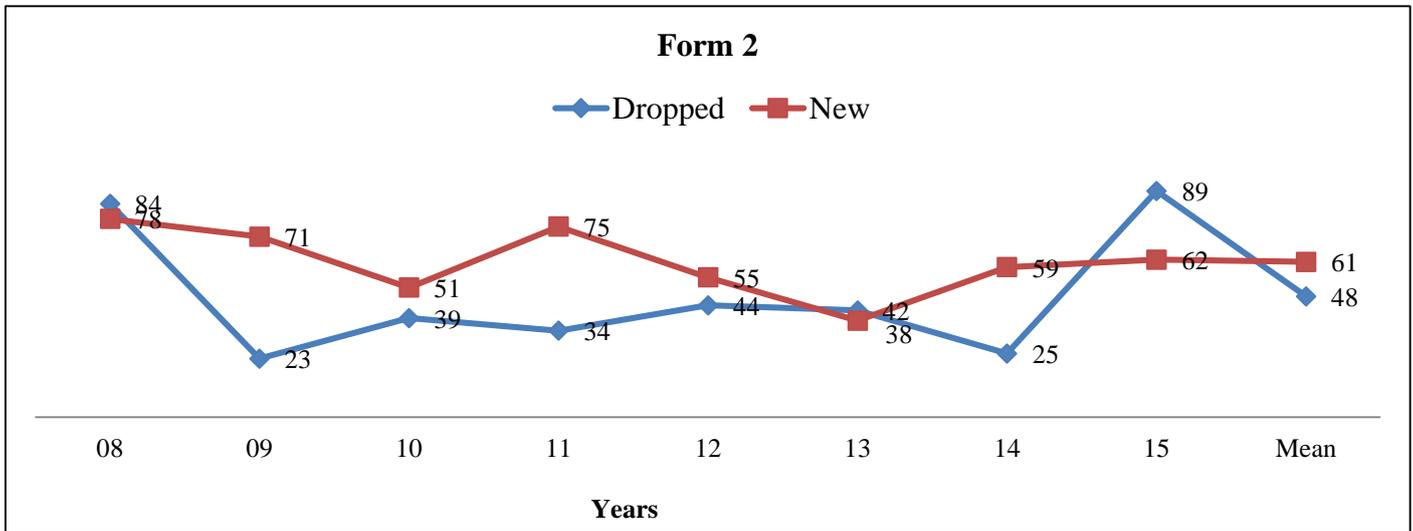
The researcher assessed the turnover and attrition trends among students in nine schools for a period of 8 years (2008-2015). This was through secondary data collected from each of these schools. To this, the number of



students in Form 2 and 3 who dropped within the year and those who joined were assessed. This is shown in Figure 1 to 3.

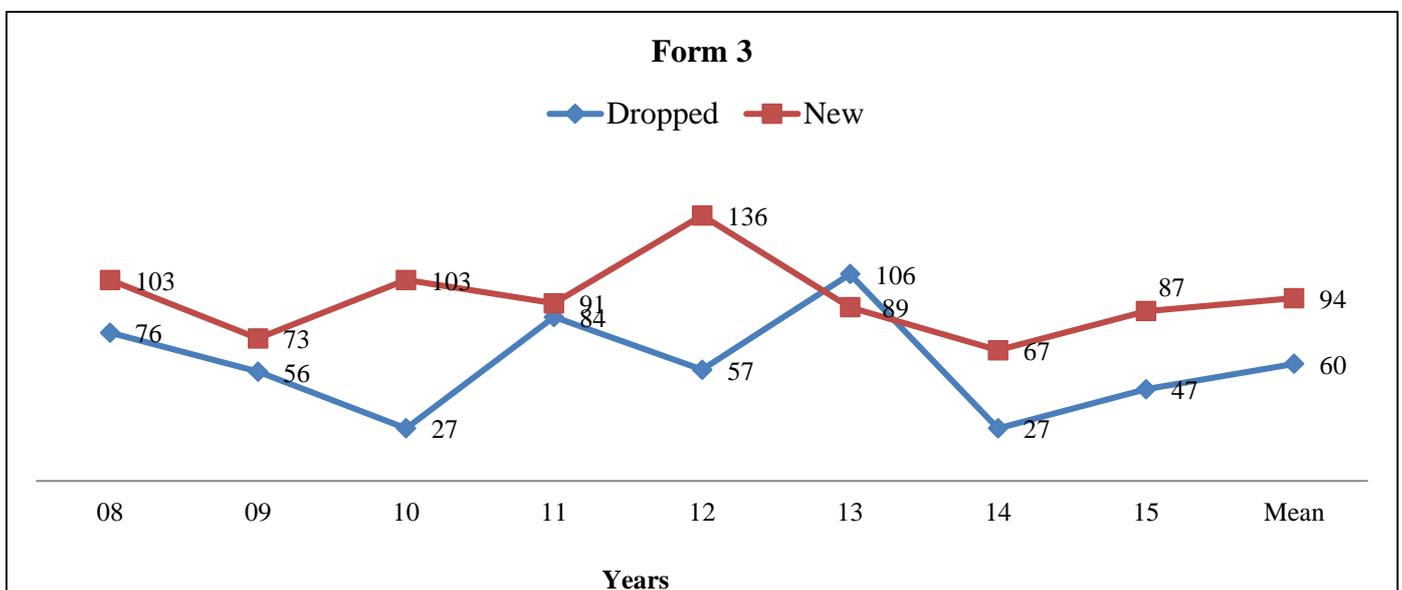
The findings obtained in figure 1 show that students were being replaced as they dropped out in some of the years (2009, 2010, 2011, 2012 & 2014). This shows high turnover rates. There were, however, incidences of attrition (students leaving without being replaced) in 2008, 2013 and 2015. In these three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

Figure 1
Turnover and attrition among form two students



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

Figure 2
Turnover and attrition among form three students

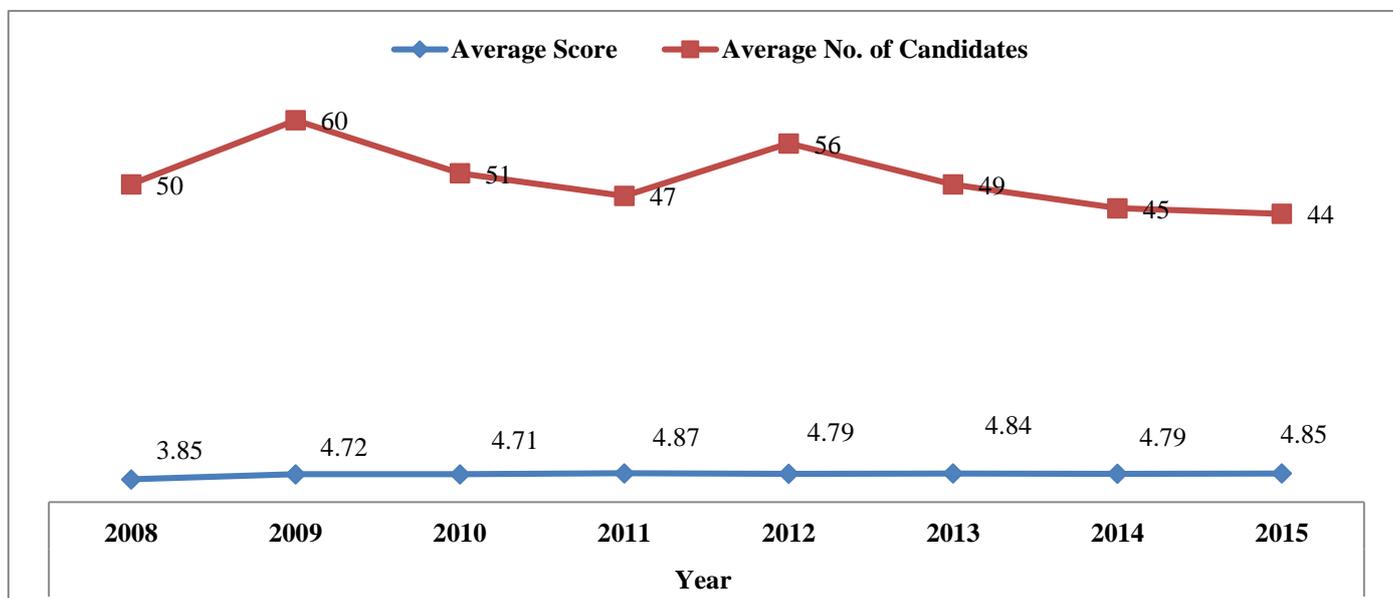




As shown in Figure 3, the number of candidates in 9 schools (who responded) between 2008 and 2015 kept on fluctuating. It ranged between 44 and 60. Since 2012, the number of candidates has been on the decline (from 56 in 2012 to 44 in 2015). Although mean scores improved most of the time and did not go below the score of 3.85 recorded at the beginning of 2008, most of this may not be strong indication that the schools' performance kept on increasing since less number of candidates could increase the central tendency (mean) of scores. These findings show that the schools faced serious challenges with students' retention, especially in the final year of school.

Figure 3

Candidates and performance in KCSE in 9 schools (2008-2015)



IV: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Conclusions

The results obtained availed important findings on student retention in secondary schools of Seventh-day Adventist church in East Kenya Union Conference. The findings show that there were high numbers of students in Form 2 and 3 who dropped within the year and those who joined. Students were being replaced as they dropped out in some of the years. All in all, there were high annual turnover rates. This could affect the learning processes as well as students' academic performance.

4.2 Recommendations

The study recommends the need for schools to put in place strategies for ensuring that students learning facilities were available. Students should also be motivated to remain in school. Bursaries and sponsorships for students from poor backgrounds should be availed. Spiritual guidance, work programs and flexible fees payment mechanisms should also be instituted so as to support children from poor background to remain in school.

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