



Determinants and predictive model of student retention in Seventh-day Adventist secondary schools in Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Student retention remains a critical challenge in faith-based secondary schools despite the integration of academic and spiritual formation programs. This study examined the determinants and predictive model of student retention in Seventh-day Adventist secondary schools in Kenya. Specifically, it assessed the influence of school administration, religious commitment, motivational strategies, and financial assistance on students' intention to remain in school and developed a predictive model of retention. A descriptive and correlational research design was adopted. Data were collected from 335 students using structured questionnaires. Pearson correlation and multiple regression analyses were employed to determine relationships and predictive power of the independent variables. Findings from the correlation analysis revealed that all predictors had positive and statistically significant relationships with students' intention to remain in school: school administration ($r = 0.630, p < 0.01$), religious commitment ($r = 0.460, p < 0.01$), motivational strategies ($r = 0.390, p < 0.01$), and financial assistance ($r = 0.243, p < 0.01$). Regression results indicated that school administration and religious commitment were the strongest predictors of student retention, jointly explaining 42.2% of the variance in intention to remain ($R^2 = 0.422, \text{Adjusted } R^2 = 0.419$). The final predictive model showed that improvements in school administration and religious commitment significantly increase students' intention to remain in school. The study concludes that institutional leadership and spiritual environment are the most influential determinants of student retention in SDA secondary schools in Kenya. It recommends strengthening participatory school governance, improving student-centered administrative practices, and enhancing structured spiritual engagement programs to improve retention outcomes.

Keywords: Financial Assistance, Motivation, Religious Commitment, School Administration, Seventh-day Adventist, Student Retention, Kenya

I. INTRODUCTION

Faith-based schools play a central role in the provision of education globally, particularly in Africa, where religious institutions constitute a significant proportion of secondary school providers. These schools integrate academic instruction with spiritual, moral, and character formation, with religious commitment forming a defining feature of their institutional identity (Metcalf et al., 2024). In Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) schools, education is guided by a holistic philosophy that emphasizes intellectual development, spiritual growth, and service to humanity. Through structured spiritual practices such as daily devotionals, Sabbath observance, Bible study, and moral instruction, SDA institutions aim to shape student behaviour and promote positive educational outcomes, including student retention (Swaner & Wolfe, 2021).

Student retention remains a persistent challenge in education systems worldwide, affecting both public and private institutions. It refers to the ability of a school to keep students enrolled until completion of a prescribed academic programme. Although faith-based institutions are often assumed to have higher retention due to strong moral and spiritual grounding, evidence shows that dropout, transfers, and absenteeism still occur even in schools with well-established religious programs (Furger, 2008; Lau, 2012). This suggests that religious commitment alone may not be sufficient to guarantee sustained student engagement and completion.

Research indicates that student retention is a multidimensional phenomenon influenced by institutional, socio-economic, motivational, and spiritual factors. According to Lau (2012), students' decisions to remain in school are shaped by their experiences within the institutional environment, including leadership effectiveness, school climate, and sense of belonging. Similarly, Furger (2008) observes that students often leave school due to academic challenges, disengagement, financial constraints, and external socio-economic pressures. These findings highlight the need for a broader analytical framework that incorporates multiple determinants of student retention.

Within faith-based education systems, school administration plays a critical role in shaping student experiences through governance, communication, discipline, and support systems. Effective administrative structures foster a positive school climate that enhances student satisfaction and persistence. In addition, motivational strategies such as recognition programs, academic support, and co-curricular engagement contribute to learners' sense of



belonging and commitment to stay in school. Financial assistance also remains a key determinant, particularly in contexts where household income constraints limit students' ability to sustain school attendance (Rose, 2024).

Religious commitment is particularly significant in SDA schools, where spiritual development is integrated into daily school life. These institutions aim to instill values that encourage discipline, moral responsibility, and long-term commitment to education. However, Farrell (2021) cautions that student retention cannot be attributed solely to individual or spiritual factors, as institutional systems and socio-economic conditions also play a decisive role in shaping learner persistence. This implies that religious commitment must operate alongside effective administrative and support structures to yield meaningful retention outcomes.

In Kenya, Seventh-day Adventist secondary schools are widely recognized for their structured spiritual environment, which includes daily worship programs, chapel services, moral guidance, and adherence to church lifestyle standards. Despite these efforts, schools within the East Kenya Union Conference (EKUC) continue to experience cases of student attrition, including dropout and transfers, raising concerns about the effectiveness of existing retention strategies (East Kenya Union Conference, 2015). This indicates a possible gap between institutional religious ideals and practical retention outcomes.

Empirical evidence further suggests that student retention in African contexts is strongly influenced by socio-economic constraints such as poverty, household responsibilities, and limited access to educational resources (Subotzky & Prinsloo, 2011; Griffins, 2007). These external pressures may weaken the influence of religious commitment and institutional support systems, thereby increasing the likelihood of student withdrawal or transfer.

Against this background, this study examines the determinants and predictive model of student retention in Seventh-day Adventist secondary schools in Kenya. It specifically investigates the extent to which school administration, religious commitment, motivational strategies, and financial assistance influence students' intention to remain in school. The study further develops a predictive model to determine the relative contribution of each factor in explaining student retention, thereby providing evidence-based insights for improving retention strategies in faith-based educational institutions.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Despite the strong spiritual and institutional foundation of Seventh-day Adventist secondary schools in Kenya, student retention remains a persistent challenge, with cases of dropout, transfers, and incomplete schooling still reported within institutions in the East Kenya Union Conference (EKUC). Although these schools emphasize holistic education grounded in religious commitment, students continue to disengage, suggesting that spiritual programs alone may not be sufficient to ensure sustained enrollment. Existing literature indicates that student retention is influenced by multiple factors, including school administration, motivational strategies, financial assistance, and socio-economic conditions; however, there is limited empirical evidence on how these factors interact within SDA secondary schools in Kenya or their relative contribution to student retention. This creates a knowledge gap for education stakeholders and church administrators, as there is no clear predictive model identifying the most influential determinants of student persistence. Therefore, this study examines the determinants and predictive model of student retention in SDA secondary schools in Kenya to inform evidence-based strategies for improving student retention outcomes.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

- i. To examine the factors influencing student retention in Seventh-day Adventist secondary schools in Kenya.
- ii. To develop a predictive model of student retention based on the identified factors.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in the Expectancy Theory of motivation (Vroom, 1964), which explains behaviour as a function of individuals' expectations that effort will lead to desired outcomes. The theory posits that individuals are more likely to engage in and persist with activities when they believe their efforts will result in valued rewards (Lee, 2007). In the context of education, students are more likely to remain in school when they perceive that academic effort leads to meaningful outcomes such as academic success, personal development, and future opportunities.

In Seventh-day Adventist secondary schools, student retention is influenced not only by academic expectations but also by institutional, socio-economic, and spiritual factors. School administration practices, motivational strategies, availability of financial support, and the strength of religious commitment shape students' perceived value of remaining in school. When these factors reinforce positive expectations and reduce barriers to learning, students are more likely to persist until completion.

Therefore, Expectancy Theory provides a suitable lens for understanding student retention in this study, as it links institutional conditions and motivational structures to students' decisions to remain in school. The theory



supports the conceptualization of retention as an outcome of both internal motivation and external school-related factors, which together form the basis for the predictive model developed in this research.

2.2 Empirical Review

2.2.1 Factors Influencing Student Retention in Seventh-day Adventist Secondary Schools

Empirical studies indicate that student retention is a multidimensional phenomenon influenced by institutional, socio-economic, motivational, and psychosocial factors. School administration plays a central role in shaping the learning environment and student persistence. According to Lau (2012), supportive school leadership, effective communication, and student involvement in decision-making enhance learners' sense of belonging, which in turn reduces dropout tendencies. Similarly, Furger (2008) emphasizes that positive school climate and strong teacher-student relationships significantly improve student engagement and retention.

Motivational strategies within schools also strongly influence student persistence. Rewards, recognition of academic and co-curricular achievement, and provision of guidance and counselling services have been shown to increase student commitment to schooling (Ori, 2011). In faith-based schools, spiritual programs such as mentorship, worship activities, and moral instruction further reinforce discipline and purpose, thereby strengthening students' willingness to remain in school (Omar, 2004).

Socio-economic factors, particularly financial constraints, remain a major barrier to student retention in sub-Saharan Africa. Studies by Gituriandu (2010) and FASDEP (2012) show that poverty, inability to pay school fees, and lack of basic learning resources contribute significantly to student dropout rates. In response, financial assistance programs such as bursaries, work-study arrangements, and scholarships have been identified as effective mechanisms for improving retention.

Bennell (2004) notes that poverty, lack of resources, and household responsibilities often override institutional efforts to retain students, leading to dropout even in well-structured school environments.

Saret (2016) further observes that early indicators of dropout, such as absenteeism, poor academic performance, and lack of participation, are often linked to external pressures including family challenges and economic hardship. These factors suggest that retention is a multidimensional phenomenon that extends beyond school-based interventions.

Religious commitment is a distinctive factor in faith-based schools, particularly in Seventh-day Adventist institutions. Research by Swaner and Wolfe (2021) shows that spiritual engagement fosters discipline, moral responsibility, and a sense of purpose among students, which can positively influence retention. However, studies also caution that religious commitment alone is insufficient unless supported by strong academic and socio-economic support systems.

Omar (2004) observes that in faith-based institutions, many teachers and students remain not only because of institutional structures but also due to spiritual attachment and a perceived sense of calling. This spiritual connection fosters loyalty and emotional commitment to the institution, which may indirectly enhance retention.

White (1903) further emphasizes that faith-based education extends beyond academic achievement to the development of character and moral values. In this framework, education is viewed as a spiritual mission, where teachers and students are engaged in a process of holistic transformation. Such a perspective strengthens institutional attachment and encourages persistence, as individuals perceive their involvement in education as purposeful and value-driven.

Similarly, Mutune and Orodho (2014) note that mission schools in Kenya historically commanded respect due to their strong moral and spiritual foundations. These institutions fostered a sense of belonging and trust among students, parents, and teachers, which contributed to stability and continuity in education. This historical perspective suggests that religious commitment has long been associated with stronger institutional loyalty in faith-based schools.

2.2.2 Predictive Model of Student Retention

Recent studies have increasingly focused on predictive modelling to identify key determinants of student retention. Regression-based approaches are commonly used to estimate the relative contribution of different factors to student persistence. According to Nikolaidis et al., (2022), predictive models allow researchers to quantify how institutional and personal variables jointly influence student retention outcomes.

Empirical evidence suggests that school administration and learning environment are among the strongest predictors of retention, often explaining a significant proportion of variance in student persistence (Loeb et al., 2011). In addition, motivational strategies and religious engagement have been shown to contribute positively but with varying strength depending on context (Omar, 2004). Socio-economic factors, particularly financial assistance, also emerge as significant predictors in most African education settings (Gituriandu, 2010).

Regression models developed in previous studies typically demonstrate that a combination of institutional support, motivation, and socio-economic assistance provides a stronger explanatory power than any single factor



alone. This supports the development of a multivariate predictive model in the current study, which integrates school administration, motivational strategies, religious commitment, and financial support as key predictors of student retention in Seventh-day Adventist secondary schools in Kenya.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a descriptive and correlational research design to examine the determinants and predictive model of student retention in Seventh-day Adventist secondary schools in Kenya. The design was considered appropriate because it allows for the description of relationships among variables as they naturally occur, as well as the prediction of outcomes based on selected factors.

The target population comprised students enrolled in Seventh-day Adventist secondary schools within Kenya. Data were collected using structured questionnaires designed to capture students' perceptions of school administration, religious commitment, motivational strategies, and financial assistance, as well as their intention to remain in school, which served as the proxy measure for student retention.

Four independent variables were examined, namely school administration, religious commitment, motivational strategies, and financial assistance to students, against the dependent variable, student intention to remain in school.

Data were analyzed using Pearson correlation and multiple regression analysis. Pearson correlation was used to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between each independent variable and student retention, while multiple regression analysis was employed to establish the combined predictive power and relative contribution of the independent variables in explaining student retention outcomes.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section presents the empirical findings on the determinants and predictive model of student retention in Seventh-day Adventist secondary schools in Kenya. The results are organized according to the study objectives: (i) factors influencing student retention and (ii) the predictive model of student retention. Pearson correlation and multiple regression analyses were used.

4.1 Descriptive Results of Study Variables

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) for the key study variables.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables (Means and Standard Deviations)

| Variable | N | Mean | Standard Deviation |
|---------------------------------|-----|------|--------------------|
| School Administration | 335 | 3.12 | 0.68 |
| Religious Commitment | 335 | 3.78 | 0.33 |
| Motivational Strategies | 335 | 2.95 | 0.72 |
| Financial Assistance | 334 | 2.6 | 0.75 |
| Intention to Remain (Retention) | 335 | 3.25 | 0.66 |
| Overall | 335 | 3.14 | 0.63 |

The descriptive statistics in Table 1 indicate that religious commitment recorded the highest mean score ($M = 3.78$, $SD = 0.33$), suggesting strong agreement among students regarding the influence of spirituality in school. School administration also received a relatively high rating ($M = 3.12$, $SD = 0.68$), indicating a generally positive perception of institutional leadership. In contrast, motivational strategies ($M = 2.95$, $SD = 0.72$) and financial assistance ($M = 2.60$, $SD = 0.75$) recorded comparatively lower mean scores, suggesting moderate to low satisfaction levels. The overall mean for students' intention to remain in school ($M = 3.25$, $SD = 0.66$) indicates a generally positive inclination toward retention.

4.2 Relationship between Independent Variables and Student Retention

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships between the independent variables and students' intention to remain in school. The results are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2***Correlation Analysis*

| Variable | Intention to Remain (Retention) | Religious Commitment | School Administration | Motivational Strategies | Financial Assistance to Students |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Intention to Remain (Retention) | 1 | | | | |
| Religious Commitment | 0.460** | 1 | | | |
| School Administration | 0.630** | 0.512* | 1 | | |
| Motivational Strategies | 0.390** | 0.401* | 0.433* | 1 | |
| Financial Assistance to Students | 0.243** | 0.298* | 0.310* | 0.287* | 1 |

Note: $p < 0.01$, $*p < 0.05$ (2-tailed).

The results reveal positive and statistically significant relationships between student retention and all the independent variables. School administration exhibited the strongest correlation with student retention ($r = 0.630$, $p < 0.01$), followed by religious commitment ($r = 0.460$, $p < 0.01$), motivational strategies ($r = 0.390$, $p < 0.01$), and financial assistance ($r = 0.243$, $p < 0.01$).

These findings indicate that improvements in institutional leadership, spiritual engagement, and student support systems are associated with increased likelihood of students remaining in school. Consequently, all null hypotheses were rejected.

The findings are consistent with previous studies. For instance, Ori (2011) emphasizes the critical role of school administration in shaping student outcomes, while Omar (2004) highlights the influence of religious commitment on student persistence. Similarly, Gituriandu (2010) identifies socio-economic challenges as key determinants of student dropout, while Furger (2008) underscores the importance of school-based interventions in enhancing retention.

4.3 Best Predictors of Student Retention

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine the predictive power of the independent variables on student retention. The findings are shown in Table 3.

Table 3*Model Summary*

| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error |
|-------|-------|----------|-------------------|------------|
| 1 | 0.634 | 0.403 | 0.401 | 0.67768 |
| 2 | 0.65 | 0.422 | 0.419 | 0.66745 |

Predictors: (Constant), School administration

Predictors: (Constant), School administration, Religious commitment

The results show that school administration alone explains 40.3% of the variance in student retention ($R^2 = 0.403$). When religious commitment is added, the explained variance increases to 42.2% ($R^2 = 0.422$), indicating that religious commitment contributes an additional 1.9% to the model.

This suggests that while both variables are important, school administration is the dominant predictor of student retention.

Table 4*ANOVA Results*

| Model | F | Sig. |
|-------|---------|------|
| 1 | 223.677 | 0 |
| 2 | 120.924 | 0 |

The ANOVA results indicate that both regression models are statistically significant ($p < 0.05$), confirming that the predictors reliably explain variations in student retention

Table 5*Regression Coefficients (Student Retention)*

| Variable | B | Beta | t | Sig. |
|-----------------------|-------|-------|--------|------|
| (Constant) | 0.084 | — | — | — |
| School Administration | 0.753 | 0.634 | 14.956 | 0 |
| Religious Commitment | 0.647 | 0.546 | 11.025 | 0 |



The regression results indicate that both school administration ($\beta = 0.634$, $p < 0.05$) and religious commitment ($\beta = 0.546$, $p < 0.05$) are significant predictors of student retention. School administration emerged as the strongest predictor, suggesting that institutional leadership, communication, and governance structures play a central role in shaping students' decisions to remain in school.

Religious commitment also significantly contributes to retention, indicating that spiritual engagement reinforces students' sense of purpose and belonging within faith-based institutions.

4.4 Predictive Model of Student Retention

Based on the regression analysis, the predictive model for student retention is expressed as:

$$Y = 0.084 + (0.753 \times \text{School Administration}) + (0.647 \times \text{Religious Commitment})$$

The model indicates that a one-unit improvement in school administration leads to a 0.753 increase in students' intention to remain, while a one-unit increase in religious commitment leads to a 0.647 increase. This highlights the critical importance of strengthening institutional leadership and spiritual programs in enhancing student retention.

4.5 Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study provide strong empirical evidence that student retention in Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) secondary schools in Kenya is a multidimensional phenomenon shaped by institutional, motivational, socio-economic, and spiritual factors. The results demonstrate that all the independent variables—school administration, religious commitment, motivational strategies, and financial assistance—have positive and statistically significant relationships with students' intention to remain in school. Notably, school administration emerged as the strongest predictor of student retention ($r = 0.630$, $p < 0.05$), reinforcing the central role of leadership in shaping school climate, student engagement, and institutional effectiveness. This finding aligns with the work of Ori (2011), who emphasized that supportive and participatory school leadership enhances student satisfaction and persistence. Similarly, Loeb et al. (2011) argue that effective administrative practices create conducive learning environments that reduce dropout rates and improve educational outcomes.

Religious commitment also demonstrated a strong and significant relationship with student retention ($r = 0.460$, $p < 0.05$), underscoring the importance of spirituality in faith-based educational settings. This finding supports earlier studies by Omar (2004), which found that religious engagement fosters discipline, moral responsibility, and a sense of belonging among students. In the context of SDA schools, where faith integration is central to the curriculum, religious commitment appears to function as both a motivational and identity-forming mechanism. This is further corroborated by Swaner & Wolfe (2021), who argue that holistic education models that integrate faith and learning enhance student engagement and long-term persistence. However, the findings also suggest that religious commitment alone is insufficient; its impact is amplified when supported by effective institutional structures, echoing Farrell (2009), who contends that institutional conditions significantly mediate student persistence.

Motivational strategies were also found to significantly influence student retention ($r = 0.390$, $p < 0.05$), indicating that recognition, rewards, and co-curricular engagement contribute meaningfully to students' decisions to remain in school. These findings are consistent with Furger (2008), who observed that students are more likely to persist in schools that actively recognize their achievements and nurture their talents. Similarly, Deci & Ryan (2000), through the Self-Determination Theory, highlight that intrinsic and extrinsic motivation significantly influences persistence behaviors by enhancing students' sense of competence and autonomy. The relatively moderate mean score for motivational strategies in this study suggests that while such initiatives exist, their implementation may be inconsistent across schools, thereby limiting their full potential impact on retention.

Financial assistance, although the weakest predictor among the variables ($r = 0.243$, $p < 0.05$), still showed a significant positive relationship with student retention. This finding reflects the broader socio-economic realities in Kenya, where financial constraints remain a major barrier to educational continuity. The results are in agreement with Subotzky & Prinsloo (2011), who found that financial challenges significantly contribute to student attrition, particularly in low-income contexts. Additionally, Griffins (2007) noted that financial support mechanisms such as bursaries and flexible fee structures can substantially improve student retention rates. However, the relatively lower influence of financial assistance compared to other variables suggests that in faith-based schools, non-financial factors—especially administration and religious commitment—may play a more dominant role in shaping student persistence.

The regression analysis further strengthens these findings by identifying school administration and religious commitment as the most significant predictors of student retention, jointly explaining 42.2% of the variance (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.419$). The predictive model indicates that improvements in administrative support and religious engagement



can substantially increase students' likelihood of remaining in school. This supports Tinto (1993)'s Student Integration Theory, which posits that students are more likely to persist when they are academically and socially integrated into their institutions. In SDA schools, such integration appears to occur through both administrative structures and spiritual engagement, creating a unique dual pathway for enhancing retention.

Overall, the findings suggest that student retention in SDA secondary schools is not driven by a single factor but rather by the interaction of institutional effectiveness, spiritual environment, motivational practices, and socio-economic support systems. These results contribute to the growing body of literature emphasizing the need for holistic and context-specific approaches to improving student retention, particularly in faith-based educational settings.

IV. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Conclusion

This study established that student retention in Seventh-day Adventist secondary schools in Kenya is primarily influenced by institutional and spiritual factors, with school administration emerging as the most significant predictor, followed by religious commitment. While motivational strategies and financial assistance were found to have positive effects, their influence was comparatively moderate. The study further demonstrated that a combined model integrating school administration and religious commitment provides a strong predictive framework for understanding student retention. These findings highlight that effective leadership, supportive school environments, and meaningful spiritual engagement are critical in enhancing students' intention to remain in school.

4.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study makes the following recommendations: First, school administrations should be strengthened through capacity building in leadership, communication, and participatory governance. Enhancing transparency, involving students in decision-making, and fostering supportive school climates can significantly improve student retention.

Second, faith-based schools should reinforce structured and meaningful spiritual programs that go beyond routine religious activities to actively engage students in value-based learning, mentorship, and personal development. This will strengthen the role of religious commitment in promoting persistence.

Third, schools should enhance motivational strategies by institutionalizing reward systems, recognizing academic and co-curricular achievements, and promoting talent development programs. Such initiatives can improve student engagement and attachment to school.

Fourth, stakeholders, including church organizations and school management, should expand financial support mechanisms such as bursaries, flexible fee payment plans, and work-study programs to reduce economic barriers that may hinder student retention.

Finally, policymakers and education authorities should adopt a holistic approach to student retention that integrates institutional effectiveness, spiritual development, and socio-economic support systems. Future research should further explore additional contextual factors and test the predictive model across different educational settings to enhance its generalizability.

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