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RESULT OF LOW STUDENT ENROLMENT ON THE SUSTAINABILITY OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN WESTERN KENYA

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Abstract

This study examines the effect of low student enrolment on the sustainability of SDA secondary schools in the West Kenya Conference of Seventh Day Adventist Church. The study was underpinned by the sustainability transformation in education theory which postulates the identification of sustainability strategies and action plans for implementation. Therefore, the mixed methods research approach was adopted in this study. This study utilised the descriptive research design and was conducted in WKUC of the SDA church, covering 15 out of 47 counties in Kenya. The test-retest and the split-half reliabilities of the questionnaires were ascertained by use of Cronbach Alpha Coefficient, and reliability of 0.7 and 0.65 was arrived at, respectively. Study findings revealed that student enrolment trends in SDA schools were on a downward trend, and this needs to be addressed as soon as possible. This study recommends that the church administration and schools' management should address issues that affect low student enrolments, such as the high fees charged by sourcing funds from other sources such as engaging in income generating activities or partnering with the government so that it can provide and pay the teachers in the schools.

Key terms: Student enrolment, post-graduate qualifications, holistic education.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

As Kenya strives to attain sustainable development goals and the National Goals of Vision 2030, the issue of education takes centre stage. Education is seen as one of the most promising paths for individuals to realise better, more lives that are productive and as one of the primary drivers of national economic development. Education also forms the basic component upon which any nation's economic, social and political development is founded (Ball, 2012). The study focused on how low student enrolment has affected sustainability among the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) secondary schools in West Kenya Union Conference (WKUC). While there are currently some successful Adventist secondary schools, most of them are basically struggling to survive. Therefore, Adventist schools must pay great attention to sustainability if they continue to exist in such a challenging environment.

A study by Mesa (2010) asserts that Adventist schools in the South American Division territory of the SDA church are growing in relation to the number of students, staff, quality of education offered and spiritual programs. Marfo et al. (2017) conducted a study in Ghana and concluded that prospective students for SDA secondary schools in Ghana are faced with a dilemma when choosing schools. Either they focus on their faith and attend Seventh-day Adventist secondary schools, which offer limited career options or enrol in a non-SDA school which offers highly demanded courses in the job market. Most of the Adventist secondary schools in Kenya have not established themselves as part of trustworthy educational networks in the eyes of the church constituency and the general public. McIver (2017) also observes that Adventist schools have a considerable dependency on possible grants and donations from their respective conferences. Moreover, most of them are operating on weak financial bases due to dwindling enrolment, which is crucial for sustainability and resilience since they depend on fee collection from parents to run their programmes, including the payment of teacher salaries.

Adventist education has continued to grow in Kenya with the establishment of many secondary schools and other learning institutions. In addition, Kenya has two union conferences: The East Kenya Union Conference (EKUC) and the West Kenya Union Conference (WKUC). The Education Department in WKUC is responsible for the coordination, promotion, training and quality of the Seventh-day Adventist educational programmes in the region, which includes 10 secondary schools, two colleges, and one university, with over 150 teachers and 2020 students (WKUC, 2020).

Working closely with the Education Department Directors in the six conferences and one field, the staff offer services to boards, administrators, and faculty of Adventist schools, colleges, and universities within WKUC. The staff also provide support through the WKUC to the local conferences and field levels and to teachers working in Adventist elementary and secondary schools with the aim of ensuring that the education of Adventist philosophy and the principles of faith and learning are integrated into the life of each institution (WKUC, 2020).

The mission of the WKUC Department of Education exists to act as the church arm in enabling Jesus Christ's disciples who live as His loving witnesses and proclaim to everyone the eternal gospel of the three Angels' messages in readiness for His return soon (Matt 28:18-20, Acts 1:8, Rev 14:6-12). The union carries out this mission through supervision, coordination, and promotion to ensure the provision of quality Adventist Education in the WKUC territory. On the other hand, the union's vision is to provide qualified, competent personnel and Christ-based membership to the church system in WKUC for the effective achievement of its mission (WKUC, 2018).

This study was necessary since the enrolment trends in the said schools were on a downward trend, and this has greatly affected the sustainability of the schools. Therefore, the study findings will go a long way in diagnosing the genesis of the low enrolment trends and coming up with innovative ways in which the sustainability of the SDA schools could be enhanced besides contributing literature that will elicit further studies on the said topic. SDA schools in WKUC are collectively facing a rather unpredictable future. Some would argue that the state of SDA schools in the WKUC education system has great room for improvement, but developing a plan to take SDA schools in WKUC in the right direction is easier said than done. The SDA schools in WKUC are faced with the challenge of low student enrolment occasioned by the government policy of providing free day secondary education in all public secondary schools and encouraging 100 per cent transition from primary to secondary schools. The low enrolment has brought about dwindling financial resources in these schools since they solely rely on fees paid by students. In turn, they have suffered from high teacher turnover, where they have experienced a mass exodus of the most experienced teachers to government secondary schools.

There has been the challenge of financial dependence of SDA schools in WKUC on their respective conferences for sustenance. Consequently, the funds from various conferences that were used to support these schools have decreased rapidly. This, coupled with the effects arising from the Covid-19 pandemic that saw the closure of schools and places of worship, has reduced tithes and offerings that were remitted to the various conferences significantly.

The various conferences where the SDA schools in WKUC are situated have asked the various schools to come up with strategies to overcome the challenges facing them in matters of sustainability and the subsequent provision of quality and holistic education. Apparently, a limited study has been conducted to establish the strategies to overcome the challenge of low student enrolment and the sustainability of SDA schools in WKUC in Kenya in the provision of quality and holistic education. Therefore, investigates the strategies to overcome this challenge facing the sustainability of SDA schools in WKUC in Kenya in the provision of quality and holistic education.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

A report by Alyani et al. (2014) indicates that the academic performance of a school, the environment of a school, the facilities of a school, the quality of teachers and the quality of teaching are among the factors that determine enrolment in a school. Bearsley-Hardy (2017) believes that enrolment in Adventist schools needs to be addressed because it does not correspond to what Adventist members believe and profess. Many Adventist believers still do not prefer SDA schools as their option. Beadsley-Hardy (2017) says that: "If more than 140 years after the initial development of a denominational education system in the 1870s, we still believe that mission and education are one, that the work of redemption and education is one, and that the Seventh-day Adventist Church is a prophecy movement with an end-time mission to all the universe, we would expect enrolment patterns to support that belief. How does enrolment in Seventh-day Adventist schools relate to church membership? As of December 31, 2015, membership stood at more than 19 million members. However, a global survey revealed that less than half of church members had some Adventist education (47%), and 52 per cent had none. More than half of the members have not attended a Seventh-day Adventist school. The data display a significant discrepancy between what we say about the significance of education and actual enrolment (p. 2)."

Studies by Kilgour and Pitakia (2017) point out that the decreasing demand for Adventist education is occasioned by a perceptual decline in its value and the perceptions of people. A shift in perceptions from negative to positive should be the strongest factor for overcoming this challenge. School administrators, pastors, teachers and other stakeholders should enlighten others on the distinctive feature of Adventist education if enrolment is to improve. Schools have to identify their unique feature in their approach to educating young people. Holistic education, spiritual values and faith are the core of Adventist education. The challenge is how to relate these values to good curricula, facilities, teachers, administrators, leaders, and environment (Kilgour & Pitakia, 2017).

3.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The table below summarises the respondent's background information sought during the study, and information includes their school, gender, year of birth, level of education, marital status and religious affiliation.

Table 1: Background Information of Respondents

Characteristic	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	86	76.1
Female	27	23.9
Total	113	100.0
Year of Birth		
1961-1970	24	21.2
1971-1980	31	27.4
1981-1990	27	23.9
1991-2000	23	20.4
2000-2010	08	7.1
Total	113	100.0
Level of Education		
Primary	00	00
Secondary	00	00
Tertiary	04	3.5
University	102	90.3
Postgraduate	07	6.2
Total	440	100.0
Marital Status		
Single	07	6.2
Married	102	90.3
Separated	04	3.5
Total	440	100.0
Religious affiliation		
SDA	113	100
Other	00	00
Total	113	100

From the teachers' respondents' background information, 86(71.1%) were male, while the rest, 27(23.9%), were female. This shows most of our schools are dominated by male teachers as opposed to the female gender, in regards to their years of birth, a majority 31(27.4%) were born between 1971-1980 followed by those born between 1981-1990 who were 27(23.9%) followed by those 8(7.1%). This shows that majority of the teachers in S.D.A maintained schools are in their early 40s and late 30s and still energetic in terms of service delivery. In regards to their level of dedication, a majority of 102(90.3%) are university graduates with a first degree then, followed by those with post-graduate qualifications who are 7(6.2%) followed by those with college diplomas or tertiary qualifications who were 4(3.5%). None had primary or secondary school level education as the highest qualification attained. This is in line with the employment policy in Kenya, where only teachers with T.S.C numbers ought to be employed in Kenyan secondary schools; for you to qualify for a T.S.C number, you need to have graduated with two teaching subjects from a recognised institution. On marital grounds, the majority, 102(90.3%), were married, 7(6.2%) were single, and 4(3.5%) were separated. The high number of married teachers shows that they belong in the age bracket where one is supposed to be in a stable relationship, and the Adventist philosophy encourages spouses to work together. On religious affiliations, all 113(100%) teachers were members of the SDA church. This is a result of employment policy within the church that requires you to be a member of the church before being employed. In regards to training, all 113(100%) teachers were trained, which explains the Kenyan government policy that one cannot work as a teacher before being qualified for the same.

Table 2: Schools and Teachers that participated in the Study

School	Frequency	Percent
Nyabola	10	8.8
Kisumu South	8	7.1
Kagoro	8	7.1
Nyabikaye	6	5.3
Ranen	8	7.1
Chebwai	8	7.1
Kimolwet	6	5.3
Segero Natnl	31	27.4
Segero Herald	9	8.0
Segero Barton	9	8.0
Kamagambo	10	8.8
TOTAL	133	100

According to table 2, the school with the highest number of teacher respondents was Segero National School, with 31(27.4%) teacher respondents, this was followed by Nyabola and Kamagambo, which both had 10(8.8%) teachers who acted as respondents. This was closely followed by Segero Heralds and Segero Barton, which both had 9(8.0%). This was followed closely with four other schools, which had the same teacher respondents. Those with the second least number of teacher respondents had 8(7.1%) teachers, and these schools were Kisumu South, Kagoro, Ranen and Chebwai. This was, of course, followed by the last category with 6(5.3%) teacher respondents, Kimolwet and Nyabikaye. In total, there were 11 schools and 113 teachers participated in the study.

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The study sought to examine the low student enrolment and its effect on the sustainability of S.D.A schools. Table 3 shows the findings from the teachers' questionnaires.

Table 3: Student Enrolment

Statement	Agreed		Undecided		Disagreed		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
The student's number in the school has been reduced	107	94.7	6	5.3	0	0	113	100
The quality of Education offered has contributed to student enrolment	39	34.5	0	0	74	65.5	113	100
School Facilities and enrolment have contributed to student enrolment	113	100	0	0	0	0	113	100
The amount of fees charged has affected school enrolment	105	92.9	8	7.1	0	0	113	100
Perception of parents about Adventist schools has affected enrolment	93	82.3	20	17.7	0	0	113	100

The study sought to examine the low student enrolment and its effect on the sustainability of S.D.A schools. The research began by asking the teachers whether the number of students in the school had reduced. To answer the question, a majority of 107(94.7%) agreed, while 6(5.3%) were undecided. None disagreed. This shows that student enrollment trends in S.D.A school were on a downward trend, and this needs to be addressed as soon as possible. This agrees with Bearsley-Hardy's (2017) sentiments, who believe that enrollment in Adventist schools needs to be addressed because it does not correspond to what Adventist members believe and profess. Many Adventist believers still do not prefer SDA schools as their option. When asked if the quality of education offered in the schools contributed to the low student enrollment, a majority, 74(65.5%), disagreed, while a good number, 39(34.5%), agreed. None was undecided. This showed that other factors had contributed to low student enrolment and not solely academic quality. This agrees with the report by Alyani et al. (2014), who indicate that the academic performance of a school, the environment of a school, the facilities of a school, the quality of teachers and the quality of teaching are among the factors that determine enrolment in a school. Asked whether its school facilities and resources had contributed to the low student enrollment, all the respondents, 113(100%), seemed to agree with this fact. This is in line with the arguments of Owoeye and Yara (2011), also cited by Fagbamiye (1979), who studied secondary schools in Lagos and revealed that schools which are equipped had good records of achievement and attracted more students. He concluded that good quality schools in terms of facilities and younger students' intake perform better.

In conclusion, Owoeye and Yara (2011) stated that school facilities were the main determinant of academic achievement and school sustainability. The teachers' respondents were further asked if it was the amount of fee charged that affected school enrollment. A majority of 105(92.9%) agreed, while the rest were undecided. None disagreed. This shows that one of the reasons why enrolment rates have gone down was due to the huge amount of fees charged by S.D.A schools. Private schools pay their own teachers from the fee charged from parents while the government pays teachers in public schools. This is why public schools pay lower fees as compared to private schools. This agrees with Thomas and Pruvot (2011), who says that schools need proper financial systems and procedures to be stable. Most Adventist secondary schools are operating on a weak financial base which cannot enable them to meet their operating and infrastructure

development needs. This is attributed to low enrolment, ineffective fee collection, rising expenditures, and weak financial management, accountability and reporting system. Despite having robust financial management policies and procedures aligned to the higher church organisation, cases of financial mismanagement and pilferage are still reported in the schools.

Asked whether the perception of parents about Adventist schools had affected enrollment, a majority, 93(82.3%) of the teachers, agreed, while 20(17.7%) were undecided. None disagreed. This shows the perception that some parents had about S.D.A schools had affected enrollment trends in schools. This agrees with a study by Kilgour and Pitakia (2017) that points out that the decreasing demand for Adventist education was occasioned by a perceptual decline in its value and the perceptions of people. Therefore, a shift in perceptions from negative to positive should be the strongest factor in overcoming this challenge.

Table 4: Chi-Square Results Showing the Relationship between Low Student Enrolment and Sustainability of Seventh-day Adventist Secondary Schools in WKUC

	Low enrolment in SDA schools	Sustainability of SDA schools.
Chi-Square	0.123	0.124
Df	5	5
Asym. Sig	0.033	0.033

A Chi-Square test was calculated comparing the frequency of low student enrolment and sustainability of SDA schools. It was hypothesised that no significant relationship existed between the two factors. A significant relationship was found (χ^2) = 0.123, df 5, P = 0.033, for low student enrolment, and χ^2 = 0.124, df 5, for sustainability of SDA schools in WKUC as shown in table 4. The results show that in both cases, the P value of 0.033 was less than 0.05. Therefore, there was a significant relationship between student enrolment and the sustainability of SDA schools in WKUC. Thus, the researcher rejected the null hypothesis and accepted the alternative hypothesis. "There is a significant relationship between low student enrolment and sustainability of SDA schools in WKUC". In other words, the sustainability of SDA schools was dependent on as opposed to independent of student enrolment. The two attributes are therefore associated in reality and not as a result of some chance factor.

Table 5: Why Student Enrolment Determines Adequate Financial Resources

Response	Frequency	Percentage
It enables the school to be self-reliant without relying on donors/sponsors	71	62.8
It ensures the school develops in terms of facilities	42	37.2
Total	113	100

When the teacher respondents were asked how students' enrolment determined adequate financial resources, a majority, 71(62.8%), argued that it enabled the schools to sustain themselves without relying

on outside sponsors/donors who, at times, were unreliable. Another 42(37.2%) said it ensured the schools develop in terms of facilities.

4.0 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions: Student enrollment trends in S.D.A schools were on a downward trend, and this needs to be addressed as soon as possible. This agrees with Bearsley-Hardy's (2017) sentiments, who believe that enrollment in Adventist schools needs to be addressed because it does not correspond to what Adventist members believe and profess. Many Adventist believers still do not prefer SDA schools as their option. When asked if it's the quality of education offered in school that had contributed to the low student enrollment, a majority, 74(65.5%), disagreed, while a good number, 39(34.5%), agreed. None was undecided. This depicts that there are other factors that have contributed to the low student enrolment and not solely academic quality. This agrees with the report by Alyani et al. (2014) that indicates that the academic performance of a school, the environment of a school, the facilities of a school, the quality of teachers and the quality of teaching are among the factors that determine enrolment in a school. This shows that one of the reasons why enrolment has gone down was due to the huge amount of fees charged by S.D.A schools. Private schools pay their own teachers from the school fees charged from parents, while the government pays teachers in public schools. This is why public schools pay less school fees as compared to private schools. This agrees with Thomas and Pruvot (2011), who argue that schools need proper financial systems and procedures to be stable. Unfortunately, most Adventist secondary schools are operating on a weak financial base which cannot enable them to meet their operating and infrastructure development needs. This is attributed to low enrolment, ineffective fee collection, rising expenditures, and weak financial management, accountability and reporting systems. Perceptions that some parents have about S.D.A schools had affected enrolment in schools. This agrees with a study by Kilgour and Pitakia (2017) that points out that the decreasing demand for Adventist education is occasioned by a perceptual decline in its value and the perceptions of people. A shift in perceptions from negative to positive should be the strongest factor for overcoming this challenge.

Recommendations: The SDA church needs to sensitise its members to take their children to SDA schools to boost their enrolment. The church administration and schools' management should address the other issues that affect low student enrolments, such as the high fees charged and negative perception of the. The church administration and schools' management should purpose to reduce fees paid by students by sourcing funds from other sources such as engaging in income-generating activities or partnering with the government so that the government can provide teachers to the schools. The church administration and schools' management should endear church members and the public at large to change their perception of SDA schools through proper branding and serious marketing and advertisement.

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