

**Guidance and Counselling Services and Girls' Retention in Secondary Schools in Kitgum
District**

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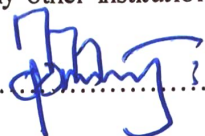
**A Research Dissertation Submitted to the Directorate of Research and Graduate Training
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Award of a Master of Education Degree
in Education Management of Gulu University**

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Declaration

I, Godfrey Opwonya, 18/U/3218/MED, a student of Master of Education at Gulu University, hereby declare that this research dissertation entitled "*Guidance and Counselling Services and Girls' Retention in Secondary Schools in Kitgum District*" is my original work and has not been submitted to any other institution for any academic award.

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Approval

This research dissertation is submitted to the Directorate of Research and Graduate Studies, Gulu University, for examination in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of a Master of Education degree with our approval.

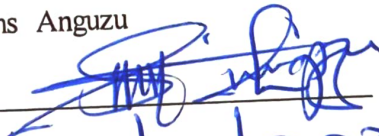
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Dedication

Am destined to dedicate this research work to my beloved late father Pacific Okwera and my mother Lamon Paska Okwera for the foundation well laid for me in education achievements, all my brothers and sisters and my wife Anena Mary Opwonya.

Acknowledgement

I would like to register my special thanks of gratitude to my supervisors for having led me through this academic work successfully. Am indebted to a number of people who gave me the golden opportunity to complete this study programme. I am thankful to my supervisors Dr. Stephen Odama (PhD), Dr. Collins Anguzu (PhD) and Dr. Gloria Lamaro (PhD) for their professional guidance throughout this study period. I equally recognized my friend Mr. Hakiigaba Jussy Okello for his expert guidance.

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Abstract

This study was conducted on guidance and counselling services and girls' retention in secondary schools in Kitgum District. The study was guided by the following objectives; to determine the status of guidance and counselling services in secondary schools, to examine the level of girls' retention in secondary schools and to establish the relationship between guidance and counselling services and girls' retention in secondary schools in Kitgum District. The study used quantitative method and data were collected using questionnaires from 85 participants. Results were presented on tables and figures. Findings established that secondary schools (76.5%) provide support to girls at risk of dropping out through counselling services, educational encouragement, attendance monitoring, collaboration with parents and communities and implementation of programmes aimed at reducing dropout. The findings revealed that most girls remain in school from one term to another, indicating generally good retention levels. Finding established a positive ($r = 0.43$) and statistically significant relationship between guidance and counselling services and girls' retention in secondary schools. The study concluded that availability of functional guidance and counselling contributes significantly to addressing personal, social and academic challenges that often lead to school dropout. The study concluded that girls' retention in secondary schools is generally satisfactory and has improved over time, guidance and counselling services, strong educational aspirations among girls, and active collaboration between schools exist. The study concluded that guidance and counselling services have a positive, statistically significant and meaningful influence on girls' retention in secondary schools. The study recommended that the Ministry of Education and Sports, school administrators and education stakeholders should strengthen guidance and counselling programmes by increasing financial and material resource allocation, recruiting and training qualified counsellors, and providing dedicated counselling facilities. School administrators should strengthen comprehensive retention programmes by enhancing guidance and counselling services, improving attendance monitoring and follow-up systems, increasing parental and community engagement, and providing targeted support to girls at risk of dropping out due to early pregnancy, early marriage, and other social challenges.

Keywords: Guidance, Counselling and Girls' Retention in Secondary Schools.

Chapter One

Introduction

1.0. Introduction

An effective education systems should strive for full retention of girls because every dropout represents a loss of educational opportunity and a setback to gender equality (UNESCO, 2024). According to UNICEF (2023), an effective education system is one in which all enrolled girls successfully transition from one grade to the next and complete their schooling. According to American School Counselor Association (ASCA, 2023), guidance and counselling services are organized support programs provided in schools to assist learners in understanding themselves, solving personal, social, educational, behavioural and career-related challenges and making informed decisions about their lives and future careers.

This chapter presents background of the study, problem statement, purpose of the study, objectives, research questions, scope of the study, significance and conceptual framework.

1.1 Background of the Study

This section discuss the historical, theoretical, conceptual and contextual background of the study.

1.1.1 Historical Perspective

Historically, girls were largely excluded from formal education in many societies due to cultural beliefs, gender discrimination, and socio-economic inequalities (Sperling and Winthrop, 2016). During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, educational opportunities for girls expanded gradually in Europe and North America as reformers advocated equal access to education. By the mid-twentieth century, international organizations began emphasizing girls' education as a fundamental human right (Sperling and Winthrop, 2016).

The adoption of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 and subsequent international conventions strengthened commitments to universal education. Later, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Education for All (EFA) initiative, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) further prioritized girls' access, participation, retention, and completion in education (UNESCO, 2024). Recent studies indicate that girls who remain in school are less

likely to experience early marriage, teenage pregnancy, poverty, and social exclusion. They are more likely to achieve improved health outcomes, economic empowerment, and increased participation in decision-making processes (UNESCO, 2024). However, despite global progress, millions of girls continue to drop out of school due to poverty, gender-based violence, child marriage, armed conflict, menstrual health challenges and inadequate school environments. UNESCO estimates that girls remain disproportionately affected by educational exclusion in low-income countries (UNESCO, 2024).

According to African Union (AU, 2024), traditionally many African societies prioritized boys' education over girls' education because girls were expected to undertake domestic responsibilities and prepare for marriage. During the colonial era, educational opportunities for girls remained limited, as formal education largely favoured males (AU, 2024). After independence, African governments adopted policies promoting universal education and gender equality (Hanushek and Woessmann, 2020). International interventions and national educational reforms significantly increased girls' enrolment. However, retention remains a major challenge due to poverty, cultural practices, child labour, gender-based violence, early marriages and teenage pregnancies (Hanushek and Woessmann, 2020). Research across Sub-Saharan Africa shows that although enrolment gaps between boys and girls have narrowed, girls continue to experience higher dropout rates than boys, particularly during adolescence (World Bank, 2024). The transition from primary to secondary education remains especially problematic for many girls (World Bank, 2024).

According to Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAW, 2022), East African governments have implemented numerous interventions aimed at improving girls' retention. These include free education policies, school feeding programs, bursaries, menstrual hygiene management initiatives, re-entry policies for teenage mothers, and community sensitization programmes (FAWE, 2022). Despite these efforts, girls in countries such as Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda continue to face barriers including early marriage, teenage pregnancy, household poverty, long distances to school, inadequate sanitation facilities and gender-based violence. Recent evidence suggests that schools that provide safe learning environments, supportive teachers, adequate sanitation facilities, and gender-responsive policies experience better retention outcomes among girls (FAWE, 2022).

Globally, guidance and counselling have been used effectively in post-conflict zones to address trauma, support mental health and facilitate school re-entry (Unterhalter, 2018). Countries

emerging from conflict, such as Rwanda, Liberia and Sierra Leone, have integrated psychosocial support into school systems to address emotional and behavioral challenges among students, especially girls (Hanushek and Woessmann, 2020).

Historically, education in Uganda has undergone significant transformation, especially after the introduction of Universal Primary Education (UPE) in 1997 and Universal Secondary Education (USE) in 2007 (MoE&S, 2023). These reforms were designed to enhance equitable access to education, particularly for marginalized groups such as girls (MoE&S, 2023). However, despite these policies, dropout rates among girls remain persistently high in many parts of the country, including Kitgum District.

The history of guidance and counselling services in Uganda can be traced to the 1960s, though its formal incorporation into school systems has been slow. Initially, these services focused more on career guidance, leaving psychological and social counselling largely unattended (WHO, 2024). Over time, the importance of psychosocial support in education has gained recognition, especially in the wake of challenges such as HIV/AIDS, poverty and armed conflict (WHO, 2024). Northern Uganda, including Kitgum District, was severely affected by the two-decade Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) insurgency, which caused trauma, displacement and systemic disruption of education. As a result, many learners, especially girls, carry emotional scars that impact their ability to thrive academically (Ocii, Eduan and Eduan, 2024).

1.1.2 Theoretical Perspective

This study is anchored in Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (Guy-Evans, 2020). The Ecological Systems Theory, originally developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner and later elaborated by Guy-Evans (2020), provides a useful theoretical framework for examining the relationship between guidance and counselling services and girls' retention in secondary schools. The theory argues that an individual's development and behaviour are influenced by multiple environmental systems that interact with one another. Therefore, a girl's decision to remain in or leave school is not determined by a single factor but by the combined influence of family, school, community, cultural, and policy environments.

According to Guy-Evans (2020), the ecological systems include the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem, all of which shape learners' educational experiences and outcomes. The microsystem refers to the immediate environments in which an

individual directly interacts, such as family, school, peers and teachers (Guy-Evans, 2020). . The mesosystem refers to the relationships and interactions between two or more microsystems in which the student participates. The exosystem consists of settings in which the student does not necessarily participate directly but which nevertheless influence the student's experiences and development. The macrosystem is the widest environmental system. In the context of secondary schools, guidance and counselling services operate primarily within the school microsystem. School counsellors, teachers, peers and administrators interact directly with girls and influence their attitudes, behaviors, aspirations and educational decisions.

Effective guidance and counselling services help girls to manage academic challenges, overcome low self-esteem, resist peer pressure, cope with adolescence-related challenges, address emotional and psychological difficulties and avoid risky behaviors that may lead to school dropout. Through these interventions, counselling services strengthen girls' attachment to school and increase their likelihood of remaining enrolled until completion.

The theory suggests that guidance and counselling services can directly influence girls' retention because they are part of the immediate school environment that shapes learners' experiences and decisions. The mesosystem refers to the interactions between two or more microsystems, such as the relationship between school and family.

Guidance and counselling services often involve collaboration between parents and teachers, school administrators and families and counsellors and community leaders. When counsellors engage parents regarding girls' attendance, academic progress, behavioural challenges, or risks of early marriage and pregnancy, stronger support systems are created around learners.

Positive school-family relationships contribute to improved attendance, reduced dropout rates, increased parental support for girls' education and better monitoring of learners' welfare. The theory indicates that girls' retention is enhanced when guidance and counselling services strengthen cooperation between schools and families. The theory demonstrates that guidance and counselling services can improve retention by linking girls to external support systems that address educational and social challenges.

1.1.3 Conceptual Perspective

According to Sperling and Winthrop (2016), guidance and counselling services are organized support programmes provided in schools to assist learners in understanding themselves, solving

personal, social, educational, behavioural and career-related challenges and making informed decisions about their lives and future careers.

American School Counselor Association (ASA, 2023) defined counselling is a professional relationship in which a trained counsellor helps an individual understand problems, develop coping strategies and make appropriate decisions. Guidance, on the other hand, involves assisting learners to make educational, vocational and personal choices that promote their development (ASA, 2023).

UNESCO (2022) looks at school guidance and counselling services are comprehensive developmental programs designed to help students acquire knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary for academic success, personal growth and career development.

Conceptually, this study considers guidance and counselling as a structured school-based intervention that includes academic advising, career planning, psychological counselling, and social skills training. These services aim to support learners holistically, addressing barriers that affect school attendance and performance.

Girls' retention is conceptualized as the ability of female students to remain in school consistently from enrollment to completion of the secondary cycle. Retention involves regular attendance, minimal absenteeism, timely progression, and successful completion of examinations.

The conceptual link between guidance and counselling and girls' retention lies in the role these services play in mitigating dropout factors such as trauma, peer pressure, early pregnancies, and low academic motivation. When these barriers are addressed, girls are more likely to persist in school.

UNESCO (2015) defines retention as the capacity of an education system to keep learners in school from the time they enroll until they complete a specific level of education. In the context of girls, retention refers to ensuring that girls remain in school and successfully complete their education despite social, economic, cultural, and institutional challenges.

UNICEF (2021) describes girls' retention as the sustained participation of girls in education through regular attendance, grade progression and completion of the educational cycle. According to UNICEF, retention is closely linked to reducing dropout rates and promoting educational equity.

World Bank (2018) explains girls' retention as the ability of girls to stay in school, transition from one grade to another, and complete the intended level of education. Retention is considered a key indicator of educational effectiveness and gender equality.

This study conceptualised girls' retention as the extent to which learners remain enrolled in school, attend classes regularly, register progress in grades, achieve literacy competency and numeracy competency until the completion of a particular level of education Completion of secondary education.

1.1.4 Contextual Perspective

Kitgum District, located in Northern Uganda, remains one of the regions deeply affected by past civil conflict. Many children and adolescents face unique post-war challenges including orphan-hood, poverty, gender-based violence and lingering trauma, all of which have a profound effect on school participation and performance (Okwany, 2018).

Secondary schools in Kitgum face constraints such as inadequate guidance and counselling personnel, limited training, and poor infrastructural facilities. In some cases, the role of counselling is delegated to untrained staff or ignored altogether. This compromises service delivery and leaves students vulnerable (Okwany, 2018).

Girls in Kitgum face heightened vulnerability due to early marriages, menstruation-related absenteeism, and gender-based violence. While national policies advocate for girl-child education, their enforcement at the local level is inconsistent. A robust guidance and counselling system could bridge this gap by offering timely, relevant and culturally sensitive support (Okello and Musisi, 2015).

Community perceptions toward guidance and counselling remain mixed. Some parents and school administrators view it as unnecessary or intrusive, while others acknowledge its potential. These divergent views affect the acceptance and integration of counselling into the school system (Okello and Musisi, 2015).

Despite these challenges, several schools have made progress in piloting guidance and counselling clubs, peer mentorship and psychosocial training, but documentation of such efforts is sparse (MoE&S, 2018). This study seeks to profile these interventions and assess their effectiveness in retaining girls (MoE&S, 2018).

Finally, the district's education management bodies have limited data on the performance and impact of school counselling services. Without this data, targeted interventions and resource allocation remain guesswork. This study provides an evidence base to inform local policy and planning (MoE&S, 2018).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Girls' retention in secondary education remains a critical concern globally, particularly in developing countries where gender disparities continue to affect educational access, progression and completion (UNICEF, 2022). The global education agenda, including the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4, advocates for inclusive and equitable quality education and emphasizes the completion of secondary education by all learners, including girls (UNESCO, 2023). Unfortunately, the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBoS, 2024) still recorded disparity in the education of boys and girls in Uganda. The transition rate to secondary schools for girls, 21% is lower than that of boys, 28.4%, the percentage out of schoolgirls, 21% is also lower than that of boys 30% and the completion rate for boys in secondary over five years (2013- 2017) is between 36.7% and 36.2% while that of girls is between 33.8% and 33.5% (MoE&S, 2023). Furthermore, retention of girls in secondary schools remains below the desired level. Reports indicate that many girls who enroll in secondary education do not complete the cycle due to challenges associated with adolescent reproductive health, household responsibilities, financial constraints, and limited support systems within schools (Ministry of Education and Sports [MoES], 2023; UNICEF, 2022). The situation is particularly pronounced in Northern Uganda, where decades of armed conflict disrupted social structures, weakened educational systems, and exacerbated vulnerabilities among girls (UNESCO, 2021).

In Kitgum District, secondary schools continue to experience cases of absenteeism, dropout, early marriages, teenage pregnancies, and poor school completion rates among girls despite the existence of guidance and counselling services in many schools as reported by Education Policy Data Centre (EPDC, 2018). Guidance and counselling services were expected to provide psychosocial support, career guidance, behavioural counselling, and life-skills development that help learners cope with personal, social and academic challenged careers, thereby, enhancing school retention (EPDC, 2018). However, evidence suggests that many schools face challenges such as inadequate counselling personnel, limited counselling facilities, insufficient training of teacher-counsellors, and low utilization of counselling services by students (MoES, 2023).

Although previous studies have examined factors influencing girls' education, much of the existing literature has focused on socioeconomic barriers, early marriage and teenage pregnancy, with limited attention given to the contribution of guidance and counselling services to girls' retention in secondary schools, particularly in Kitgum District. Consequently, the extent to which guidance and counselling services influence girls' retention in secondary schools in Kitgum District remains unclear. This knowledge gap necessitates an investigation into the relationship between guidance and counselling services and girls' retention in secondary schools in Kitgum District.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

To assess how guidance and counselling services influence girls' retention in secondary schools in Kitgum District, focusing on the current state of such services, the level of girls' retention, and the relationship between these variables.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

1. To determine the status of guidance and counselling services in secondary schools in Kitgum District.
2. To examine the level of girls' retention in secondary schools in Kitgum District.
3. To establish the relationship between guidance and counselling services and girls' retention in secondary schools in Kitgum District.

1.5 Research Questions

1. What is the status of guidance and counselling services in secondary schools in Kitgum District?
2. What is the level of girls' retention in secondary schools in Kitgum District?
3. What is the relationship between guidance and counselling services and girls' retention in secondary schools in Kitgum District?

1.6 Significance of the Study

This study will guide policymakers, education managers, and school administrators in understanding the role of counselling in addressing the dropout crisis among girls. It offers insights for improving training, staffing and resourcing of counselling departments in schools.

NGOs, civil society actors and community leaders can also use the findings to support local programs and mobilize community awareness. Academically, the study contributes to literature on psychosocial interventions in post-conflict education systems.

1.7 Scope of the Study

This study focuses on the provision of guidance and counselling services and their impact on girls' retention in secondary schools. Conducted in secondary schools in Kitgum District, Northern Uganda. Covers a 5-year period from 2019 to 2024, capturing trends before, during, and after recent educational reforms and recovery efforts.

1.8 Conceptual Framework of the Study

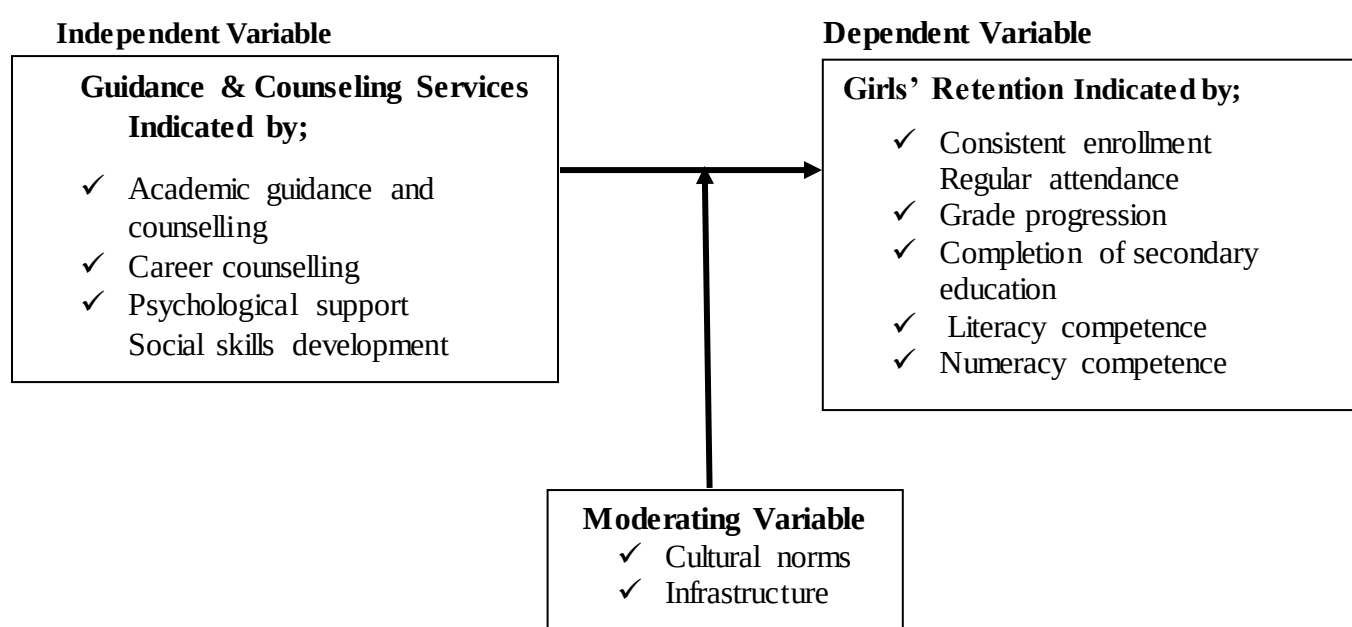


Fig. 1: Conceptual Framework Showing the proposed Relationship between Guidance and Counseling and Girls' Retention in Secondary Schools

Source: Adapted from Ecological Systems Theory (Guy-Evans, 2020).

This study is anchored on the premise that guidance and counseling services play a crucial role in enhancing girls' retention in school. Guidance and counseling, which is the independent variable, includes a wide range of support systems such as academic advising, career guidance, personal and psychological counseling, mentorship, and peer support. These services are designed to assist students, particularly girls, in overcoming the academic, social, emotional, and psychological barriers that may hinder their educational journey.

The dependent variable in this study is girls' retention, which refers to the ability of female students to remain enrolled and complete their education without dropping out. Retention is influenced by a variety of factors including self-esteem, emotional stability, safety, a sense of belonging, and motivation all of which can be addressed through effective counseling and guidance interventions.

This framework is guided by Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory (1943), which posits that individuals are motivated to fulfill a series of needs arranged in a hierarchy: physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization. For girls to stay in school and achieve academic success, their lower and mid-level needs such as emotional security, a sense of belonging, and self-worth must be met. Guidance and counseling services contribute significantly to meeting these needs by providing emotional support, helping to resolve personal and academic problems, and fostering a sense of connectedness and purpose.

When these needs are adequately addressed, girls are more likely to feel valued, motivated, and secure within the school environment. This, in turn, enhances their commitment to schooling, reduces the likelihood of dropping out, and increases their chances of academic success. Therefore, the conceptual framework suggests a positive relationship between the availability and quality of guidance and counseling services and the retention of girls in school.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

This chapter presents review of the related literature on guidance and counselling, girl-child retention and the relationship between guidance and counselling services. A number of books, publication journals and other research papers were consulted.

2.1 Theoretical Review

The theoretical foundation of this study primarily draws from Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, which asserts that an individual's development is influenced by complex, interacting environmental systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This theory helps explain how school-based guidance and counselling (microsystem) interacts with broader socio-cultural and economic factors (exosystem and macrosystem) to affect girls' retention. However, previous studies often apply this theory broadly without specific focus on post-conflict contexts like Kitgum, leaving a gap in understanding how ecological systems influence girls' retention under such conditions.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory further complements this study by emphasizing the importance of fulfilling basic psychological needs such as safety, belonging, and esteem for effective learning (Maslow, 1943). Guidance and counselling can help meet these needs by addressing emotional and social barriers to retention. Yet, literature tends to generalize Maslow's framework without linking it explicitly to girls' education in fragile environments, suggesting a gap in contextualizing psychosocial support in post-conflict schools.

Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977) highlights how learners develop behaviors through observation and interaction with role models, including counsellors and peers. It supports the idea that counselling can influence positive behavior and school engagement among girls. However, existing research seldom examines how peer-mentorship and counsellor roles specifically affect girls' retention in Northern Uganda, revealing a contextual gap.

Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1969) is also relevant, emphasizing the need for secure emotional bonds to foster resilience in youth. School counsellors can provide surrogate attachment figures

to help girls cope with trauma and instability. Few studies apply this theory to post-conflict educational settings, where disrupted family structures affect retention, indicating an important theoretical gap.

The Resilience Theory posits that protective factors such as social support and coping strategies help individuals overcome adversity (Masten, 2001). Guidance and counselling services act as resilience-building mechanisms for girls facing post-conflict hardships. Nonetheless, empirical studies assessing how counselling interventions build resilience among girls in Kitgum are scarce, pointing to a critical research gap.

Finally, the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) suggests that attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived control influence individuals' intentions and behaviors. In the context of education, counselling can shift girls' and communities' attitudes towards schooling. However, there is limited exploration of how guidance and counselling can alter social norms affecting girls' retention in culturally conservative districts like Kitgum.

Summary of Theoretical Gaps: While existing theories provide robust frameworks, there is a lack of localized application in post-conflict settings. The nuanced interaction between counselling services and girls' retention amid Kitgum's socio-cultural realities remains underexplored, justifying this study.

2.2 Empirical Review

This section presents review of related literature according to objectives formulated in chapter one above.

2.2.1 Guidance and Counselling Services in Secondary Schools

Globally, guidance and counselling services have become an integral component of education systems due to their role in promoting students' academic achievement, psychosocial well-being, career development, and school retention (Egbo, 2015). According to the UNESCO (2023), effective school counselling programmes help learners cope with academic pressures, social challenges, mental health concerns, and life transitions that may otherwise contribute to absenteeism and dropout. In developed countries such as the United States, Canada and Australia, counselling services are institutionalized with trained counsellors, dedicated counselling offices, and structured support programmes. Despite these advancements, studies

indicate that many schools worldwide continue to experience shortages of trained counsellors, inadequate funding and low student utilization of counselling services. The World Health Organization (2022) reported increasing mental health challenges among adolescents, yet many schools lack sufficient counselling capacity to respond effectively. While numerous studies have examined the effectiveness of guidance and counselling services in promoting academic achievement and mental health, fewer studies have specifically investigated their contribution to girls' retention in secondary schools, particularly in developing-country contexts. This leaves a knowledge gap regarding how counselling services influence girls' decisions to remain in school.

Across Africa, guidance and counselling services have been adopted to address challenges such as school dropout, teenage pregnancy, early marriage, substance abuse, and poor academic performance. According to African Union (2021), counselling programmes are increasingly recognized as important mechanisms for supporting adolescent girls to overcome social and economic barriers to education. Research in countries such as Kenya, Ghana, and Nigeria shows that schools with functional counselling programmes often report improved learner discipline, attendance, and educational aspirations (Nyamwange, 2016; Egbo, 2015). However, many schools face challenges including inadequate counselling facilities, lack of professionally trained counsellors, and insufficient policy implementation (Nyamwange, 2016). Most African studies have concentrated on counselling and academic performance, discipline management, or career guidance. Limited empirical evidence exists on how guidance and counselling services specifically affect girls' retention in secondary schools, especially in post-conflict and rural communities where girls face unique educational challenges.

In East Africa, governments have strengthened school counselling programmes to address increasing concerns about learner dropout and psychosocial well-being. Studies in Kenya and Tanzania indicate that counselling services contribute to improved student attendance, self-esteem, and resilience among adolescent learners (Orira, 2016). However, counselling services in many schools remain largely teacher-based rather than professionally managed. Counselling departments often lack resources, private offices and regular training, reducing their effectiveness (Orira, 2019). Although studies acknowledge the importance of counselling services, there remains inadequate evidence on how specific counselling interventions influence girls' retention in secondary education. Furthermore, many studies have focused on general student populations rather than girls as a distinct group.

Uganda's education policy recognizes guidance and counselling as essential support services for learners. The Ministry of Education and Sports recommends that all secondary schools establish guidance and counselling departments to address learners' academic, career, social, and emotional needs (Kakuru, 2019). Despite this policy framework, several studies reveal that guidance and counselling services in many Ugandan secondary schools are inadequately implemented. According to MoES (2023), many schools lack trained counsellors, counselling materials, dedicated counselling rooms, and regular supervision. Cases of teenage pregnancy, early marriage, absenteeism, and school dropout among girls continue to be reported, particularly in rural districts. Research by Kakuru (2019) and Nsubuga (2020) found that counselling services often rely on teachers who have limited professional counselling training, thereby constraining service effectiveness. Existing Ugandan studies have primarily examined counselling in relation to discipline management, academic performance and behavioural change. Few studies have specifically investigated how guidance and counselling services influence girls' retention in secondary schools, leaving uncertainty regarding their contribution to reducing dropout among girls.

According to Uganda National Bureau of Statistics (UBoS, 2021), secondary schools in Kitgum District continue to experience challenges associated with girls' retention, including absenteeism, teenage pregnancy, early marriage, poverty, menstrual hygiene difficulties and domestic responsibilities. Although guidance and counselling departments exist in many schools, their functionality, accessibility, adequacy, and effectiveness in supporting girls remain largely undocumented (UBoS, 2021). Schools are expected to provide counselling services that help girls address personal, academic, social, and emotional challenges that threaten their continued participation in education. However, there is limited empirical evidence on whether these services are sufficiently available, utilized, and effective in retaining girls in secondary schools (UBoS, 2021). No known comprehensive study has adequately examined the relationship between guidance and counselling services and girls' retention in secondary schools in Kitgum District. Consequently, it remains unclear whether the existing counselling services are contributing significantly to girls' continued enrolment, attendance, progression and completion of secondary education. This knowledge gap justifies the need for the present study.

2.2.2 Girls' Retention in Secondary Education

Globally, substantial progress has been made in increasing girls' access to education. According to the UNESCO (2024), gender parity has improved in primary and secondary education in

many countries. However, millions of girls continue to leave school before completing secondary education due to poverty, child marriage, gender-based violence, adolescent pregnancy, conflict, and inadequate support systems. The World Bank (2023) estimates that although enrolment rates for girls have increased globally, completion rates remain lower in many low-income countries, especially at the secondary level. The situation is more severe among marginalized and rural populations where social and economic barriers persist. Most global studies have focused on access, enrolment and gender parity in education. Less attention has been given to school-based interventions such as guidance and counselling services that may influence girls' retention and completion of secondary education, thus created content gap for this study.

Across Africa, girls' retention remains a significant challenge despite efforts to promote universal education (AU, 2023). According to the African Union (AU, 2023), many countries continue to experience high dropout rates among adolescent girls due to early marriage, teenage pregnancy, household labour demands, poverty, and cultural practices. Research conducted in Kenya, Nigeria and Ghana indicates that girls are more likely than boys to leave school before completing secondary education, particularly in rural and disadvantaged communities. Most African studies have concentrated on socioeconomic determinants of girls' dropout, such as poverty and child marriage (AU, 2023). Limited empirical attention has been directed toward the role of school-based guidance and counselling services in promoting girls' retention, particularly in secondary schools.

East African countries have made notable progress in improving girls' participation in education. Nevertheless, retention remains problematic (Wanyonyi, 2018). Studies in Kenya, Tanzania, and Rwanda report that girls continue to drop out because of menstrual hygiene challenges, teenage pregnancy, early marriage and financial constraints as reported (Wanyonyi, 2018). According to the East African Community (2022), transition and completion rates among girls improve when schools provide psychosocial support and safe learning environments. While existing studies highlight barriers to girls' retention, relatively few have examined how guidance and counselling services can help girls overcome these barriers and remain in school. Moreover, many studies focus on general retention rather than girls specifically.

Afelik (2020) reported that in Uganda, government interventions such as Universal Primary Education (UPE) and Universal Secondary Education (USE) have significantly increased girls'

enrolment. However, retention remains a challenge. The Ministry of Education and Sports reports that many girls who enroll in secondary schools fail to complete the education cycle due to teenage pregnancy, early marriage, school-related gender-based violence, poverty and limited psychosocial support (Afelik, 2020). Reports from the UNICEF indicate that adolescent pregnancy remains one of the leading causes of school dropout among girls in Uganda (Lekuru, 2024). Additionally, absenteeism and irregular attendance negatively affect progression and completion rates (Lekuru, 2024). Most Ugandan studies have examined factors such as poverty, school fees, pregnancy and cultural practices as determinants of girls' retention with no empirical evidence regarding guidance and counselling services and girls' retention in secondary schools.

According to Mayoma and Nabukenya (2022), Northern Uganda experienced prolonged conflict associated with the Lord's Resistance Army insurgency, which disrupted educational systems and exposed many children to psychosocial trauma. Although peace has enabled educational recovery, girls' retention remains a concern. Studies conducted in districts such as Gulu District, Pader District, and Lamwo District indicate that poverty, orphan-hood, early marriage and teenage pregnancy continue to affect girls' educational progression and completion (Mayoma and Nabukenya, 2022). Research in Northern Uganda has largely focused on post-conflict educational recovery, socioeconomic challenges, and reproductive health issues. Few studies investigated school-based guidance and counselling services in enhancing girls' retention in secondary schools.

In Kitgum District, secondary schools continue to experience challenges related to girls' retention despite increased enrolment. School administrators, teachers and education stakeholders report cases of absenteeism, dropout, early marriage, teenage pregnancy, domestic responsibilities and economic hardships that affect girls' continued participation in education (Aluma and Ongom, 2021). Although guidance and counselling services have been introduced in many secondary schools to provide psychosocial, academic, and social support to learners, the extent to which these services contribute to girls' retention remains unclear (Aluma and Ongom, 2021). Available evidence mainly highlights dropout factors rather than the effectiveness of interventions designed to address them (Aluma and Ongom, 2021). There is limited empirical evidence on the relationship between guidance and counselling services and girls' retention in secondary schools in Kitgum District. Unclear whether counselling services are adequately provided, accessible and effective in helping girls remain enrolled, attend

regularly, progress through grades, and complete secondary education. This knowledge gap necessitated a study in Secondary Schools in Kitgum District.

Okwany (2018) reported that in Northern Uganda early marriage and pregnancy are the leading causes of girls' dropout, often linked to limited school support systems. However, most literature focuses on identifying dropout causes rather than systematically linking retention to specific school interventions like guidance and counselling. Moreover, while national policies advocate for girl-friendly schools, there is scant evidence on how these policies translate into improved retention on the ground in districts like Kitgum. The effectiveness of existing programmes remain under-documented, leaving a gap in understanding practical retention strategies in fragile contexts.

2.2.3 Relationship between Guidance and Counselling Services and Girls' Retention in Secondary Schools

Globally, guidance and counselling services are recognized as critical interventions for improving girls' retention in schools (Boitt, 2016). According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, effective counselling services help girls overcome challenges such as early marriage, teenage pregnancy, gender-based violence, low self-esteem, academic stress and socio-economic barriers that often lead to school dropout (Tinoula and Bengesai, 2016). UNESCO reports indicate that schools with strong psychosocial support systems tend to register higher retention and completion rates among female learners (Tinoula and Bengesai, 2016).

Similarly, the United Nations Children's Fund emphasizes that school-based counselling creates a supportive environment where girls can discuss personal, social and academic concerns, thereby increasing their likelihood of remaining in school (Ishmael, 2016). Studies conducted in Asia, Europe, and North America have shown positive correlations between counselling programs and students' persistence in education (Ishmael, 2016). However, despite global evidence demonstrating a positive relationship, disparities continue to exist in developing countries where counselling services remain underfunded and inadequately implemented. Most global studies focus on developed countries with well-established counselling structures. Less evidence exists regarding how guidance and counselling services influence girls' retention in low-income educational settings like Sub-Saharan Africa.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, girls face numerous barriers to educational retention, including poverty, cultural practices, menstrual hygiene challenges, child labour and early marriages (Mwingirwa, 2016). Mwingirwa (2016) observed that guidance and counselling programmes provide emotional support and life-skills education that help girls cope with these challenges. Studies in countries such as Kenya, Ghana, Nigeria and Tanzania indicate that schools with active counselling departments report lower dropout rates among girls than schools without structured counselling services (Omanyi, 2016). Counselling has been associated with increased self-confidence, improved decision-making, and enhanced academic motivation (Omanyi, 2016). Despite these findings, counselling services in many African schools remain characterized by inadequate trained personnel, limited resources and weak institutional support (Omanyi, 2016). Most African studies have concentrated on counselling effectiveness generally, with limited emphasis on its specific contribution to girls' retention in secondary schools, particularly in post-conflict regions.

Within East Africa, governments have increasingly recognized guidance and counselling as a strategy for reducing dropout rates among girls (Nguli et al., 2022). Nguli et al. (2022) reported that findings from Kenya, Tanzania and Rwanda suggests that counselling services assist girls in addressing challenges related to adolescence, reproductive health, peer pressure and academic adjustment. Furthermore, Ihoro, Piliyesi and Wambiya (2024) reported that girls who regularly access counselling services demonstrate stronger school attachment, better attendance records and greater resilience against factors that predispose them to dropping out. Although studies showed positive outcomes, many have examined counselling in relation to academic achievement rather than retention. This created content gap for this study.

In Uganda, the Ministry of Education and Sports has promoted guidance and counselling as an essential component of learner support (Byaruhanga and Alinda, 2019). Research indicates that counselling services help girls address issues such as menstruation-related absenteeism, sexual harassment, early pregnancies and family pressures (Byaruhanga and Alinda, 2019). Several districts reveal that schools with active counselling programs tend to retain more girls compared to schools where counselling is weak or absent. Guidance and counselling have been linked to improved school attendance, enhanced self-esteem and reduced dropout intentions among female learners (Dambo, 2019). However, many Ugandan secondary schools continue to face challenges including inadequate counselling facilities, insufficient trained counsellors and limited time allocated for counselling activities (Mayoma, 2022). Existing studies in

Uganda have largely focused on academic performance, discipline management and psychosocial wellbeing. Limited empirical evidence exists on how guidance and counselling services specifically influence girls' retention in secondary schools.

Northern Uganda, particularly districts such as Kitgum District, continues to face educational challenges arising from poverty, early marriages, teenage pregnancies and socio-cultural practices that disproportionately affect girls' schooling (Okello & Musisi, 2015). While schools have introduced guidance and counselling services to support learners, little is known about the extent to which these services contribute to retaining girls in secondary education (Okello & Musisi, 2015). Available reports indicate persistent cases of absenteeism and dropout among girls despite the presence of counselling programs in some schools (Okello & Musisi, 2015). There is limited empirical evidence on the relationship between guidance and counselling services and girls' retention in secondary schools in Kitgum District. Thus justifying this study in secondary schools within the district.

2.3. Research Gaps

Contextual differences and limited local evidence created a knowledge gap, thereby, justifying a study on the relationship between guidance and counselling services and girls' retention in secondary schools in Kitgum District.

Most studies originate from developed countries where schools with well-resourced and supported, therefore contexts differ significantly from Uganda, where secondary schools face challenges such as overcrowded classrooms, inadequate instructional materials and limited infrastructure. Therefore, findings from developed settings can't be generalised in Uganda.

Previous studies have employed a variety of methodologies including qualitative approaches, descriptive designs and multiple regression analysis. However, limited studies applied correlational research design using Pearson correlation analysis to examine the relationships among guidance and counselling and girls' retention in secondary education within a single integrated model.

Empirical findings on the relationship between guidance and counselling and girls retention in secondary schools remain inconsistent as some studies reported strong positive relationships between guidance and counselling and girls' retention, while others report weak or insignificant effects. There was limited empirical evidence focusing on secondary schools in Kitgum district.

Chapter Three

Methodology

3.0. Introduction

This chapter presents the research methodology, specifically, it presents the research design, area of study/geographical, population of the study, sampling procedures, sample size, sampling techniques, data collection methods and instruments, methods, instruments, quality control methods, data management and processing, data analysis, ethical considerations and limitations and delimitations of the study.

3.1 Research Orientation

This study adopted a quantitative research orientation to measure and analyze the status of guidance and counselling services and their relationship with girls' retention in secondary schools. Quantitative methods are techniques used to collect and analyze numerical data to find patterns, test hypotheses and make predictions (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). This was preferred because it allowed for the collection of numerical data, enabling the researcher to establish patterns and relationships between variables using statistical methods (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Given the study's aim to examine correlations and quantify retention levels, this approach ensured objectivity and generalizability of findings across the target population (Mertens, 2019).

3.2 Research Design

A descriptive correlational design was employed to describe the status of guidance and counselling services and explored the relationship between guidance and counselling and girls' retention. This design well-suited for the study which sought to identify associations without manipulating variables (Fraenkel, Wallen & Hyun, 2019). It allowed the researcher to collect data at a single point in time, making it efficient and practical for educational settings. The correlational design supported hypothesis testing about whether the provision and quality of guidance and counselling services relate to girls' retention rates (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2015).

3.3 Target Population

The study targeted female student leaders enrolled in government-aided secondary schools, school counsellors, school administrators and chairpersons of the Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) within Kitgum District. These multiple stakeholder groups provided a comprehensive understanding of guidance and counseling services from different perspectives, which

enhanced the depth and validity of the findings (Patton, 2015). Female student learders are the primary beneficiaries of retention initiatives, while counsellors and administrators play critical roles in delivering services and implementing policies that support these efforts. These participants were drawn from the 17 mixed-sex and girls' government-aided secondary schools in Kitgum District, as reported by the District Inspector of Schools.

3.4 Sample Size

The total sample size was 85 respondents; 17 head teachers, 17 chairpersons PTA, 34 female student leaders and 17 teacher – counsellors / career masters or mistresses. The exact number of participants from each category were determined using Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table of sample size determination as shown below.

Table 1: Sample Size Determination

S/N	Target Population Category	Target Population	Sample Size	Sampling Technique
1	Head Teachers	17	17	Purposive Sampling
2	Chairpersons, Parent-Teacher Association (PTA)	17	17	Purposive Sampling
3	Female Student Leaders (e.g., Head Girl, Prefects)	51	34	Simple Random Sampling
4	Teacher Counselors / Career Masters or Mistresses	17	17	Purposive Sampling
	Total	102	85	

Source: Kitgum District Inspection Report (2019)

The study engaged 85 participants. Purposive sampling technique was used to select 17 head teachers, 17 chairpersons PTA and 17 teacher counselors or career guidance masters / mistresses. Teacher Counselors / Career Masters or Mistresses hold key roles in guidance and counseling and provided relevant insights. Their small number made it practical to include the entire group (census). 34 female student leaders were randomly selected, provided a manageable yet representative sample that enhanced the reliability and generalizability of the findings.

3.5 Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected using questionnaires administered to female student leaders and school counsellors, head teachers and PTA to gather quantitative data on perceptions, availability and utilization of guidance and counselling services.

3.6 Data Collection Instruments

The study structured questionnaires administered to female students and school counsellors school counsellors, head teachers and PTA. This facilitated quantitative analysis through statistical comparisons. The instrument was pilot-tested in a school outside the study area to ensure clarity, reliability and validity, and revised accordingly before full-scale data collection.

3.7 Data Analysis Techniques

The data were collected, sorted, coded and analyzed using SPSS. Background information, objectives one and two were analysed using descriptive statistics (means, frequencies and percentages) and it allowed for summary of the status of guidance and counselling services and levels of girls' retention. Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to assess the strength and direction of the relationship between counselling services and retention rates. These techniques were appropriate for quantitative data and enable the researcher to draw valid conclusions about associations between variables (Field, 2018). Use of statistical software SPSS enhanced accuracy and efficiency in data analysis.

3.8 Administration Procedures

In this study, the researcher followed an administration procedure, beginning with the submission of the research dissertation to the institutional research committee for approval. Approval was granted, an official introductory letter was secured from the department to formally introduce the researcher to the selected schools and requested permission to conduct the study. Upon obtaining authorization from the school heads, the researcher coordinated with relevant school personnel to schedule suitable dates and times for data collection, ensuring minimal disruption to regular school activities. Participants were informed about the study's purpose, the voluntary nature of their participation and the confidentiality of their responses. These procedures ensured that the study was conducted ethically and with full institutional cooperation.

3.9 Quality Control

Reliability of the instrument by categories of respondents

The reliability of the instruments used by the different respondents were test using Cronbach's alpha. It is well known that 0.70 is the accepted level of alpha. These were achieved for instruments administered to: female learners ($\alpha \geq 0.90$, *excellent reliability*), female

student's leaders ($0.8 \leq \alpha < 0.90$, *good reliability*) and Head Teachers ($0.7 \leq \alpha < 0.80$, *acceptable reliability*) as shown in Table 4.1.1 (Lum, et al., 2024).

Also, the study found out that not all the instruments achieved this threshold of internal consistency as a measure of reliability. The instrument for Head Teacher and Chairperson of PTA was not did not meet the Guidance and counselling (please look for literature that allows you to alpha less than 0.70).

Table 2: Summary of Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the study variable of five categories of respondents

Variable by respondents' category	Number of items	α coeff.	reliability
Learners			
Guidance and counselling	6	0.92	excellent
Girls' retention	6	0.91	excellent
Student's leaders			
Guidance and counselling	6	0.86	good
Girls' retention	6	0.83	good
Teachers			
Guidance and counselling	6	0.61	questionable
Girls' retention	6	0.72	acceptable
Head Teacher			
Guidance and counselling	6	0.76	acceptable
Girls' retention	6	0.72	acceptable
Chairperson PTA			
Guidance and counselling	6	0.80	good
Girls' retention	6	0.67	questionable

The reliability coefficients indicate that the research instruments were sufficiently reliable for data collection because most alpha values exceeded the minimum acceptable threshold of 0.70, while the few lower values (0.61 and 0.67) remained close to the acceptable level. The findings suggest that the questionnaire items generally measured the constructs of guidance and counselling and girls' retention consistently across the five respondent categories. Therefore, the instruments were considered suitable for generating dependable data for subsequent statistical analysis and interpretation of the study findings.

Validity of the instrument

To establish content validity, the Content Validity Index (CVI) formula was applied based on ratings provided by a panel of experts in education and counseling. Feedback from the pre-test and expert review informed the final revisions, ensuring that the instrument was both valid and reliable for data collection in the study.

3.10 Assumptions

The study assumed that participants would respond truthfully and that schools would grant access to necessary records. These assumptions were standard in educational research but were mitigated through assurances of confidentiality and ethical protocols (Mertens, 2019).

3.11 Ethical Considerations

The informed consent were obtained from all participants before data collection begins and so all participants were fully informed about the purpose, nature and procedures of the study. Participants were given a consent form to read and sign, confirming that their participation was voluntary and based on a clear understanding of what the research involves.

Participants were clearly informed that they were under no obligation to participate in the study and may withdraw at any point without facing any form of penalty or negative consequence. This ensured that all involvement in the research was genuinely voluntary and free from pressure.

To maintain anonymity, participants' names and personal identifiers were not recorded in the data collection instruments. Instead, codes or pseudonyms were used to protect their identity.

Confidentiality was strictly maintained by securely storing all data electronic files with password-protected and any physical documents were kept in locked storage accessible only to the researcher. This protected participants' private information from unauthorized access or disclosure.

The use of data were limited strictly to academic purposes and the information collected were not shared with unauthorized parties and destroyed after the completion of this study report.

3.12 Limitations and Delimitations

Potential challenges included non-response, incomplete or inaccurate school records and social desirability bias in self-reports. These were mitigated through careful data collection planning and follow-ups (Fowler, 2014). The study focused exclusively on public secondary schools in Kitgum District, excluding private institutions to maintain scope feasibility and because public schools constitute the majority in the area.

Chapter Four

Data Analysis, Presentations and Interpretations

4.0. Introduction

This chapter is organized as follows: First, the demographic characteristics of respondents (student, teachers, Head Teachers and Chairperson PTA); Second, status of guidance and counselling services; Thirdly, level of girls' retention in the schools, finally, the relationship between guidance and counselling and girls' retention in seventeen (that is, 7 government aided and 9 private) secondary schools in Kitgum District.

4.1 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 4.1a below presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents comprising 51 female student leaders and 119 female learners. The characteristics examined include age, class level, area of residence, living arrangements, and duration of stay at school. These characteristics are important because they provide contextual information that may influence girls' retention in secondary schools and their experiences with guidance and counselling services.

Table 4.1a: Distribution of female student leaders and female learners (N=170)

Characteristics	Female student leaders (n = 51)		Female learners (n = 119)	
	Frequency (n)	Proportion (%)	Frequency (n)	Proportion (%)
Age group (in years)				
13-15	4	7.8	10	8.4
16-18	32	62.7	77	64.7
Above 18	11	21.6	30	25.2
Class / Grade				
S1	--	--	13	10.9
S2	2	3.9	22	18.5
S3	18	35.3	37	31.1
S4	17	33.3	26	21.8
S5	11	21.6	13	10.9
S6	2	3.9	8	6.7
Area of residence				
Urban	27	52.9	79	66.4
Rural	24	47.1	40	33.6
Lives with parents				
Yes	34	66.7	72	60.5
No	17	33.3	47	39.5
Duration at school				
Less than 1 year	2	3.9	12	10.1
1-2 years	16	31.4	59	49.6
3+ years	32	62.7	46	38.7

Age of Respondents. The findings indicate that the majority of both female student leaders (62.7%) and female learners (64.7%) were aged between 16 and 18 years. Respondents aged above 18 years constituted 21.6% of student leaders and 25.2% of female learners, while those aged between 13 and 15 years represented the smallest proportion, accounting for 7.8% of student leaders and 8.4% of female learners.

These findings suggest that most respondents were in the middle and upper adolescent stages, which are critical periods characterized by academic, social, emotional and developmental challenges. Since retention issues such as absenteeism, school dropout, teenage pregnancy and peer influence are more prevalent during adolescence, the respondents were well placed to provide reliable information regarding factors affecting girls' retention in secondary schools.

Class/Grade of Respondents. Among female student leaders, the highest proportion were in Senior Three (35.3%) and Senior Four (33.3%), followed by Senior Five (21.6%). Very few leaders were in Senior Two (3.9%) and Senior Six (3.9%). Among female learners, the largest proportion was in Senior Three (31.1%), followed by Senior Four (21.8%) and Senior Two (18.5%). Smaller proportions were found in Senior One (10.9%), Senior Five (10.9%), and Senior Six (6.7%).

The findings imply that the majority of respondents were concentrated in the middle secondary classes (S3 and S4), where students have accumulated substantial school experiences and are likely to have interacted with school guidance and counselling programs. Their responses therefore provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of such services in promoting school retention.

Area of Residence. The results reveal that 52.9% of female student leaders and 66.4% of female learners resided in urban areas, while 47.1% of leaders and 33.6% of learners came from rural areas. This suggests that most respondents were drawn from urban settings. Urban learners often have relatively greater access to educational resources, counselling services, transportation, and information compared to their rural counterparts. However, urban settings may also expose learners to challenges such as peer pressure, substance abuse, and social distractions, which can influence retention. The inclusion of both urban and rural respondents therefore provided a broader understanding of the contextual factors affecting girls' retention.

Living Arrangements. The findings show that 66.7% of female student leaders and 60.5% of female learners lived with their parents, whereas 33.3% of leaders and 39.5% of learners did not live with their parents. The results imply that a considerable proportion of respondents

benefited from parental presence and support, which is often associated with improved school attendance, emotional stability, academic monitoring, and retention. However, the substantial number of girls not living with their parents highlights the need for school-based support mechanisms, including guidance and counselling services, to address challenges that may arise from limited parental supervision and support.

Duration at School. The majority of female student leaders (62.7%) had stayed at the school for more than three years, compared to 38.7% of female learners. Nearly half of the female learners (49.6%) had stayed at the school for one to two years, while only 3.9% of leaders and 10.1% of learners had been at the school for less than one year. These findings indicate that most respondents had spent sufficient time in their respective schools to understand school policies, guidance and counselling programs, disciplinary practices, and factors affecting girls' retention. Their extended exposure to the school environment strengthens the credibility of the information they provided.

The demographic findings reveal that most respondents were aged between 16 and 18 years, indicating that the study largely captured views from adolescents who are most vulnerable to retention challenges. The majority of respondents were in middle secondary classes (S3 and S4), where students have extensive experience with school programs and services. Most respondents resided in urban areas, though a significant proportion came from rural settings. The majority lived with their parents, suggesting the presence of parental support systems for many learners. Most respondents had spent at least one to three years or more in their schools, providing them with adequate experience to assess factors influencing girls' retention.

This implies that the predominance of respondents aged 16–18 years enhances the relevance of the findings because this age group is most affected by retention-related challenges such as peer influence, academic pressure, and reproductive health concerns.

Adequate School Experience: The concentration of respondents in S3 and S4, together with the large proportion who had stayed in school for more than one year, suggests that respondents possessed sufficient knowledge and experience to provide informed opinions about guidance and counselling services.

Representation of Different Contexts: The inclusion of both urban and rural learners increases the applicability of the findings across different school environments and socioeconomic contexts.

Influence of Family Support: Since a majority lived with parents, parental support may positively influence retention. Consequently, any relationship observed between guidance and counselling services and girls' retention should be interpreted alongside the role of family support systems.

Reliability of Data: The long duration of stay in school among most respondents enhances the reliability and validity of the data because respondents had ample opportunity to experience and evaluate the effectiveness of guidance and counselling interventions.

Table 4.1b below presents the demographic characteristics of 51 key informants comprising 17 teachers, 17 head teachers and 17 Chairpersons of Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs). The characteristics analyzed include gender, age, teaching experience, academic qualifications and subject specialization.

Table 4.1b: Distribution of Teachers, Head Teachers and Chairpersons PTA

	Teachers (n = 17)	Head Teachers (n = 17)	Chairperson PTA (n = 17)
Characteristics	Percent (%)	Percent (%)	Percent (%)
Gender			
Male	58.8	82.4	64.7
Female	41.2	17.6	35.3
Age group (in years)			
25-34	17.6	---	3.9
35-44	58.8	29.4	35.3
45-54	23.5	64.7	47.1
Above 55		5.9	11.8
Teaching experiences (in years)			
1-5 years	70.6	64.7	82.2
6-10 years	5.9	29.4	11.8
11+ years	23.5	5.9	---
Qualification			
Diploma	35.3	---	---
Bachelor's Degree	64.7	---	---
Subject taught in the schools			
Sciences	23.5	---	---
Arts	76.5	---	---

Gender of Respondents. The findings indicate that males constituted the majority across all categories of respondents. Among teachers, 58.8% were male while 41.2% were female. Among head teachers, 82.4% were male and only 17.6% were female. Similarly, 64.7% of PTA chairpersons were male compared to 35.3% who were female. The findings suggest that leadership and decision-making positions in the sampled secondary schools were

predominantly occupied by men. The relatively lower representation of women, particularly among head teachers, may imply that female-specific concerns affecting girls' retention could be underrepresented in school leadership discussions and decision-making processes.

Age of Respondents. The majority of teachers (58.8%) were aged between 35 and 44 years, while 23.5% were aged 45–54 years and 17.6% were aged 25–34 years. Among head teachers, the largest proportion (64.7%) were aged 45–54 years, followed by 29.4% aged 35–44 years and 5.9% aged above 55 years. For PTA chairpersons, 47.1% were aged 45–54 years, 35.3% were aged 35–44 years, 11.8% were above 55 years, and only 3.9% were aged 25–34 years. These findings indicate that most respondents were mature adults with substantial life and professional experience. Such respondents possess extensive knowledge about school management practices, student welfare issues and factors influencing girls' retention in schools.

Teaching Experience. The majority of teachers (70.6%) had teaching experience of between 1 and 5 years, while 23.5% had over 11 years of experience and only 5.9% had worked for 6–10 years. Similarly, most head teachers (64.7%) had served for 1–5 years, while 29.4% had 6–10 years of experience and 5.9% had over 11 years of experience. Among PTA chairpersons, 82.2% had served for 1–5 years and 11.8% had 6–10 years of experience. The findings imply that although many respondents were relatively new in their current positions, they had sufficient exposure to school operations and student issues to provide meaningful information regarding guidance and counselling services and girls' retention.

Academic Qualifications of Teachers. The results show that 64.7% of teachers possessed Bachelor's Degrees while 35.3% held Diplomas. No teacher reported qualifications below diploma level. These findings indicate that the teaching workforce in the sampled schools was professionally trained and academically qualified. Consequently, the teachers were likely to understand educational policies, learner support mechanisms, and guidance and counselling practices, thereby enhancing the quality of information collected.

Subject Specialization. The majority of teachers (76.5%) taught Arts subjects, while only 23.5% taught Science subjects. This suggests that Arts teachers constituted the largest proportion of respondents. Since Arts teachers often interact closely with learners through subjects that involve discussion, communication and social issues, they possess deeper insights into learners' personal, social, and emotional challenges that influence retention.

The demographic characteristics have several implications for the study on Guidance and Counselling Services and Girls' Retention in Secondary Schools.

1. **Credibility of Information.** The predominance of respondents aged 35–54 years suggests that participants had acquired substantial professional and life experience. Their maturity increases the likelihood of providing informed and reliable information regarding factors affecting girls' retention and the effectiveness of guidance and counselling services.

2. **Influence of Gender on Perspectives.** The dominance of male respondents, especially among school leaders and PTA chairpersons, may influence how issues affecting girls are perceived and addressed. Since girls' retention often involves gender-specific concerns such as menstruation management, early marriage, sexual harassment, and teenage pregnancy, the limited representation of women in leadership may affect the design and implementation of supportive interventions.

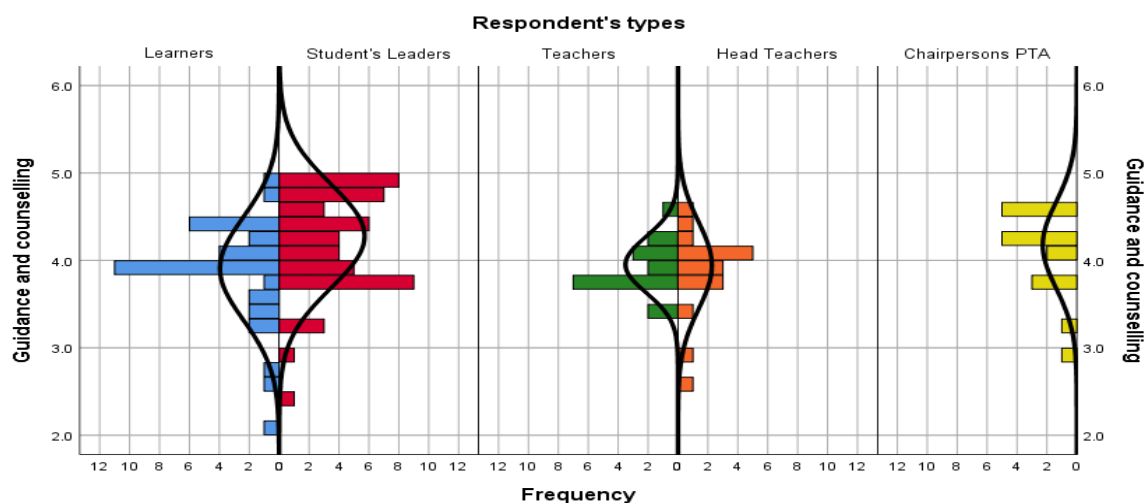
3. **Adequate Understanding of School Systems.** The majority of respondents had served for at least one to five years, indicating that they had acquired sufficient familiarity with school policies, learner behaviour, and guidance and counselling programs. This strengthens confidence in the validity of their responses.

4. **Professional Competence.** The high proportion of teachers holding Bachelor's Degrees suggests that respondents possessed the professional knowledge necessary to understand educational challenges and evaluate the effectiveness of guidance and counselling services. This enhances the quality and dependability of the study findings.

5. **Insights into Learner Welfare.** The predominance of Arts teachers among respondents may have enriched the study with perspectives related to learners' social, emotional, behavioural, and psychological needs, which are central aspects of guidance and counselling and closely linked to girls' retention.

6. **Policy and Practice Implications.** The findings highlight the importance of strengthening female representation in school leadership and governance structures. Increased female participation may enhance advocacy for girl-child education and contribute to more gender-responsive guidance and counselling programs aimed at improving girls' retention in secondary schools.

Figure 2: Showing Respondent's Types



4.2 Research Question One

What is the status of guidance and counselling services in secondary schools in Kitgum District?

The study employed Likert type scale data to investigate the status of guidance and counselling in secondary schools in the Kitgum District. The perceptions of respondents were measured in a scale of 1 to 5. That is, strongly disagree (SD = 1), disagree (D = 2), not sure (NS = 3), agree (A = 4) and strongly agree (SA = 5), where the numeric codes indicate the status of agreement of the respondent. The results presented using mean, standard deviation and percentage. For a better interpretation, 1 & 2 were aggregated to mean disagree, 3 referred to neutral view and 4 & 5 were also aggregated to mean agree.

The findings of the section were organized as follows: (a) students, (student's leaders), (b) teachers and (c) Head teachers and chairpersons of PTA.

4.2.1 Learners and student's leaders

Table 4.2.1 below presents learners' perceptions regarding the status and effectiveness of guidance and counselling services in secondary schools. Responses were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (SD) to Strongly Agree (SA). The mean scores for all statements were approximately 4.00, indicating that respondents generally agreed with the statements and perceived guidance and counselling services positively.

Table 4.2.1 Descriptive Statistics on Status of Guidance and Counselling Services in Secondary Schools by Learners

No.	Statement	M(SD)	SD	D	NS	A	SA
1	I am aware that school offers guidance and counselling	4.00(0.00)	0(0.0%)	0(0.8%)	11(9.2%)	103(86.6%)	4(3.4%)
2	I know where to find guidance and counselling office	4.00(1.00)	0.0%	10(8.4%)	15(12.6%)	83(69.7%)	11(9.2%)
3	I have personally used schools counselling services	4.00(1.00)	0.0%	10(11.8%)	11(5.9%)	79(66.4%)	15(16.0%)
4	The counsellor is approachable and easy to talk to	4.00(1.00)	0.0%	15(13.0%)	10(8.7%)	75(62.6%)	19(15.7%)
5	The counselling services are helpful in solving personal or academic problems	4.00(1.00)	0.0%	20(16.9%)	7(5.9%)	75(62.7%)	17(14.4%)
6	Guidance and counselling help girls avoid dropping out of school	4.00(1.00)	0(0.0%)	20(16.8%)	(5.9%)	66(55.5%)	26(21.8%)

Awareness of Guidance and Counselling Services. The findings show that 86.6% of learners agreed and 3.4% strongly agreed that they were aware that their schools offered guidance and counselling services. Only 9.2% were neutral, while less than 1% disagreed. This finding indicates a very high level of awareness among learners regarding the existence of guidance and counselling services. The high mean score ($M = 4.00$) suggests that schools have successfully communicated the availability of these services to students.

Knowledge of the Counselling Office. The results reveal that 69.7% of learners agreed and 9.2% strongly agreed that they knew where to find the guidance and counselling office. However, 12.6% were neutral and 8.4% disagreed. These findings imply that most learners know where counselling services are located and can access them when needed. Nevertheless, the proportion of learners who were neutral or disagreed suggests that some schools may need to improve visibility and accessibility of counselling facilities.

Utilization of Counselling Services. Regarding personal use of counselling services, 66.4% of learners agreed and 16.0% strongly agreed that they had personally used school counselling services. Only 11.8% disagreed and 5.9% were neutral. The findings suggest that counselling services are not only available but are also being utilized by a large proportion of learners. This

demonstrates the relevance of counselling programs in addressing learners' academic, social, and personal concerns.

Approachability of Counsellors. The results indicate that 62.6% of learners agreed and 15.7% strongly agreed that counsellors were approachable and easy to talk to. Meanwhile, 13.0% disagreed and 8.7% were neutral. These findings suggest that learners generally perceive counsellors as friendly and accessible, which is an important condition for effective counselling. However, the minority expressing disagreement may indicate the need for counsellors to strengthen rapport and trust with some learners.

Helpfulness of Counselling Services. The study found that 62.7% of learners agreed and 14.4% strongly agreed that counselling services were helpful in solving personal or academic problems. Conversely, 16.9% disagreed and 5.9% were neutral. This finding indicates that learners largely view guidance and counselling services as effective in addressing challenges that could otherwise interfere with academic participation and school attendance.

Guidance and Counselling as a Tool for Retention. The results further reveal that 55.5% of learners agreed and 21.8% strongly agreed that guidance and counselling help girls avoid dropping out of school. Only 16.8% disagreed and 5.9% remained neutral. This finding demonstrates a strong perception among learners that guidance and counselling contribute significantly to girls' retention by helping them cope with academic, social, emotional, and personal challenges that might otherwise lead to absenteeism or school dropout.

The findings indicate that most learners are aware that guidance and counselling services exist in their schools, the majority know where counselling services can be accessed, a large proportion of learners have personally utilized counselling services, learners generally perceive counsellors as approachable and easy to talk to, most respondents believe that counselling services help resolve personal and academic problems and a substantial majority agree that guidance and counselling services help girls remain in school and reduce the likelihood of dropping out.

Based on the learners' responses, guidance and counselling services are well established and functional in the sampled secondary schools. Learners are generally aware of the services, know where to access them, and many have personally benefited from them. The services are perceived as accessible, helpful, and effective in addressing personal and academic challenges. Most importantly, learners believe that guidance and counselling play a significant role in preventing school dropout and promoting girls' retention. The study therefore concludes that

guidance and counselling services are positively perceived by learners and constitute an important support mechanism for enhancing girls' retention in secondary schools. Strengthening these services further could contribute to improved student welfare, academic success, and sustained school attendance among girls.

4.2.2 Student Leaders' Perspective

Table 4.2.2 below presents female student leaders' perceptions of the status and effectiveness of guidance and counselling services in their schools. The responses were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (SD) to Strongly Agree (SA). The mean scores ranged from 4.08 to 4.41, indicating a generally high level of agreement that guidance and counselling services are available, functional, and supportive of girls' educational retention.

Table 4.2.2: Descriptive Statistics on Status of Guidance and Counselling Services in Secondary Schools by Female Students' Leaders

No.	Statement	M(SD)	SD	D	NS	A	SA
1	My school has a functional guidance and counselling department.	4.33(0.52)	0.0%	0.0%	2(2.0%)	64(62.7%)	36(35.3%)
2	There is a qualified guidance counsellor available at my school.	4.16(0.92)	0.0%	8(7.8%)	12(11.8%)	38(37.3%)	44(43.1%)
3	Guidance and counselling services help me to deal with personal problems affecting my studies.	4.41(0.67)	0.0%	2(2.0%)	4(3.9%)	46(45.1%)	50(49.0%)
4	I receive regular career and academic guidance from the counselling department.	4.08(0.84)	0.0%	10(9.8%)	2(2.0%)	60(58.8%)	30(29.4%)
5	Counselling services in my school provide support on issues like early pregnancy and dropout.	4.29(0.81)	0.0%	4(3.9%)	10(9.8%)	40(39.2%)	48(47.1%)
6	The counselling department organizes talks or sessions that help girls stay in school.	4.39(0.80)	0.0%	4(3.9%)	8(7.8%)	34(33.3%)	56(54.9%)

Functional Guidance and Counselling Department. The findings reveal that 62.7% of female student leaders agreed and 35.3% strongly agreed that their schools had a functional guidance and counselling department, while only 2.0% were neutral. No respondent disagreed with the statement. The mean score was 4.33 (SD = 0.52). These findings suggest that guidance and counselling departments are well established and operational in most of the sampled schools. The absence of disagreement demonstrates widespread confidence in the existence and functionality of counselling structures.

Availability of a Qualified Guidance Counsellor. The results indicate that 37.3% of respondents agreed and 43.1% strongly agreed that a qualified guidance counsellor was available in their schools. However, 11.8% were neutral and 7.8% disagreed. The statement recorded a mean score of 4.16 (SD = 0.92). This finding implies that most schools have personnel responsible for guidance and counselling services. Nevertheless, the relatively higher standard deviation and the presence of some disagreement suggest that availability of qualified counsellors may vary across schools.

Counselling Support for Personal Problems. The study found that 45.1% of female student leaders agreed and 49.0% strongly agreed that guidance and counselling services help them deal with personal problems affecting their studies. Only 3.9% were neutral and 2.0% disagreed. The statement achieved the highest mean score of 4.41 (SD = 0.67). This indicates that counselling services play a significant role in helping learners overcome personal challenges that may interfere with academic performance and school attendance. The finding demonstrates strong confidence in the effectiveness of counselling interventions.

Provision of Career and Academic Guidance. The findings show that 58.8% agreed and 29.4% strongly agreed that they regularly receive career and academic guidance from the counselling department. Only 9.8% disagreed and 2.0% were neutral. The mean score was 4.08 (SD = 0.84). These results suggest that counselling departments are actively involved in supporting learners' educational and career aspirations. Such guidance can improve motivation, academic focus, and long-term commitment to schooling.

Support on Early Pregnancy and Dropout Issues. The study further revealed that 39.2% agreed and 47.1% strongly agreed that counselling services provide support on issues such as early pregnancy and school dropout. Only 3.9% disagreed while 9.8% remained neutral. The mean score was 4.29 (SD = 0.81). This finding highlights the role of counselling services in addressing some of the major factors contributing to girls' school dropout. By providing

support on sensitive and high-risk issues, counselling programs help learners remain in school and continue their education.

Organization of Talks and Retention Sessions. The results indicate that 33.3% agreed and 54.9% strongly agreed that counselling departments organize talks and sessions that help girls stay in school. Only 3.9% disagreed and 7.8% were neutral. The statement recorded a mean score of 4.39 (SD = 0.80). These findings suggest that schools actively use counselling-related sensitization activities, seminars, and educational talks to promote awareness of challenges affecting girls and strategies for remaining in school. Such activities appear to be widely appreciated by student leaders.

The findings indicate that most female student leaders confirmed the existence of functional guidance and counselling departments in their schools and a large majority reported the availability of qualified guidance counsellors. Counselling services are perceived as highly effective in helping learners address personal problems affecting their studies and students receive regular career and academic guidance from counselling departments. Guidance and counselling services provide support on critical issues such as early pregnancy and school dropout and counselling departments regularly organize talks and sensitization sessions aimed at encouraging girls to remain in school. The mean scores ranging from 4.08 to 4.41 demonstrate a strong positive perception of guidance and counselling services among female student leaders.

The findings show that guidance and counselling services are well established, accessible, and effective in the sampled secondary schools. Female student leaders perceive counselling departments as functional and responsive to learners' academic, personal, social, and career-related needs. The services provide critical support in addressing challenges such as personal stress, early pregnancy, and the risk of school dropout, while also promoting academic and career development. The study therefore concludes that guidance and counselling services constitute a strong institutional support mechanism that contributes positively to girls' retention in secondary schools. Through counselling sessions, career guidance, and targeted interventions on dropout-related issues, these services help create a supportive school environment that encourages girls to remain in school and successfully complete their education.

4.2.3 Teacher Counselor / Career Masters/Mistresses' Perspective

Table 4.2.3 below presents the perceptions of Teacher Counselors, Career Masters, and Career Mistresses regarding the status of guidance and counselling services in secondary schools. Responses were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (SD) to Strongly Agree (SA). The mean scores ranged from 3.00 to 4.29, indicating generally positive perceptions of guidance and counselling services, although concerns were raised regarding the adequacy of resources allocated to these services.

Table 4.2.3 Descriptive Statistics on Status of Guidance and Counselling Services in Secondary Schools by Teacher Counselor / Career Masters/Mistresses (N=17)

No.	Statement	M(SD)	SD	D	NS	A	SA
1	Our school has a dedicated and qualified guidance counsellor	3.76(0.75)	0.0%	2(11.8%)	1(5.9%)	13(76.5%)	1(5.9%)
2	Guidance and counselling services are effectively integrated into the school system	4.24(0.44)	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	13(76.5%)	4(23.5%)
3	Guidance counsellors provide adequate support to female students facing challenges	4.18(0.53)	0.0%	0.0%	1(5.9%)	12(70.6%)	4(23.5%)
4	Teachers are regularly involved in counselling-related activities for student retention	4.29(0.47)	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	12(70.6%)	5(29.4%)
5	There are adequate resources (time, materials) allocated for guidance and counselling services	3.00(1.06)	1(5.9%)	6(35.3%)	2(11.8%)	8(47.1%)	0.0%
6	The counselling services address issues such as early pregnancy, truancy, and social challenges	4.24(0.56)	0.0%	0.0%	1(5.9%)	11(64.7%)	5(29.4%)

Availability of Dedicated and Qualified Guidance Counsellors. The findings reveal that 76.5% of respondents agreed and 5.9% strongly agreed that their schools had dedicated and qualified guidance counsellors. However, 11.8% disagreed and 5.9% were neutral. The statement recorded a mean score of 3.76 (SD = 0.75). These findings suggest that most schools have

personnel responsible for guidance and counselling services. Nevertheless, the presence of some disagreement indicates that not all schools may have adequately qualified counsellors or dedicated counselling staff, which could affect the quality and consistency of counselling services.

Integration of Guidance and Counselling into the School System. The results show that 76.5% of respondents agreed and 23.5% strongly agreed that guidance and counselling services were effectively integrated into the school system. No respondent disagreed or remained neutral. The statement achieved a mean score of 4.24 (SD = 0.44). This finding indicates that guidance and counselling services are embedded within the routine operations of schools and form an important component of school management and learner support systems.

Support Provided to Female Students Facing Challenges. The study found that 70.6% of respondents agreed and 23.5% strongly agreed that guidance counsellors provide adequate support to female students facing challenges. Only 5.9% were neutral. The mean score was 4.18 (SD = 0.53). The findings imply that counsellors are actively assisting female learners in addressing academic, social, emotional, and behavioural challenges that may hinder their educational progress and school retention.

Teachers' Involvement in Counselling Activities. The results indicate that 70.6% agreed and 29.4% strongly agreed that teachers are regularly involved in counselling-related activities aimed at promoting student retention. No respondent disagreed or remained neutral. This statement recorded the highest mean score of 4.29 (SD = 0.47). These findings demonstrate that guidance and counselling is not solely the responsibility of designated counsellors but involves the participation of other teachers as well. Such collaborative involvement strengthens learner support systems and enhances the effectiveness of retention initiatives.

Adequacy of Resources for Guidance and Counselling. The findings reveal mixed perceptions regarding resource allocation. While 47.1% agreed that adequate resources were available, 35.3% disagreed and 5.9% strongly disagreed. Additionally, 11.8% were neutral. The statement recorded the lowest mean score of 3.00 (SD = 1.06). This finding suggests that resource inadequacy remains a significant challenge affecting the delivery of guidance and counselling services. Shortages in counselling materials, office facilities, time allocation, and financial support may limit the effectiveness of counselling programs.

Addressing Early Pregnancy, Truancy, and Social Challenges. The study found that 64.7% agreed and 29.4% strongly agreed that counselling services address issues such as early

pregnancy, truancy, and other social challenges affecting learners. Only 5.9% were neutral. The statement achieved a mean score of 4.24 (SD = 0.56). These findings indicate that counselling programs are responsive to major issues that threaten girls' educational participation and retention. By addressing these challenges, schools are likely to reduce dropout rates and improve learner persistence.

The findings established that most schools have dedicated and qualified guidance counsellors, although a few schools may still face staffing limitations and guidance and counselling services are well integrated into the school system and are recognized as an important component of school management. Counsellors provide substantial support to female students facing personal, social, and academic challenges and teachers actively participate in counselling-related activities aimed at promoting student retention. Counselling services effectively address critical issues such as early pregnancy, truancy, and social challenges that contribute to school dropout and resource allocation emerged as the main area of concern, with many respondents indicating that available resources are insufficient for effective counselling service delivery.

The findings indicate that guidance and counselling services are generally functional, institutionalized, and widely supported within the sampled secondary schools. The services are integrated into school operations, involve both counsellors and teachers, and address key challenges affecting girls' educational participation and retention. Teacher counsellors perceive these services as effective in supporting female learners and promoting school retention. However, the relatively low rating regarding resource availability highlights an important limitation. Insufficient time, materials, facilities, and financial support may constrain the capacity of counselling departments to deliver comprehensive services.

The study therefore concludes that guidance and counselling services are well established and play a significant role in supporting girls' retention in secondary schools. Nevertheless, strengthening resource allocation and ensuring the availability of qualified counselling personnel would further enhance the effectiveness of these services in addressing factors that contribute to school dropout and poor educational outcomes among girls.

4.2.4 Head Teacher Perception to Guidance and Counselling Services

Table 4.2.4 below presents head teachers' perceptions regarding the status of guidance and counselling services in secondary schools. Responses were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (SD) to Strongly Agree (SA). The mean scores ranged from 3.29 to 4.47, indicating that head teachers generally held positive views about the

availability, implementation, and contribution of guidance and counselling services toward improving girls' retention in secondary schools. However, concerns were expressed regarding the adequacy of resources allocated to these services.

Table 4.2.4 Descriptive Statistics on Status of Guidance and Counselling Services in Secondary Schools by Headteachers (N=17)

No.	Statement	M(SD)	SD	D	NS	A	SA
1	Our school has a well-established guidance and counselling department	3.94(0.75)	0.0%	1(5.9%)	2(11.8%)	11(64.7%)	3(17.6%)
2	Teachers and staff receive training on the importance of guidance and counselling	3.71(0.92)	0.0%	3(17.6%)	1(5.9%)	11(64.7%)	2(11.8%)
3	There are policies in place supporting guidance and counselling to improve girls' retention	4.24(0.44)	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	13(76.5%)	4(23.5%)
4	The school allocates adequate resources for guidance and counselling services	3.29(0.99)	0.0%	5(29.4%)	3(17.6%)	8(47.1%)	1(5.9%)
5	The counselling services effectively address issues leading to girls dropping out	4.00(0.71)	0.0%	1(5.9%)	1(5.9%)	12(70.6%)	3(17.6%)
6	The school collaborates with parents and community to support girls' education	4.47(0.51)	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	9(52.9%)	8(47.1%)

Existence of a Well-Established Guidance and Counselling Department. The findings show that 64.7% of head teachers agreed and 17.6% strongly agreed that their schools had a well-established guidance and counselling department. However, 11.8% were neutral and 5.9% disagreed. The statement recorded a mean score of 3.94 (SD = 0.75). These findings suggest that most schools have formal structures for delivering guidance and counselling services. The relatively high level of agreement indicates that counselling departments are recognized components of school administration and learner support systems.

Training of Teachers and Staff on Guidance and Counselling. The results indicate that 64.7% of respondents agreed and 11.8% strongly agreed that teachers and staff receive training on the importance of guidance and counselling. However, 17.6% disagreed and 5.9% were neutral. The statement achieved a mean score of 3.71 (SD = 0.92). This finding implies that schools

generally support capacity building for teachers and staff in guidance and counselling. Nevertheless, the relatively higher proportion of disagreement suggests that training opportunities may not be consistent across all schools, potentially affecting the quality of counselling services provided.

Availability of Policies Supporting Guidance and Counselling. The findings reveal that 76.5% of head teachers agreed and 23.5% strongly agreed that their schools had policies supporting guidance and counselling to improve girls' retention. No respondent disagreed or remained neutral. The statement recorded a mean score of 4.24 (SD = 0.44). These findings indicate that schools have institutionalized policies that recognize guidance and counselling as an important strategy for supporting girls' education and retention. The unanimous agreement demonstrates strong administrative commitment to counselling initiatives.

Allocation of Resources for Guidance and Counselling. The results show that 47.1% agreed and 5.9% strongly agreed that adequate resources were allocated for guidance and counselling services. However, 29.4% disagreed and 17.6% were neutral. This statement recorded the lowest mean score of 3.29 (SD = 0.99). The findings suggest that resource allocation remains a challenge in many schools. While some schools provide sufficient support, others face shortages of counselling materials, finances, facilities, and time, which may hinder effective implementation of guidance and counselling programs.

Effectiveness of Counselling Services in Addressing Dropout Factors. The study found that 70.6% of respondents agreed and 17.6% strongly agreed that counselling services effectively address issues leading to girls dropping out of school. Only 5.9% disagreed and 5.9% remained neutral. The statement achieved a mean score of 4.00 (SD = 0.71). These findings indicate that head teachers perceive counselling services as effective mechanisms for addressing challenges such as poor academic performance, peer pressure, early marriage, teenage pregnancy, absenteeism, and other factors that contribute to school dropout.

Collaboration with Parents and the Community. The findings further reveal that 52.9% of respondents agreed and 47.1% strongly agreed that schools collaborate with parents and the community to support girls' education. No respondent disagreed or remained neutral. This statement recorded the highest mean score of 4.47 (SD = 0.51). The results suggest that schools place considerable emphasis on partnerships with parents and community stakeholders. Such collaboration strengthens support systems for girls, enhances monitoring of learner welfare, and promotes school retention.

The findings established that most schools have well-established guidance and counselling departments and teachers and staff generally receive training on the importance of guidance and counselling, although the extent of training varies across schools. Schools have clear policies that support guidance and counselling as a strategy for improving girls' retention and guidance and counselling services are perceived as effective in addressing factors that contribute to girls' dropout from school. Strong collaboration exists between schools, parents, and communities in supporting girls' education and resource allocation emerged as the weakest aspect of guidance and counselling services, with a substantial proportion of head teachers indicating inadequacies in resources.

The findings indicate that guidance and counselling services are firmly embedded within the administrative and policy frameworks of the sampled secondary schools. Head teachers perceive counselling departments as functional and supported by institutional policies, trained personnel, and strong collaboration with parents and communities. These services are considered effective in addressing challenges that threaten girls' retention and educational success. However, the relatively low rating on resource allocation points to a significant implementation challenge. Inadequate funding, materials, facilities, and time allocation may reduce the effectiveness of otherwise well-structured counselling programmes.

The study, therefore, concludes that guidance and counselling services are well established and play a vital role in promoting girls' retention in secondary schools. Their effectiveness is enhanced by supportive policies and community collaboration, but their impact could be further strengthened through increased resource allocation and continuous staff training to ensure comprehensive and sustainable counselling support for female learners.

4.2.5 Chairpersons of PTA perception to guidance and counselling services

Table 4.2.5 below presents the perceptions of PTA Chairpersons regarding the status and effectiveness of guidance and counselling services in secondary schools. The responses were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (SD) to Strongly Agree (SA). The mean scores ranged from 4.00 to 4.41, indicating that PTA Chairpersons generally held positive views about the availability, effectiveness, and contribution of guidance and counselling services toward supporting girls' education and retention in secondary schools.

Table 4.2.5 Descriptive Statistics on Status of Guidance and Counselling Services in Secondary Schools by PTA Chairpersons

No.	Statement	M(SD)	SD	D	NS	A	SA
1	The school provides effective guidance and counselling services for students	4.00(0.50)	0.0%	0.0%	2(11.8%)	13(76.5%)	2(11.8%)
2	Guidance and counselling services address important issues affecting girls' education	4.18(0.81)	0.0%	1(5.9%)	1(5.9%)	9(52.9%)	6(35.3%)
3	Parents and community are involved in supporting guidance and counselling initiatives	4.06(0.83)	0.0%	1(5.9%)	2(11.8%)	9(52.9%)	5(29.4%)
4	Counselling helps reduce dropout rates among girls in our community schools	4.12(0.78)	0.0%	1(5.9%)	1(5.9%)	10(58.8%)	6(29.4%)
5	PTA supports the school in creating awareness about girls' education and retention	4.31(0.60)	0.0%	0.0%	1(6.3%)	10(56.3%)	6(37.5%)
6	The school collaborates with parents to address social issues that affect girls schooling	4.41(0.62)	0.0%	0.0%	1(5.9%)	8(47.1%)	8(47.1%)

Effectiveness of Guidance and Counselling Services. The findings reveal that 76.5% of PTA Chairpersons agreed and 11.8% strongly agreed that schools provide effective guidance and counselling services for students. Only 11.8% remained neutral, while none disagreed. The statement recorded a mean score of 4.00 (SD = 0.50). These findings suggest that PTA Chairpersons perceive guidance and counselling services as functional and beneficial to learners. The absence of disagreement indicates widespread confidence in the effectiveness of these services within the sampled schools.

Addressing Issues Affecting Girls' Education. The results show that 52.9% of respondents agreed and 35.3% strongly agreed that guidance and counselling services address important issues affecting girls' education. Only 5.9% disagreed and 5.9% were neutral. The statement achieved a mean score of 4.18 (SD = 0.81). This finding implies that counselling services are actively addressing challenges that hinder girls' educational progress, such as teenage pregnancy, early marriage, absenteeism, peer pressure, low self-esteem, and other social and academic difficulties.

Community and Parental Involvement in Counselling Initiatives. The findings indicate that 52.9% agreed and 29.4% strongly agreed that parents and the community are involved in

supporting guidance and counselling initiatives. However, 11.8% were neutral and 5.9% disagreed. The mean score was 4.06 (SD = 0.83). These findings suggest that schools have established collaborative relationships with parents and community members in supporting counselling programs. Such partnerships are essential for reinforcing positive behaviours and addressing challenges that affect learners both at school and at home.

Counselling and Reduction of Girls' Dropout Rates. The study found that 58.8% of PTA Chairpersons agreed and 29.4% strongly agreed that counselling helps reduce dropout rates among girls in community schools. Only 5.9% disagreed and 5.9% were neutral. The statement recorded a mean score of 4.12 (SD = 0.78). This finding indicates that PTA leaders recognize guidance and counselling as an important intervention in preventing school dropout and promoting girls' continued participation in education.

PTA Support for Awareness Creation on Girls' Education and Retention. The results reveal that 56.3% of respondents agreed and 37.5% strongly agreed that the PTA supports schools in creating awareness about girls' education and retention. Only 6.3% were neutral, while none disagreed. This statement achieved a mean score of 4.31 (SD = 0.60). The findings demonstrate that PTAs play an active role in sensitizing parents and communities about the value of educating girls and the importance of keeping them in school. Such advocacy efforts are likely to strengthen community support for girls' education.

Collaboration between Schools and Parents to Address Social Issues. The findings further reveal that 47.1% agreed and 47.1% strongly agreed that schools collaborate with parents to address social issues affecting girls' schooling. Only 5.9% remained neutral, while none disagreed. This statement recorded the highest mean score of 4.41 (SD = 0.62). These results suggest that strong school-parent partnerships exist in addressing challenges such as poverty, early marriage, domestic responsibilities, gender-based violence, and teenage pregnancy. Such collaboration enhances the effectiveness of interventions aimed at improving girls' retention.

The findings indicate that PTA Chairpersons highly value guidance and counselling services as a critical strategy for supporting girls' education and retention. They perceive counselling services as effective in addressing educational and social challenges, reducing school dropout, and promoting learners' well-being. The results further demonstrate that parents, communities, and PTAs actively collaborate with schools to support counselling initiatives and create awareness about the importance of girls' education.

The study therefore concludes that guidance and counselling services are not only school-based interventions but also community-supported mechanisms that contribute significantly to girls' retention in secondary schools. The strong partnerships among schools, parents, PTAs, and communities enhance the effectiveness of counselling services and create a supportive environment that encourages girls to remain in school and successfully complete their education.

4.3 Research Question Two

What is the level of girls' retention in secondary schools in Kitgum District?

The section presents the findings of respondents' perceptions on girls' retention in secondary schools in Kitgum District. The results are presented in subsections based on the category of respondents in the study.

4.3.1 Learners' Perception on Girls' Retention

Table 4.3.1 below presents female learners' perceptions regarding the level of girls' retention in secondary schools. The responses were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (SD) to Strongly Agree (SA). All statements recorded a mean score of approximately 4.00, indicating that learners generally agreed that girls' retention in their schools was relatively high and supported by various school-based interventions.

Table 4.3.1 Descriptive Statistics on Levels of Girls' Retention in Secondary Schools by Female Learners

No.	Statement	M(SD)	SD	D	NS	A	SA
1	Most girls in my class stay in school from term to term	4.00(1.00)	0.0%	13(10.9%)	17(14.3%)	69(58.0%)	20(16.8%)
2	My school provides support to girls who are at risk of dropping out	4.00(1.00)	0.0%	19(16.0%)	9(7.6%)	77(64.7%)	14(11.8%)
3	Guidance and counselling help girls who face challenges	4.00(1.00)	0.0%	22(18.5%)	6(5.0%)	72(60.5%)	19(16.0%)
4	Teachers and counsellors encourage us to complete our education	4.00(1.00)	0.0%	7(6.0%)	5(4.3%)	71(59.5%)	36(30.2%)
5	I have personal goals for my education after secondary school	4.00(1.00)	0.0%	2(1.7%)	5(4.2%)	58(48.7%)	54(45.4%)
6	I feel supported to stay in school despite any challenges I may face	4.00(1.00)	0.0%	25(21.2%)	3(2.5%)	58(48.3%)	33(28.0%)

Girls Staying in School from Term to Term. The findings show that 58.0% of learners agreed and 16.8% strongly agreed that most girls in their class remain in school from one term to another. However, 14.3% were neutral and 10.9% disagreed. The mean score was 4.00 (SD = 1.00). These findings suggest that the majority of girls continue their education without interruption, indicating relatively good retention levels in the sampled schools. Nevertheless, the proportion of respondents who disagreed points to the existence of some dropout or irregular attendance cases that still require attention.

School Support for Girls at Risk of Dropping Out. The results reveal that 64.7% agreed and 11.8% strongly agreed that their schools provide support to girls who are at risk of dropping out. Meanwhile, 16.0% disagreed and 7.6% remained neutral. The mean score was 4.00 (SD = 1.00). This finding indicates that schools have mechanisms aimed at identifying and supporting vulnerable girls. Such support may include counselling, mentorship, financial assistance, parental engagement, and academic guidance designed to prevent school dropout.

Role of Guidance and Counselling in Addressing Challenges. The study found that 60.5% agreed and 16.0% strongly agreed that guidance and counselling help girls who face challenges. However, 18.5% disagreed and 5.0% were neutral. The mean score was 4.00 (SD = 1.00). These findings imply that guidance and counselling services are recognized by learners as important interventions that help girls overcome personal, academic, social, and emotional difficulties that could negatively affect their school attendance and retention.

Encouragement from Teachers and Counsellors. The findings show that 59.5% agreed and 30.2% strongly agreed that teachers and counsellors encourage learners to complete their education. Only 6.0% disagreed and 4.3% were neutral. The statement recorded one of the highest levels of agreement, with a mean score of 4.00 (SD = 1.00). This finding suggests that teachers and counsellors play an active role in motivating girls to remain in school and complete their studies. Such encouragement is likely to enhance learners' commitment to education and reduce the risk of dropout.

Educational Aspirations Beyond Secondary School. The results reveal that 48.7% agreed and 45.4% strongly agreed that they have personal educational goals beyond secondary school. Only 1.7% disagreed and 4.2% were neutral. The statement registered the highest combined agreement level (94.1%) and a mean score of 4.00 (SD = 1.00). These findings indicate that most girls possess strong educational aspirations and future career ambitions. Such aspirations

are important predictors of persistence in school because learners who have clear goals are more likely to overcome challenges and remain committed to their education.

Feeling Supported to Remain in School. The findings further indicate that 48.3% agreed and 28.0% strongly agreed that they feel supported to remain in school despite challenges they may face. However, 21.2% disagreed and 2.5% were neutral. The mean score was 4.00 (SD = 1.00). This suggests that although most girls perceive significant support from their schools and other stakeholders, a notable minority still feel inadequately supported. This highlights the need for schools to strengthen support systems for vulnerable learners.

The findings established that most girls remain in school from one term to another, indicating generally good retention levels and schools provide support to girls who are at risk of dropping out. Guidance and counselling services help girls cope with personal, academic, and social challenges and teachers and counsellors actively encourage girls to complete their education. Most female learners have strong educational aspirations beyond secondary school and the majority of girls feel supported to remain in school despite challenges, although some still experience inadequate support.

The findings suggest that girls' retention in the sampled secondary schools is generally high. Female learners perceive their schools as providing supportive environments that encourage continued participation in education through counselling services, teacher encouragement, dropout prevention initiatives, and learner support mechanisms. The strong educational aspirations reported by learners further reinforce the likelihood of continued school attendance and completion. However, the existence of a minority of learners who reported inadequate support and the persistence of some dropout-related concerns indicate that retention challenges have not been completely eliminated. Therefore, while retention levels appear satisfactory, schools should continue strengthening guidance and counselling services, learner support programs, and targeted interventions for vulnerable girls.

The study therefore concludes that girls' retention in secondary schools is relatively high and is supported by positive school practices, effective guidance and counselling services, teacher encouragement, and strong educational aspirations among learners. Continued investment in these support systems is essential for sustaining and further improving girls' retention rates.

4.3.2 Student Leaders' Perception on girls' Retention

Table 4.3.2 below presents the perceptions of female student leaders regarding the level of girls' retention in secondary schools. Responses were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (SD) to Strongly Agree (SA). The mean scores ranged from 3.12 to 4.53, indicating generally positive perceptions of girls' retention, although concerns were raised regarding the adequacy of support provided to girls facing challenges.

4.3.2 Descriptive Statistics on Levels of Girls' Retention in Secondary Schools by Female Student Leaders

No.	Statement	SD	D	NS	A	SA	
1	Most girls remain enrolled year to year without dropping out	3.82(0.87)	0.0%	1(7.8%)	4(23.5%)	8(47.1%)	4(21.6%)
2	School environment encourages girls to continue education	4.08(0.98)	0.0%	2(13.7%)	1(2.0%)	8(47.1%)	6(37.3%)
3	Girls facing challenges get enough support to stay in school	3.12(0.91)	1(2.0%)	5(27.5%)	5(29.4%)	7(39.2%)	1(2.0%)
4	School has programs to reduce dropout rates among girls	4.04(0.82)	0.0%	1(5.9%)	2(13.7%)	9(51.0%)	5(29.4%)
5	Attendance of girls is generally consistent throughout year	3.96(0.82)	0.0%	1(5.9%)	3(17.6%)	9(51.0%)	4(25.5%)
6	Girls encouraged to set goals for education beyond secondary	4.53(0.61)	0.0%	0.0%	1(5.9%)	6(35.3%)	10(58.8%)

Girls Remaining Enrolled from Year to Year. The findings reveal that 47.1% of female student leaders agreed and 21.6% strongly agreed that most girls remain enrolled in school from year to year without dropping out. However, 23.5% were neutral and 7.8% disagreed. The statement recorded a mean score of 3.82 (SD = 0.87). These findings suggest that girls' retention is generally satisfactory in the sampled schools, with a majority of learners progressing through their education without dropping out. However, the proportion of neutral and disagreeing respondents indicates that dropout remains a concern for some learners.

School Environment Encouraging Continued Education. The results indicate that 47.1% agreed and 37.3% strongly agreed that the school environment encourages girls to continue with their education. Only 13.7% disagreed and 2.0% were neutral. The statement achieved a mean score of 4.08 (SD = 0.98). This finding implies that the school environment is generally supportive

and conducive to girls' educational participation. Positive relationships with teachers, counselling services, peer support, and school policies may contribute to encouraging girls to remain in school.

Support for Girls Facing Challenges. The findings show that only 39.2% agreed and 2.0% strongly agreed that girls facing challenges receive enough support to stay in school. In contrast, 27.5% disagreed, 2.0% strongly disagreed, and 29.4% remained neutral. This statement recorded the lowest mean score of 3.12 (SD = 0.91). These findings suggest that support systems for vulnerable girls may not be fully adequate in all schools. While some girls receive assistance, many respondents were uncertain or dissatisfied with the level of support available. This indicates a potential gap in interventions targeting girls experiencing academic, social, economic, or personal challenges.

Availability of Programs to Reduce Dropout Rates. The results reveal that 51.0% agreed and 29.4% strongly agreed that schools have programs aimed at reducing dropout rates among girls. Only 5.9% disagreed while 13.7% remained neutral. The mean score was 4.04 (SD = 0.82). This finding indicates that schools have implemented initiatives such as guidance and counselling, mentorship, career guidance, sensitization programs, and parental involvement strategies to promote girls' retention and reduce dropout.

Consistency of Girls' Attendance. The study found that 51.0% agreed and 25.5% strongly agreed that girls' attendance is generally consistent throughout the year. However, 17.6% were neutral and 5.9% disagreed. The statement recorded a mean score of 3.96 (SD = 0.82). These findings suggest that most girls attend school regularly, which is a positive indicator of retention. Nevertheless, some fluctuations in attendance may still occur due to challenges such as illness, financial constraints, domestic responsibilities, or other social factors.

Encouragement to Set Educational Goals Beyond Secondary School. The findings further reveal that 35.3% agreed and 58.8% strongly agreed that girls are encouraged to set educational goals beyond secondary school. Only 5.9% were neutral, while none disagreed. This statement recorded the highest mean score of 4.53 (SD = 0.61). The findings indicate that schools strongly promote future educational aspirations among girls. Such encouragement is likely to increase motivation, academic commitment, and persistence in education, thereby enhancing retention.

The findings established that most girls remain enrolled in school from year to year, suggesting relatively good retention levels and the school environment generally encourages girls to continue their education. Schools have programs aimed at reducing dropout rates among girls

and girls' attendance is generally consistent throughout the academic year. Schools strongly encourage girls to set educational goals beyond secondary school and the weakest area identified was the adequacy of support provided to girls facing challenges, where many respondents expressed uncertainty or dissatisfaction.

The findings suggest that girls' retention in the sampled secondary schools is generally favorable. Female student leaders perceive schools as providing supportive environments, implementing dropout prevention programs, maintaining relatively consistent attendance, and strongly encouraging girls to pursue educational goals beyond secondary school. These factors collectively contribute to keeping girls in school and promoting successful completion of their education. However, concerns regarding the adequacy of support for girls facing personal, social, financial, or academic challenges indicate that retention efforts are not equally effective for all learners. Strengthening targeted support mechanisms, particularly for vulnerable girls, would further improve retention outcomes.

The study therefore concludes that girls' retention in secondary schools is generally high and is supported by positive school environments, retention-focused programmes and strong educational aspirations among learners. Nevertheless, additional support for girls facing challenges is needed to ensure that all learners have equal opportunities to remain in school and complete their education successfully.

4.3.3 Teacher Counselor / Career Masters/Mistresses' Perception on Girls' Retention

Table 4.3.3 below presents the perceptions of Teacher Counselors, Career Masters, and Career Mistresses regarding the level of girls' retention in secondary schools. Responses were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (SD) to Strongly Agree (SA). The mean scores ranged from 3.65 to 4.41, indicating generally positive perceptions regarding girls' retention and the effectiveness of school-based interventions aimed at keeping girls in school.

Table 4.3.3 Descriptive Statistics on Levels of Girls' Retention in Secondary Schools by Teacher Counselor / Career Masters/Mistresses

No.	Statement	M(SD)	SD	D	NS	A	SA
1	Girls in our school generally remain enrolled throughout their secondary education	3.65(0.70)	0.0%	2(11.8%)	2(11.8%)	13(76.5%)	0.0%
2	Retention of girls is improved by counselling and support programs in the school	4.12(0.49)	0.0%	0.0%	1(5.9%)	13(76.5%)	3(17.6%)
3	The school takes active steps to prevent girls from dropping out due to personal or social issues	4.00(0.61)	0.0%	1(5.9%)	0.0%	14(82.4%)	2(11.8%)
4	Girls receive encouragement and motivation to complete their secondary education	4.35(0.79)	0.0%	1(5.9%)	0.0%	8(47.1%)	8(47.1%)
5	Attendance among female students is closely monitored and interventions are timely	4.00(0.87)	0.0%	1(5.9%)	3(17.6%)	8(47.1%)	5(29.4%)
6	The school engages parents and community in efforts to retain girls in school	4.41(0.87)	0.0%	1(5.9%)	1(5.9%)	5(29.4%)	10(58.8%)

Girls Remaining Enrolled Throughout Secondary Education. The findings reveal that 76.5% of respondents agreed that girls in their schools generally remain enrolled throughout their secondary education. However, 11.8% disagreed and 11.8% were neutral. No respondent strongly agreed or strongly disagreed. The statement recorded a mean score of 3.65 (SD = 0.70), the lowest among all the statements. These findings suggest that while retention levels are generally satisfactory, some girls still leave school before completing their secondary education. The relatively lower mean score indicates that retention remains a concern requiring continuous intervention and monitoring.

Contribution of Counselling and Support Programs to Retention. The results show that 76.5% agreed and 17.6% strongly agreed that girls' retention is improved by counselling and support programs in the school. Only 5.9% remained neutral, while none disagreed. The statement achieved a mean score of 4.12 (SD = 0.49). This finding indicates that counselling and support programs are widely perceived as effective strategies for improving girls' retention. Such

programs help learners address academic, social, emotional, and personal challenges that may otherwise contribute to dropout.

School Efforts to Prevent Dropout. The study found that 82.4% agreed and 11.8% strongly agreed that schools take active steps to prevent girls from dropping out due to personal or social issues. Only 5.9% disagreed. The statement recorded a mean score of 4.00 (SD = 0.61). These findings suggest that schools are proactive in identifying at-risk learners and implementing interventions such as counselling, mentorship, parental engagement, and follow-up mechanisms to prevent dropout.

Encouragement and Motivation to Complete Secondary Education. The findings reveal that 47.1% agreed and an equal proportion (47.1%) strongly agreed that girls receive encouragement and motivation to complete their secondary education. Only 5.9% disagreed. This statement achieved a mean score of 4.35 (SD = 0.79). The results indicate that motivation and encouragement are important components of school retention efforts. Teachers, counsellors, and school administrators appear to play an active role in inspiring girls to remain focused on their education and complete their studies.

Monitoring of Attendance and Timely Interventions. The findings show that 47.1% agreed and 29.4% strongly agreed that attendance among female students is closely monitored and that interventions are provided promptly when problems arise. However, 17.6% were neutral and 5.9% disagreed. The statement recorded a mean score of 4.00 (SD = 0.87). This finding suggests that schools have systems for tracking attendance and responding to cases of absenteeism. Such monitoring helps schools identify learners at risk of dropping out and provide timely support.

Engagement of Parents and Communities in Retention Efforts. The results reveal that 29.4% agreed and 58.8% strongly agreed that schools engage parents and communities in efforts to retain girls in school. Only 5.9% disagreed and 5.9% were neutral. This statement recorded the highest mean score of 4.41 (SD = 0.87). These findings indicate that schools recognize the importance of parental and community involvement in promoting girls' retention. Collaboration with parents and community stakeholders helps address challenges that originate outside the school environment and strengthens support systems for learners.

The findings established that most girls generally remain enrolled throughout their secondary education, although some dropout concerns still exist and Counselling and support programs are perceived as important contributors to girls' retention. Schools actively implement

measures to prevent dropout caused by personal and social challenges and girls receive substantial encouragement and motivation to complete their secondary education. Schools monitor attendance and provide timely interventions to address absenteeism and retention risks and strong collaboration exists between schools, parents, and communities in promoting girls' retention, making this the strongest aspect of retention efforts.

The findings indicate that girls' retention in the sampled secondary schools is generally positive and is strengthened by a combination of counselling services, dropout prevention programs, motivational support, attendance monitoring, and strong school-community partnerships. Teacher counsellors recognize guidance and counselling as a key strategy in helping girls overcome challenges that might otherwise lead to school dropout.

The strongest retention factor identified was the engagement of parents and communities, which suggests that successful retention requires collaboration between schools and external stakeholders. However, the relatively lower mean score regarding girls remaining enrolled throughout secondary education indicates that some retention challenges persist and require continued attention.

The study therefore concludes that girls' retention in secondary schools is generally high and is significantly enhanced by counselling and support programs, active dropout prevention measures, learner motivation, attendance monitoring, and strong parental and community involvement. Sustaining and strengthening these interventions will further improve girls' ability to remain in school and successfully complete their secondary education.

4.3.4 Headteachers' Perception on Girls' Retention

Table 4.3.4 below presents head teachers' perceptions of girls' retention levels in secondary schools. The responses were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (SD) to Strongly Agree (SA). The mean scores ranged from 3.94 to 4.47, indicating generally strong agreement that girls' retention has improved and is supported by school leadership, counselling services, and community engagement, although some challenges still persist.

Table 4.3.4 Descriptive Statistics on Levels of Girls' Retention in Secondary Schools by Headteachers

No.	Statement	M(SD)	SD	D	NS	A	SA
1	Girls' retention rates in our school have improved over the past five years	4.29(0.59)	0.0%	0.0%	1(5.9%)	10(58.8%)	6(35.3%)
2	Early pregnancy and social issues are significant challenges to girls' retention	4.35(0.61)	0.0%	0.0%	1(5.9%)	9(52.9%)	7(41.2%)
3	Counselling services have positively influenced girls to stay in school and complete their education	4.41(0.80)	0.0%	1(5.9%)	0.0%	7(41.2%)	9(52.9%)
4	The school leadership prioritizes girls' retention in policy and practice	4.24(0.56)	0.0%	0.0%	1(5.9%)	11(64.7%)	5(29.4%)
5	Monitoring and follow-up systems exist to track girls' attendance and retention	3.94(0.83)	0.0%	2(11.8%)	0.0%	12(70.6%)	3(17.6%)
6	Community engagement contributes to sustaining girls' enrolment and retention	4.47(0.62)	0.0%	0.0%	1(5.9%)	7(41.2%)	9(52.9%)

Improvement in Girls' Retention over Time. The findings show that 58.8% of head teachers agreed and 35.3% strongly agreed that girls' retention rates in their schools have improved over the past five years. Only 5.9% were neutral, with no disagreement recorded. The statement recorded a mean score of 4.29 (SD = 0.59). These findings indicate a positive trend in girls' retention, suggesting that schools have made progress in keeping girls enrolled and reducing dropout rates over time.

Challenges Affecting Girls' Retention. The results reveal that 52.9% agreed and 41.2% strongly agreed that early pregnancy and other social issues are significant challenges affecting girls' retention. Only 5.9% were neutral, with no disagreement. The mean score was 4.35 (SD = 0.61). This finding highlights that despite improvements in retention, girls still face major social and reproductive health challenges that threaten their continued participation in education.

Effectiveness of Counselling Services. The study found that 41.2% of head teachers agreed and 52.9% strongly agreed that counselling services have positively influenced girls to stay in school and complete their education. Only 5.9% were neutral. The statement recorded a mean score of 4.41 (SD = 0.80). These findings suggest that guidance and counselling services are a

key intervention in improving retention by addressing academic, emotional, and social challenges faced by girls.

Leadership Prioritization of Girls' Retention. The results indicate that 64.7% agreed and 29.4% strongly agreed that school leadership prioritizes girls' retention in both policy and practice. Only 5.9% were neutral, with no disagreement. The mean score was 4.24 (SD = 0.56). This suggests strong institutional commitment by school leadership toward promoting girls' education and reducing dropout rates through supportive policies and strategies.

Monitoring and Follow-Up Systems. The findings show that 70.6% agreed and 17.6% strongly agreed that monitoring and follow-up systems exist to track girls' attendance and retention. However, 11.8% disagreed and none strongly disagreed. The statement recorded a mean score of 3.94 (SD = 0.83), the lowest among all items. These findings suggest that although monitoring systems exist, they may not be fully effective or consistently implemented in all schools, leaving some gaps in tracking learners at risk of dropping out.

Community Engagement in Supporting Retention. The results reveal that 41.2% agreed and 52.9% strongly agreed that community engagement contributes to sustaining girls' enrolment and retention. Only 5.9% were neutral, with no disagreement. The statement recorded the highest mean score of 4.47 (SD = 0.62). These findings demonstrate that collaboration between schools and communities plays a critical role in supporting girls' education by addressing external factors such as cultural practices, poverty, and family-related challenges.

The findings established that girls' retention rates have improved over the past five years in most schools and early pregnancy and social issues remain major challenges affecting girls' retention. Counselling services are highly effective in supporting girls to remain in school and School leadership strongly prioritizes girls' retention in policy and practice. Monitoring and follow-up systems exist but are not fully consistent or effective in all schools and Community engagement is the most influential factor in sustaining girls' retention.

The findings indicate that girls' retention in secondary schools has improved over time and is supported by strong leadership commitment, effective counselling services, and active community involvement. Head teachers emphasize that guidance and counselling play a central role in helping girls overcome academic and social challenges that threaten their schooling. However, persistent issues such as early pregnancy and other social factors continue to undermine retention efforts, and weaknesses in monitoring and follow-up systems may limit the ability of schools to fully track and support at-risk learners.

The study therefore concludes that girls' retention in secondary schools is generally improving and is strongly supported by counselling services, school leadership, and community engagement. Nevertheless, sustained attention is needed to address persistent social challenges and strengthen monitoring systems in order to further enhance girls' completion rates in secondary education.

4.3.5 Chairpersons of PTA Perception on Girls' Retention

Table 4.3.5 below presents PTA Chairpersons' perceptions on the levels of girls' retention in secondary schools. Responses were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (SD) to Strongly Agree (SA). The mean scores ranged from 3.94 to 4.29, indicating generally strong agreement that girls' retention is improving and is largely supported by collaborative efforts between schools, parents, and the wider community.

Table 4.3.5 Descriptive Statistics on Levels of Girls' Retention in Secondary Schools by PTA Chairpersons

No.	Statement	M(SD)	SD	D	NS	A	SA
1	Girls' retention in secondary schools has improved due to collaborative efforts between school and parents	4.18(0.39)	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	14(82.4%)	3(17.6%)
2	Community attitudes positively influence girls to remain in school	3.94(0.75)	0.0%	1(5.9%)	2(11.8%)	11(64.7%)	3(17.6%)
3	The PTA plays an active role in promoting girls' education and retention	4.29(0.47)	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	12(70.6%)	5(29.4%)
4	Social challenges such as early marriage and pregnancy affect girls retention in the community	4.24(0.66)	0.0%	0.0%	2(11.8%)	9(52.9%)	6(35.3%)
5	Schools provide adequate information and support to parents to help keep girls in school	4.12(0.49)	0.0%	0.0%	1(5.9%)	13(76.5%)	3(17.6%)
6	The community supports initiatives aimed at reducing girls dropout rates	4.12(0.78)	0.0%	1(5.9%)	1(5.9%)	10(58.8%)	5(29.4%)

Improvement in Girls' Retention through School–Parent Collaboration. The findings show that 82.4% of PTA Chairpersons agreed and 17.6% strongly agreed that girls' retention has improved due to collaboration between schools and parents. There was no disagreement or neutrality. The statement recorded a mean score of 4.18 (SD = 0.39). This suggests that strong

school–parent partnerships are widely recognized as a key factor contributing to improved girls’ retention in secondary schools.

Influence of Community Attitudes. The results indicate that 64.7% agreed and 17.6% strongly agreed that community attitudes positively influence girls to remain in school. However, 11.8% were neutral and 5.9% disagreed. The mean score was 3.94 (SD = 0.75), the lowest among the items. This finding implies that while community attitudes are generally supportive, there are still pockets of negative or indifferent perceptions that may undermine girls’ educational continuity.

Role of PTA in Promoting Girls’ Education. The study found that 70.6% of respondents agreed and 29.4% strongly agreed that the PTA plays an active role in promoting girls’ education and retention. No disagreement or neutrality was recorded. The mean score was 4.29 (SD = 0.47). These findings highlight the PTA as a strong advocacy structure that mobilizes parents and communities to support girls’ education and reduce dropout rates.

Social Challenges Affecting Girls’ Retention. The results show that 52.9% agreed and 35.3% strongly agreed that social challenges such as early marriage and pregnancy affect girls’ retention in the community. Only 11.8% were neutral, with no disagreement. The mean score was 4.24 (SD = 0.66). This indicates that despite ongoing efforts, socio-cultural issues remain significant barriers to girls’ retention in secondary education.

School Support to Parents. The findings reveal that 76.5% agreed and 17.6% strongly agreed that schools provide adequate information and support to parents to help keep girls in school. Only 5.9% were neutral, with no disagreement. The statement recorded a mean score of 4.12 (SD = 0.49). This suggests that schools actively engage parents through communication, sensitization, and guidance aimed at improving girls’ retention.

Community Support for Retention Initiatives. The results show that 58.8% agreed and 29.4% strongly agreed that the community supports initiatives aimed at reducing girls’ dropout rates. Only 5.9% disagreed and 5.9% were neutral. The mean score was 4.12 (SD = 0.78). These findings indicate that community members generally support efforts to keep girls in school, although a small proportion may still be less engaged or supportive.

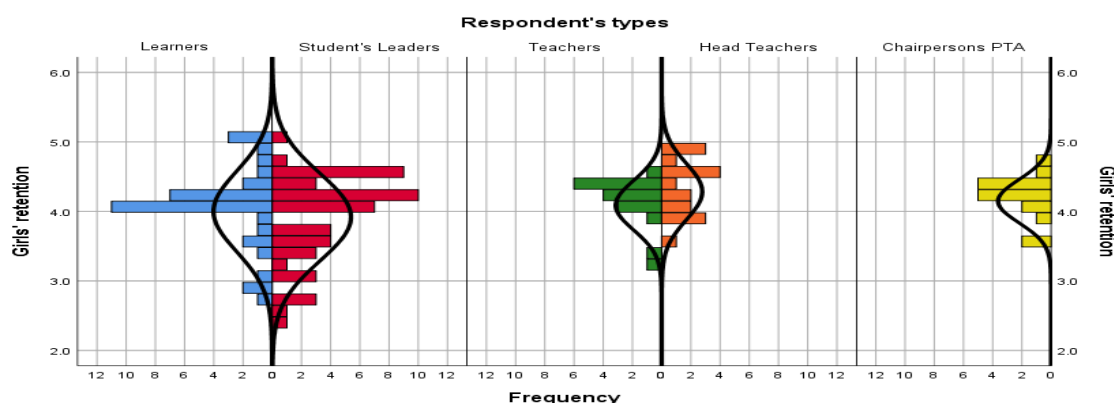
The findings established that girls’ retention has improved due to strong collaboration between schools and parents and community attitudes generally support girls’ education, although some negative perceptions still exist. PTA plays a significant and active role in promoting girls’

retention and social challenges such as early marriage and teenage pregnancy remain major barriers to retention. Schools provide adequate information and support to parents to enhance girls' retention and communities generally support initiatives aimed at reducing girls' dropout rates.

The findings indicate that girls' retention in secondary schools is generally improving and is strongly supported by collaborative efforts among schools, parents, PTAs, and the wider community. PTA Chairpersons particularly emphasize the importance of active parental involvement, community support, and school communication in promoting girls' continued participation in education. However, persistent social challenges such as early marriage and teenage pregnancy continue to negatively affect retention outcomes, and some variation in community attitudes suggests that not all environments are fully supportive of girls' education.

The study therefore concludes that girls' retention in secondary schools is largely strengthened by effective school–parent–community collaboration, with PTAs playing a central advocacy role. Nonetheless, addressing persistent socio-cultural barriers remains essential for further improving and sustaining girls' retention in secondary education.

Figure 2: Respondents' Types



4.5 Research Question Three

What is the relationship between guidance and counselling services and girls' retention in secondary schools in Kitgum District?

This section presents the analysis of the relationship between guidance and counselling (independent variable) and girls' retention (dependent variable) in secondary schools in Kitgum District. The study employed both correlation and simple linear regression analyses. Correlation analysis was used to reveal the association between the two variables while the simple linear regression was to assess the influence of guidance and counselling on girls'

retention in the study area. Also, it should be mentioned that the study had one independent variable only that was regressed against the dependent variable. Hence, simple linear regression was appropriate (cite).

Figure 3: Relationship between guidance and counselling and girls' retention by respondents' type

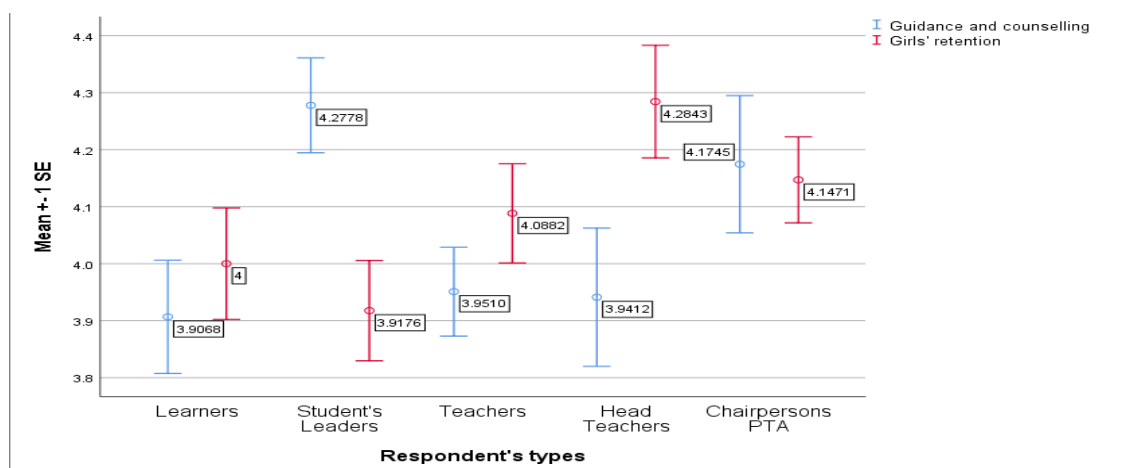


Figure 4.4.1 shows that learners, teachers and head teachers were among the respondents who agreed that girls' retention was high in the existing status of guidance and counselling. Whereas the student leaders and chairpersons of the PTA had opposing opinions, in their case, the level of girls' retention was somewhat lower than the status of guidance and counselling. Prior to conducting such an analysis, the researcher checked into the assumptions that must be met in order to attain the desired specific objective. The following assumptions were evaluated: linearity, normality, constant variance, and multicollinearity.

The linearity test was used to see whether guiding and counselling was linearly associated with girls' retention (Figure 4.4a). A scatter plot was employed. The normality assumption was tested using a probability-probability (P-P) plot (Figure 4.4b), and it is regarded valid if no heavy tails occur or left or right skewed depending on bow shape of the plot. Right skewed will bow upward and left downward, Figure 4.4c. The assumption of constant variance (homoscedasticity) was explored using a graphical plot of residual against observed values of the dependent variable. Finally, multicollinearity was investigated using the variance inflation factor (VIF), with a value less than 10 indicating no multicollinearity effect. It should be noted that the visualization or graphical results can be found in appendices Linear regression test.

Importantly, following the conceptual framework of the study, where guidance and counselling was the only construct with six items. The items were aggregated using mean values of the items to produce a single variable (the independent variable), and the same was done with the items in girls' retention (dependent variable).

Findings of the regression assumptions revealed that guidance and counselling was linearly associated with girls' retention (Figure 4.4a). It was found that the data passed the normality assumption (Independent Variable: Shapiro's test statistic = 1.957, $p < 0.067$ & Independent Variable: Shapiro's test statistic = 1.937, $p < 0.065$). This was confirmed by normality plot of dependent variable in Figure 4.4b. Although the dependent variable showed slight right skewed since it bowed upward but it was not statistically significant, see Figure 4.4c. Additionally, there was no collinearity problem (VIF = 1.00), which was less than the threshold of 10.

Learners. Learners reported a mean of about 3.91 for guidance and counselling and 4.00 for girls' retention. This suggests that while they moderately acknowledge counselling services, they perceive girls' retention to be slightly higher. This may imply that retention is visible to learners even when counselling support is not fully experienced or consistently accessed by all students.

Student Leaders. Student leaders recorded a higher mean for guidance and counselling (4.28) but a relatively lower perception of girls' retention (3.92). This suggests that student leaders strongly recognize counselling services in their schools but are more cautious or critical about the actual level of retention among girls, possibly because they observe dropout cases more closely within student peer structures.

Teachers. Teachers showed moderate-to-high perceptions of both variables, with guidance and counselling at 3.95 and girls' retention at 4.09. This indicates that teachers generally perceive retention to be slightly better than the effectiveness or visibility of counselling services, suggesting that retention may also be influenced by additional school-based factors beyond counselling alone.

Head Teachers. Head teachers reported lower guidance and counselling mean (3.94) but the highest perception of girls' retention (4.28) among all groups. This suggests that school leadership views retention outcomes very positively, possibly reflecting institutional success, while also acknowledging some gaps in counselling service strength or resourcing.

PTA Chairpersons. PTA chairpersons recorded relatively balanced and high means for both variables: 4.17 for guidance and counselling and 4.15 for girls' retention. This indicates a strong perception that both counselling services and retention are positively linked and mutually reinforcing, supported by collaboration between schools and parents.

Across all respondent types both guidance and counselling and girls' retention are rated positively (all means above 3.9). The differences between groups are relatively small, and the error bars suggest overlapping confidence intervals, indicating no major statistical divergence in perceptions. In most groups, where counselling is perceived as strong, retention is also perceived as strong, suggesting a positive relationship between the two variables.

The figure establishes that all respondent groups perceive both guidance and counselling services and girls' retention positively. PTA chairpersons show balanced and consistent perceptions of both variables. Head teachers report the highest levels of girls' retention, while student leaders report the strongest perception of counselling services. Learners perceive retention slightly higher than counselling services as all variations between respondent groups are minimal, indicating general agreement across stakeholders.

The Pearson correlation coefficient was employed to evaluate the association between Guidance and counselling, and girls' retention. The finding showed that there was moderate, positive and statistically significant ($r = 0.43$, $n = 129$, $p < .001$).

Table 4.4.1 below presents the Pearson correlation coefficient examining the relationship between guidance and counselling services and girls' retention in secondary schools. The results show a positive and statistically significant relationship between the two variables. The correlation coefficient is $r = 0.43^*$ with $p < 0.001$, indicating that the relationship is both moderate in strength and highly significant statistically.

Table 4.4.1: Pearson correlation coefficient for girls' retention and guidance and counselling

Variables	[1]	[2]
[1] Girls' retention	1	
[2] Guidance and counselling	$r = 0.43^{***}$	1

*** $p < .001$

The positive value ($r = 0.43$) shows that as guidance and counselling services improve, girls' retention in secondary schools also increases. The strength of the relationship is moderate, meaning guidance and counselling is an important factor, but not the only factor influencing retention. The significance level ($p < 0.001$) confirms that the relationship is not due to chance, and is statistically reliable.

This result implies that guidance and counselling services play a meaningful role in enhancing girls' retention, supporting learners emotionally, socially, and academically. Schools with stronger counselling systems are likely to experience lower dropout rates among girls. However, since the correlation is moderate (not strong), other factors such as poverty, early marriage, pregnancy, school environment, and family support also influence retention.

The analysis establishes that there is a positive relationship between guidance and counselling and girls' retention. The relationship is moderate ($r = 0.43$), indicating a meaningful but not exclusive influence. The relationship is statistically significant ($p < 0.001$), confirming strong evidence of association.

The study concludes that guidance and counselling services are significantly and positively associated with girls' retention in secondary schools. Schools that strengthen counselling programs are more likely to retain girls and reduce dropout rates. However, because the relationship is moderate rather than strong, it is also clear that girls' retention is influenced by multiple interacting factors and, therefore, guidance and counselling should be complemented with broader interventions such as parental involvement, socio-economic support, and school policy enforcement to achieve maximum retention outcomes.

Table 4.4.2 below presents the results of a simple linear regression analysis examining the extent to which guidance and counselling services predict girls' retention in secondary schools. The dependent variable is girls' retention, while the independent variable is guidance and counselling services.

Table 4.4.2: Simple linear regression between girls' retention and guidance and counselling

	<i>B</i>	<i>s.e</i>	<i>beta</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p-value</i>	<i>VIF</i>
Constant	1.93	.288		6.69	.000	
Guidance and counselling	0.516	.070	0.54	7.40	.000	1.00

Dependent variable: Girls' retention

The simple linear regression can be expressed as (Table 4.4.2):

$$\text{Girls' retention} = 0.54 \times \text{Guidance and counselling} + 1.93$$

This indicates that for each unit value of guidance and counselling measure, girls' retention increased by 0.54.

The results show a positive and statistically significant relationship between guidance and counselling and girls' retention. The regression coefficient ($B = 0.516$) indicates that for every one-unit increase in the quality or effectiveness of guidance and counselling services, girls' retention increases by 0.516 units, holding other factors constant. The standardized beta value ($\beta = 0.54$) shows a moderate to strong positive influence, meaning guidance and counselling is a meaningful predictor of retention in secondary schools.

The t-value is 7.40, which is very high. The p-value is 0.000 ($p < 0.001$), indicating that the relationship is highly statistically significant. This confirms that guidance and counselling services have a real and reliable effect on girls' retention, and the result is not due to chance.

Multicollinearity Check. The VIF value is 1.00, which is far below the threshold of 5 or 10. This indicates that there is no multicollinearity problem, and the model is statistically sound and stable.

Constant (Intercept). The constant value (1.93) represents the predicted level of girls' retention when guidance and counselling services are absent or at zero. This suggests that even without counselling services, some level of retention still exists, but it is relatively low compared to when counselling is present.

The regression analysis establishes that guidance and counselling has a positive effect on girls' retention. The effect is statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). The strength of influence is moderate to strong ($\beta = 0.54$). An increase in counselling services leads to a measurable increase in girls' retention ($B = 0.516$). The model is statistically reliable with no multicollinearity issues ($VIF = 1.00$).

Chapter Five

Discussions, Conclusions, Recommendations and Suggestions for Future Studies

5.0. Introduction

This chapter presents discussions arising from the investigations and findings on the status of guidance and counselling, level of girls' retention in secondary schools and the relationship between guidance and counselling and girls' retention in secondary schools in Kitgum District are presented. The discussions are made following the research questions and conclusions are drawn basing on the findings. Several recommendations were made.

5.1. Discussions

This section discusses the findings of the study, it begins with determining the status of guidance and counselling in secondary schools in Kitgum District as presented in the subsequent section.

5.2. *The Status of Guidance and Counselling Services in Secondary Schools in Kitgum District*

The findings of this study revealed that learners, teachers, head teachers and chairpersons PTAs of various secondary schools are highly aware of the existence of guidance and counselling services in their schools, know where such services can be accessed, and have utilized them to address personal and academic challenges. Learners further perceived counsellors as approachable and believed that counselling services play a significant role in helping girls remain in school and reducing dropout rates. These findings are consistent with the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES, 2023), which emphasizes guidance and counselling as a critical support mechanism for learners facing academic, social, emotional, and behavioural challenges. The Ministry observed that schools with active counselling programmes register improved attendance, discipline, and retention among learners, particularly girls who are vulnerable to socio-cultural and economic barriers to education.

The findings also agree with Egbo (2015), who argued that guidance and counselling services are essential in helping learners develop self-awareness, make informed decisions, and cope with personal and educational challenges. Egbo established that students who regularly access counselling services are more likely to remain focused on their studies and less likely to engage in behaviours that lead to school dropout. The positive perceptions expressed by learners in the

current study therefore demonstrate the value of counselling in promoting girls' persistence in education.

Similarly, the findings resonate with UNESCO (2023), which reported that comprehensive school counselling programmes enhance learners' psychosocial wellbeing, increase resilience, and improve school retention rates among girls. UNESCO observed that counselling services are particularly effective in addressing gender-specific challenges such as early marriage, teenage pregnancy, menstrual health concerns, and gender-based violence, all of which threaten girls' educational continuity. The finding that counselling services support girls facing personal and academic challenges therefore aligns with UNESCO's position on the protective role of school-based counselling.

The findings further support the recommendations of the African Union (2021) under the Continental Education Strategy for Africa, which advocates for strengthened learner support systems, including guidance and counselling, as a means of improving educational participation and completion rates among girls. The African Union emphasized that counselling programmes provide learners with psychosocial support and life skills necessary for overcoming challenges that often result in school dropout. The reported effectiveness of counselling services in addressing early pregnancy, truancy, and social challenges in this study reinforces this continental perspective.

The study findings are also in agreement with Nyamwange (2016), who found that effective guidance and counselling services positively influence students' academic adjustment, behaviour, and retention in school. Nyamwange observed that students who receive regular counselling support demonstrate greater confidence, improved decision-making abilities, and stronger commitment to completing their education. The positive perceptions of counselling services among female student leaders in the present study reflect these benefits.

Likewise, the findings corroborate those of Orira (2019), who established that guidance and counselling departments play a significant role in reducing school dropout by addressing learners' emotional, social, and behavioural problems. Orira noted that counselling interventions help learners develop coping strategies and strengthen their attachment to school. The present study's finding that counselling departments organize sensitization talks and interventions targeting girls' retention is therefore consistent with Orira's conclusions.

The findings are further supported by Kakuru (2019), whose study in Uganda revealed that guidance and counselling services contribute significantly to girls' retention by addressing

challenges such as teenage pregnancy, peer pressure, low self-esteem, and family-related difficulties. Kakuru found that schools with active counselling programmes reported lower dropout rates among girls compared to schools where counselling services were weak or absent. The current study similarly established that counselling services provide support on critical issues affecting girls' continued participation in education.

In addition, the findings concur with Nsubuga (2020), who found that counselling services improve student welfare and strengthen retention by creating a supportive school environment. Nsubuga observed that involvement of teachers, parents, and community members in counselling programmes enhances the effectiveness of interventions aimed at keeping learners in school. The current study's finding that PTA chairpersons recognize the effectiveness of counselling services and that parents and communities participate in supporting counselling initiatives therefore confirms Nsubuga's observations.

Despite the generally positive findings, the study identified inadequate resource allocation as a major challenge affecting the effectiveness of counselling services. This observation is consistent with MoES (2023), which acknowledges that many schools continue to face shortages of trained counsellors, counselling facilities, and operational resources, thereby limiting the full potential of guidance and counselling programmes.

5.3. The Level of Girls' Retention in Secondary Schools in Kitgum District

The findings of this study established that most girls remain in school from one term and one academic year to another, indicating relatively good retention levels in the sampled secondary schools. The findings further revealed that schools provide support to girls at risk of dropping out through counselling services, educational encouragement, attendance monitoring, collaboration with parents and communities, and implementation of programmes aimed at reducing dropout. However, challenges such as early pregnancy, early marriage, inadequate support systems, and inconsistent monitoring mechanisms continue to affect some girls. These findings are consistent with several national, regional, and international studies.

The findings resonate with UNESCO (2024), which reported that retention of girls in secondary education has improved globally due to increased investment in learner support systems, school counselling programmes, and community sensitization initiatives. UNESCO observed that girls are more likely to remain in school where schools provide psychosocial support, promote educational aspirations, and engage parents and communities in supporting education. The finding that girls receive encouragement from teachers and counsellors and that schools

actively implement measures to reduce dropout aligns with UNESCO's conclusion that supportive school environments are critical for sustaining girls' participation in education.

Similarly, the findings are in agreement with the World Bank (2023), which found that girls' retention improves significantly when schools combine academic support, mentorship, counselling services, and community engagement. The World Bank noted that girls who receive consistent support from teachers, parents, and community stakeholders are more likely to transition successfully from one grade level to another and complete secondary education. The current study's finding that collaboration among schools, parents, and communities is one of the strongest factors promoting retention therefore supports the World Bank's observations.

The findings further concur with the African Union (AU, 2023), which emphasized that improving girls' retention remains a central educational priority across Africa. The AU reported that effective retention strategies include strengthening guidance and counselling services, addressing gender-related barriers, enhancing community participation, and supporting girls who are vulnerable to dropping out due to social and economic challenges. The finding that schools actively implement measures to prevent dropout caused by personal and social challenges reflects the AU's recommendation for comprehensive learner support systems.

The study findings also support those of Wanyonyi (2018), who established that girls' retention is strongly influenced by school support mechanisms, positive teacher attitudes, and educational aspirations. Wanyonyi found that girls who receive encouragement from teachers and school administrators are more likely to remain committed to their studies and pursue higher levels of education. The present finding that most girls have strong educational aspirations beyond secondary school and feel motivated to complete their education therefore confirms Wanyonyi's conclusions.

Likewise, the findings are consistent with Afelik (2020), who reported that counselling programmes, attendance monitoring, and early intervention mechanisms significantly reduce school dropout among girls. Afelik found that schools that identify learners at risk and provide timely support achieve higher retention rates than those without structured intervention systems. The current study's finding that schools monitor attendance and provide interventions for absenteeism supports this position.

The findings also agree with Mayoma and Nabukenya (2022), who found that parental involvement and community support are among the most influential determinants of girls'

retention in secondary schools. Their study revealed that when parents actively participate in school programmes and communities develop positive attitudes towards girls' education, dropout rates decline significantly. The present study similarly established that PTA members play an active role in promoting retention and that collaboration between schools, parents, and communities is a major contributor to improved retention outcomes.

Furthermore, the findings are consistent with Aluma and Ongom (2021), who found that despite improvements in girls' retention, challenges such as teenage pregnancy, early marriage, poverty, and socio-cultural practices continue to threaten girls' educational participation. They observed that schools that provide counselling services, mentorship programmes, and community outreach are better able to retain girls. The current finding that early pregnancy and social challenges remain major barriers to retention while counselling services are highly effective in supporting girls reinforces the findings of Aluma and Ongom.

The study further revealed that although support mechanisms exist, some girls still perceive the support provided as inadequate. This finding is consistent with UNESCO (2024) and the World Bank (2023), which noted that many schools continue to face resource limitations that affect the quality and consistency of retention interventions. The inconsistency of monitoring and follow-up systems identified in the current study suggests that further improvements are necessary to ensure that all girls receive adequate support throughout their educational journey.

5.4. Relationship between Guidance and Counselling Services and Girls' Retention in Secondary Schools in Kitgum District

The study established a positive and statistically significant relationship between guidance and counselling services and girls' retention in secondary schools ($r = 0.43$, $p < 0.001$). The correlation coefficient indicates a moderate positive association, implying that improvements in guidance and counselling services are associated with improvements in girls' retention. The regression results further revealed that guidance and counselling significantly predicts girls' retention ($B = 0.516$, $\beta = 0.54$, $t = 7.40$, $p < 0.001$), demonstrating that counselling services contribute substantially to keeping girls in school. These findings suggest that although guidance and counselling is not the sole determinant of retention, it plays a critical role in supporting girls to overcome personal, social, and academic challenges that often lead to dropout.

The findings are consistent with Boitt (2016), who found a significant positive relationship between guidance and counselling programmes and student retention in secondary schools.

Boitt observed that counselling services improve learners' emotional wellbeing, academic adjustment, and decision-making abilities, thereby reducing the likelihood of dropping out. The current study similarly found that improved counselling services are associated with increased retention among girls.

The findings also agree with Tinoula and Bengesai (2016), who established that guidance and counselling contributes significantly to educational persistence among learners. Their study demonstrated that counselling services provide students with coping mechanisms for social and academic pressures, thereby enhancing school attendance and retention. The moderate positive relationship observed in the present study supports their conclusion that counselling is an important determinant of learner persistence.

Similarly, Ishmael (2016) found that effective school counselling programmes positively influence students' commitment to education and reduce dropout tendencies. Ishmael argued that learners who receive counselling support are better able to manage personal challenges and remain focused on their educational goals. This aligns with the current finding that counselling services positively influence girls' retention.

The findings further resonate with Mwingirwa (2016), whose study revealed that counselling interventions significantly improve learners' school adjustment and educational continuity. Mwingirwa noted that schools with active counselling programmes tend to register higher retention rates because students receive timely support to address psychosocial and academic challenges. The significant regression coefficient obtained in the current study supports this argument.

Likewise, the findings concur with Omanyi (2016), who found that guidance and counselling programmes reduce behavioural problems, absenteeism, and dropout among secondary school students. Omanyi emphasized that counselling services help learners develop resilience and positive attitudes toward education. The positive relationship between counselling and girls' retention established in this study confirms these observations.

The results are also consistent with Wako (2015), who reported that guidance and counselling services play a significant role in supporting vulnerable learners, particularly girls facing socio-cultural challenges. Wako found that counselling interventions strengthen learners' confidence and improve their ability to remain in school despite adverse circumstances. This corresponds with the present finding that counselling positively predicts retention.

The findings further support those of Nguli et al. (2022), who established that guidance and counselling significantly influences students' educational outcomes, including attendance, academic engagement, and retention. Their study concluded that counselling departments serve as critical support structures that help learners navigate challenges that could otherwise result in school dropout. The moderate to strong predictive effect ($\beta = 0.54$) found in this study reinforces this conclusion.

Similarly, Ihiro, Piliyesi, and Wambiya (2024) found that counselling services significantly contribute to girls' educational retention by addressing psychosocial issues, promoting self-esteem, and providing academic guidance. Their study reported that schools with functional counselling programmes recorded lower dropout rates and higher completion rates among girls. The present findings therefore provide further empirical support for their conclusions.

The study findings also agree with Byaruhanga and Alinda (2019), who found a positive and statistically significant relationship between learner support services and student retention in Ugandan secondary schools. They observed that counselling programmes help learners manage academic stress, family-related challenges, and peer pressure, thereby improving their chances of remaining in school. The current study similarly demonstrates that counselling services have a meaningful influence on girls' retention.

Furthermore, the findings are consistent with Dambo (2019), who concluded that guidance and counselling is an effective strategy for reducing school dropout among girls. Dambo found that counselling programmes provide emotional support and practical guidance that enable girls to overcome barriers to educational participation. The significant relationship observed in the present study confirms the importance of counselling in enhancing girls' retention.

Although the findings and the cited studies largely support the positive role of guidance and counselling in promoting girls' retention, some scholars argue that counselling alone cannot fully explain retention outcomes. The moderate correlation coefficient ($r = 0.43$) indicates that while guidance and counselling is important, other factors also contribute significantly to girls' retention. Researchers have argued that socio-economic status, school infrastructure, parental support, school fees, teacher attitudes, cultural norms, early marriage, teenage pregnancy, and government education policies may exert equal or even greater influence on retention than counselling services alone.

For example, studies on educational participation in Sub-Saharan Africa have shown that girls may still drop out despite receiving counselling when poverty, household responsibilities, or

cultural practices prevent continued schooling. This perspective suggests that guidance and counselling should be viewed as one component within a broader framework of interventions aimed at improving girls' retention. Therefore, while counselling significantly contributes to retention, it works most effectively when combined with financial support, parental involvement, community sensitization, and conducive school environments.

5.6. Conclusions

The study concludes that guidance and counselling services play a vital role in promoting girls' retention in secondary schools. The availability of functional counselling departments, qualified counsellors, supportive teachers and involvement of parents and communities contributes significantly to addressing personal, social and academic challenges that often lead to school dropout. However, inadequate resources remain a constraint that may limit the effectiveness and sustainability of counselling interventions.

The study concludes that girls' retention in secondary schools is generally satisfactory and has improved over time due to effective school-based support systems, guidance and counselling services, strong educational aspirations among girls, and active collaboration between schools, parents, PTAs, and communities. Nevertheless, challenges such as early pregnancy, early marriage, social difficulties, and inadequate support for some vulnerable girls continue to hinder full retention and require sustained intervention.

The study concludes that guidance and counselling services have a positive, statistically significant and meaningful influence on girls' retention in secondary schools. Effective counselling services help girls address personal, social, and academic challenges that might otherwise lead to school dropout. However, because the relationship is moderate rather than absolute, girls' retention is also influenced by other school, family, community and socio-economic factors.

5.7. Recommendations

The Ministry of Education and Sports, school administrators, and education stakeholders should strengthen guidance and counselling programmes by increasing financial and material resource allocation, recruiting and training qualified counsellors, and providing dedicated counselling facilities. This will enhance the capacity of schools to effectively support girls facing academic, social, and personal challenges and ultimately improve girls' retention and completion rates in secondary schools.

School administrators, education authorities and community stakeholders should strengthen comprehensive retention programmes by enhancing guidance and counselling services, improving attendance monitoring and follow-up systems, increasing parental and community engagement, and providing targeted support to girls at risk of dropping out due to early pregnancy, early marriage, and other social challenges. Such interventions will further improve girls' retention and completion of secondary education.

School administrators and education authorities should strengthen guidance and counselling departments by recruiting qualified counsellors, providing adequate resources and integrating counselling programmes with other retention strategies such as parental engagement, community sensitization, financial support initiatives, and interventions targeting early marriage and teenage pregnancy. This integrated approach will maximize the effectiveness of counselling services and further improve girls' retention in secondary schools.

5.8. Suggestions for Future Studies

This study has not investigated and reported on all the aspects of guidance and counselling and girls' retention at schools, therefore, suggests the following areas for any future studies:

1. Influence of Guidance and Counselling Services on Girls' Participation in Public Secondary Schools.
2. Effectiveness of Guidance and Counselling Programme in Enhancing Students' Retention in Public Day Secondary Schools.
3. Headteachers' Use of Guidance and Counselling on Students' Retention in Secondary School Education.

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Appendix A: Introductory Letter

GULU

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UNIVERSITY

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OFFICE OF THE DEAN,
HUMANITIES

FACULTY OF EDUCATION AND

13th, August 2025

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This is to introduce to you Mr. Opwonya Godfrey (Reg No. 18/U/3218/MED) a student pursuing a programme of study leading to an award Master of Education in Education Management of Gulu University, Master of GUIU University.

He is undertaking research on the Topic:

GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING SERVICES AND GIRLS' RETENTION IN
SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN KITGUM DISTRICT

Which is in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award.

Any assistance rendered to him in relation to this research work will be highly appreciated.

Yours faithfully,



Dr. Denis Thaddeus Ofoyuru

Dean, Faculty of Education and Humanities

Appendix B: Questionnaire for Female Students Leaders

Dear Respondent,

I am Godfrey Opwonya, a Master of Education student at Gulu University. This questionnaire is part of a study on “*Guidance and Counselling Services and Girls’ Retention in Secondary Schools in Kitgum District.*” Your honest responses will help us understand how guidance and counselling services impact girls’ retention. All answers will be kept confidential and are for academic purposes only. Participation is voluntary.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Section A: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

No.	Item	Response Options
1	Age	☐ Below 13 ☐ 13-15 ☐ 16-18 ☐ Above 18
2	Class/Grade	☐ S1 ☐ S2 ☐ S3 ☐ S4 ☐ S5 ☐ S6
3	Residence	☐ Urban ☐ Rural
4	Do you live with your parents?	☐ Yes ☐ No
5	Duration at this school	☐ Less than 1 year ☐ 1-2 years ☐ 3+ years

Section B: Status of Guidance and Counselling Services in Secondary Schools

No.	Statement	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Not Sure (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)
1	My school has a functional guidance and counselling department.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2	There is a qualified guidance counsellor available at my school.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3	Guidance and counselling services help me to deal with personal problems affecting my studies.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4	I receive regular career and academic guidance from the counselling department.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

5	Counselling services in my school provide support on issues like early pregnancy and dropout.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
6	The counselling department organizes talks or sessions that help girls stay in school.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Section C: Level of Girls' Retention in Secondary Schools

No.	Statement	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Not Sure (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)
1	Most girls in my school remain enrolled from year to year without dropping out.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2	The school environment encourages girls to continue with their education.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3	Girls who face challenges (e.g., pregnancy, family issues) get enough support to stay in school.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4	The school has programs to reduce dropout rates among girls.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
5	Attendance of girls in my school is generally consistent throughout the year.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
6	Girls in my school are encouraged to set goals for further education beyond secondary school.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Appendix C: Questionnaire for Teacher Counselors/Career Masters/Mistresses

Preamble

Dear Respondent,

I am Godfrey Opwonya, a Master of Education student at Gulu University. This questionnaire is part of a study on “*Guidance and Counselling Services and Girls’ Retention in Secondary Schools in Kitgum District.*” Your honest responses will help us understand how guidance and counselling services impact girls’ retention. All information you provide will be confidential and used only for academic purposes. Your participation is voluntary.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Section A: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

No.	Item	Response Options
1	Age	☐ Below 25 ☐ 25-34 ☐ 35-44 ☐ 45-54 ☐ 55+
2	Gender	☐ Male ☐ Female
3	Teaching Experience	☐ Less than 1 year ☐ 1-5 years ☐ 6-10 years ☐ 11+ years
4	Highest Academic Qualification	☐ Diploma ☐ Bachelor's ☐ Master's ☐ Other (specify)
5	Subject(s) Taught	☐ Sciences ☐ Arts ☐ Languages ☐ Technical ☐ Other (specify)

Section B: Status of Guidance and Counselling Services in Secondary Schools

No.	Statement	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Not Sure (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)
1	Our school has a dedicated and qualified guidance counsellor.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2	Guidance and counselling services are effectively integrated into the school system.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3	Guidance counsellors provide adequate support to female students facing challenges.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4	Teachers are regularly involved in counselling-related activities for student retention.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
5	There are adequate resources (time, materials) allocated for guidance and counselling services.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

6	The counselling services address issues such as early pregnancy, truancy, and social challenges.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
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Section C: Level of Girls' Retention in Secondary Schools

No.	Statement	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Not Sure (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)
1	Girls in our school generally remain enrolled throughout their secondary education.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2	Retention of girls is improved by counselling and support programs in the school.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3	The school takes active steps to prevent girls from dropping out due to personal or social issues.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4	Girls receive encouragement and motivation to complete their secondary education.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
5	Attendance among female students is closely monitored and interventions are timely.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
6	The school engages parents and community in efforts to retain girls in school.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Appendix D: Questionnaire for Headteachers

Preamble

Dear Respondent,

I am Godfrey Opwonya, a Master of Education student at Gulu University. This questionnaire is part of a study on “*Guidance and Counselling Services and Girls’ Retention in Secondary Schools in Kitgum District.*” Your responses will contribute to understanding the role of counselling services in girls’ retention. Information provided will be treated confidentially and used for academic purposes only. Your participation is voluntary.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Section A: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

No.	Item	Response Options
1	Age	☐ Below 35 ☐ 35-44 ☐ 45-54 ☐ 55-64 ☐ 65+
2	Gender	☐ Male ☐ Female
3	Years as Head teacher	☐ Less than 1 year ☐ 1-5 years ☐ 6-10 years ☐ 11+ years
4	Level of School	☐ Ordinary Level ☐ Advanced Level ☐ Both
5	School Type	☐ Public ☐ Private

Section B: Status of Guidance and Counselling Services in Secondary Schools

No.	Statement	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Not Sure (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)
1	Our school has a well-established guidance and counselling department.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2	Teachers and staff receive training on the importance of guidance and counselling.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3	There are policies in place supporting guidance and counselling to improve girls’ retention.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4	The school allocates adequate resources for guidance and counselling services.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
5	The counselling services effectively address issues leading to girls dropping out.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
6	The school collaborates with parents and community to support girls' education.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Section C: Level of Girls' Retention in Secondary Schools

No.	Statement	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Not Sure (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)
1	Girls' retention rates in our school have improved over the past five years.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2	Early pregnancy and social issues are significant challenges to girls' retention in our school.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3	Counselling services have positively influenced girls to stay in school and complete their education.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4	The school leadership prioritizes girls' retention in policy and practice.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
5	Monitoring and follow-up systems exist to track girls' attendance and retention.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
6	Community engagement contributes to sustaining girls' enrollment and retention.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Appendix E: Questionnaire for PTA Chairpersons

Dear Respondent,

I am Godfrey Opwonya, a Master of Education student at Gulu University. This questionnaire is part of a study on *“Guidance and Counselling Services and Girls’ Retention in Secondary Schools in Kitgum District.”* Your insights are important for understanding how families and communities perceive and support girls’ education. All responses will be confidential and used only for research purposes. Your participation is voluntary.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Section A: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

No.	Item	Response Options
1	Age	☐ Below 30 ☐ 30-39 ☐ 40-49 ☐ 50-59 ☐ 60+
2	Gender	☐ Male ☐ Female
3	Length of Time as PTA Chair	☐ Less than 1 year ☐ 1-3 years ☐ 4-6 years ☐ 7+ years

Section B: Status of Guidance and Counselling Services in Secondary Schools

No.	Statement	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Not Sure (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)
1	The school provides effective guidance and counselling services for students.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2	Guidance and counselling services address important issues affecting girls’ education.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3	Parents and community are involved in supporting guidance and counselling initiatives.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4	Counselling helps reduce dropout rates among girls in our community’s schools.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
5	PTA supports the school in creating awareness about girls’ education and retention.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

6	The school collaborates with parents to address social issues that affect girls' schooling.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
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Section C: Level of Girls' Retention in Secondary Schools

No.	Statement	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Not Sure (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)
1	Girls' retention in secondary schools has improved due to collaborative efforts between school and parents.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2	Community attitudes positively influence girls to remain in school.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3	The PTA plays an active role in promoting girls' education and retention.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4	Social challenges such as early marriage and pregnancy affect girls' retention in the community.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
5	Schools provide adequate information and support to parents to help keep girls in school.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
6	The community supports initiatives aimed at reducing girls' dropout rates.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Appendix F: Samples of Analysis

Figure 4.4a: Scatter plot of Girls' retention against Guidance and counselling

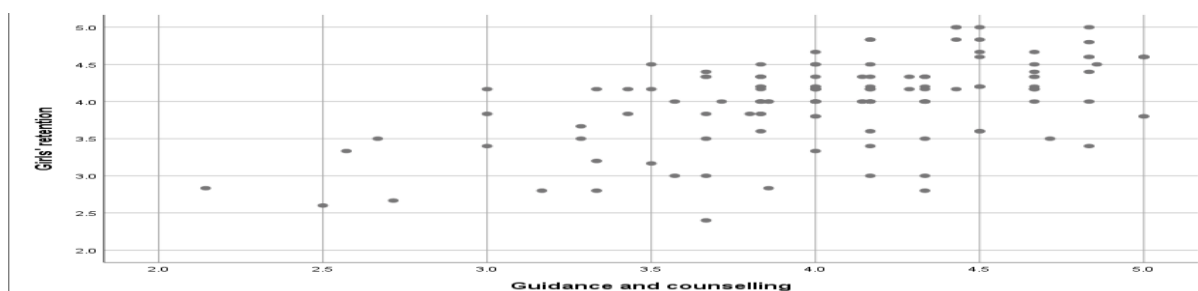


Figure 4.4b: Normality plot of residual

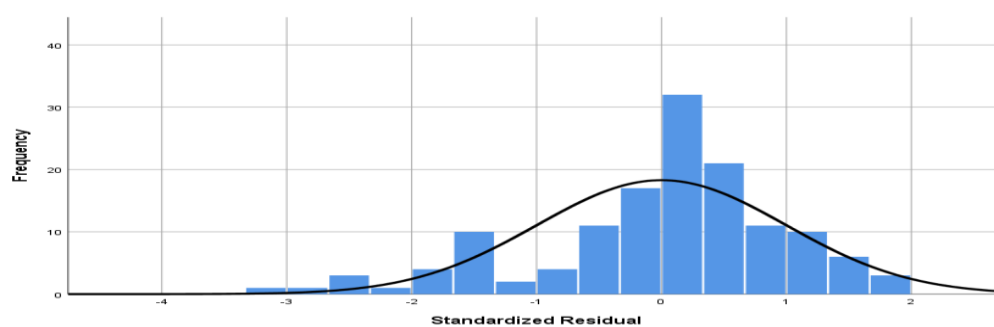


Figure 4.4c: Probability -Probability plot

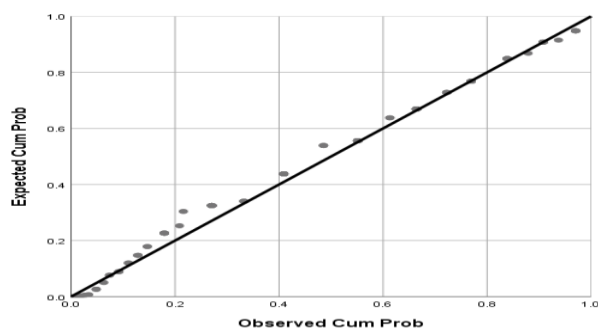


Figure 4.4d: Standardized residual against standardized predicted values for homoscedasticity test

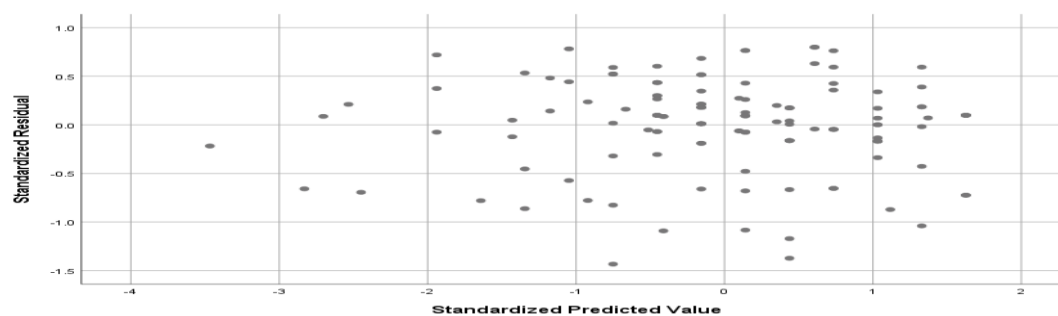


Figure 4.4.2: Relationship between girls' retention and guidance and counselling by respondents' types

