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Contribution of Service Delivery to Students' Enrolment in Public Secondary Schools in Busega District, Tanzania

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Abstract : This study examined the contribution of service delivery to students' enrolment in public secondary schools in Busega District, Tanzania. The study was guided by the need to understand how the quality and responsiveness of educational services influence parents' decisions to enroll their children and students' retention in public secondary schools. A mixed-methods approach with a predominantly quantitative orientation and an explanatory research design was employed. The study targeted 655 respondents from 30 public secondary schools, from whom a sample of 104 respondents was selected, comprising 85 teachers, 6 heads of schools, 6 Ward Education Officers, 1 District Education Officer, and 6 school board chairpersons. Data were collected using questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and observation. Validity was established through expert and supervisor review, while reliability was tested using Cronbach's Alpha, which yielded a coefficient of 0.916 for 20 questionnaire items. Quantitative data were analysed using frequencies and percentages through SPSS version 26, while qualitative data were analysed thematically. The results showed that service delivery played an important role in contributing to student enrolment. More specifically, the majority of teachers were in agreement or strongly in agreement that effective academic service delivery contributed to increased enrolment. Moreover, they noted that quality teaching and learning contributed to the decision making of parents on enrolment of their children and that educational support services in time contributed to enrolment. Also, teachers noted that effective administrative services attracted many students and that effective service delivery generally contributed to student enrolment and retention. Another finding from open-ended questions showed that effective school-community relations and sufficient learning facilities played an important role in student enrolment. The study concluded that quality, timely, and responsive service delivery strengthened school reputation, parental confidence, students' retention, and enrolment. The study recommends that Busega District Council and school authorities improve teaching and learning services, strengthen students' support and administrative systems, enhance school-community partnerships, provide adequate infrastructure, and maintain safe and supportive learning environments to increase students' enrolment in public secondary schools

Keyword : Service delivery, students' enrolment, School Performance and Educational services

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INTRODUCTION

Students' enrolment in secondary education is an important indicator of educational access, participation, and equity, particularly in developing countries where governments continue to expand opportunities for young people to acquire knowledge and skills (Delprato & Farieta, 2023). However, increasing enrolment depends not only on the physical availability of schools but also on the quality of educational services provided to learners. Factors such as household economic conditions, school infrastructure, distance to school, and the quality of educational provision can influence students' access to and participation in secondary education (Pezzulo et al., 2022). Therefore, improving secondary school enrolment requires attention not only to expanding access but also to ensuring that schools provide supportive and quality educational services that encourage students to enrol, attend, and remain in school. In addition, school quality, including teaching quality, learning conditions, and institutional responsiveness, can influence parents' decisions regarding where to enrol their children (Burgess et al., 2021). Furthermore, parents consider the quality of teaching, academic performance, school facilities, safety, and other institutional characteristics when making school-choice decisions (Jabar et al., 2022). These suggest that effective service delivery can strengthen the attractiveness of schools and consequently contribute to increased students' enrolment.

Globally, effective service delivery in public secondary schools is increasingly associated with students' and parents' decisions about school enrolment because school quality, learning outcomes, school environment, accessibility, and the range of services provided influence the attractiveness of schools. In England, Gorman and Walker (2021) found that demand for places was higher in popular and high-performing secondary schools, indicating that families value differences in school quality when seeking school places. Similarly, Haderlein (2022) found that parents consider indicators of school achievement, status, student growth, and demographic characteristics when evaluating and selecting schools. In Japan, the availability and affordability of upper-secondary education also influenced families' school-choice decisions, demonstrating that educational policies and the services made accessible to students can affect enrolment patterns (Fujikawa et al., 2021). Therefore, effective service delivery including quality teaching, adequate learning facilities, supportive school environments, student welfare, and responsive administration can contribute to making public secondary schools more attractive and consequently support higher student enrolment.

In Africa, the relationship between educational service provision and students' participation is particularly important because schools often operate under resource constraints that affect the quality and accessibility of education. Service delivery encompasses several dimensions, including the availability of qualified teachers, teaching and learning materials, infrastructure, administrative support, and a safe and supportive learning environment (Igwebueze, 2024). Recent evidence has shown that the availability and effective utilization of school resources, teacher capacity, learning materials, and adequate infrastructure are important for improving educational quality and supporting learners' participation in developing-country contexts. Similarly, recent studies in Tanzania have demonstrated that inadequate teachers, instructional resources, and essential physical facilities continue to constrain the provision of quality education in public secondary schools (Mwalwajo, 2020). Therefore, improving the quality and reliability of educational services can be an important mechanism for attracting and retaining students.

In Tanzania, the expansion of secondary education has increased access to schooling, but challenges related to the quality and adequacies of educational services remain. Evidence from Tanzanian schools indicates that shortages of teachers, infrastructure, and teaching resources have continued to affect the quality of education provided in government schools. Mwalwajo (2020) found that inadequate infrastructure, insufficient teaching and learning resources, and challenges related to teacher motivation affected the provision of quality education in public secondary schools. More recently, Kaewhanamet al. (2022) found that capitation grants influenced the availability of teaching and learning materials, infrastructure, extracurricular activities, and health services in Tanzanian public secondary schools, with delays and shortages affecting the delivery of quality education. These findings demonstrate that expanding access to secondary education needs to be accompanied by improvements in service delivery so that schools can provide adequate and responsive educational services to enrolled and prospective students.

The importance of service delivery is also evident in the Tanzanian context because the quality of teachers, learning facilities, student support, and school administration can shape learners' experiences and parents' perceptions of schools. Recent Tanzanian evidence has emphasized that teacher-related factors, adequate learning resources, and conducive classroom conditions are important for improving educational outcomes and strengthening the quality of the learning environment (Mollel & Lyimo, 2024). Furthermore, Iddya and Fussy (2023) argued that the availability and quality of safe accommodation can

influence girls' participation and educational opportunities in rural Tanzanian secondary schools. In addition, Maphie (2025) stressed that students with disabilities in Tanzanian secondary schools require various forms of support, including academic, social, emotional, and material assistance, demonstrating the importance of responsive support services in promoting inclusive participation. Thus, effective service delivery should be understood broadly to include not only classroom teaching but also learner support, infrastructure, safety, inclusion, and other services that enable students to participate effectively in secondary education.

Despite government efforts to expand access to secondary education, the delivery of educational services in public secondary schools continues to face several challenges that may affect students' enrolment and retention. Twinomujuniet al. (2023) stressed these challenges include shortages of qualified and motivated teachers, inadequate classrooms, furniture, laboratories, libraries and sanitation facilities, insufficient teaching and learning materials, delays in educational support services, and weaknesses in administrative and student welfare systems. Evidence from Tanzania indicates that inadequate instructional resources and school infrastructure can constrain the provision of quality education, while limitations in essential school services may weaken students' learning experiences and parents' confidence in schools (Mkhatshwa-Ngwenya & Khumalo, 2020). In addition, some schools experience difficulties in maintaining safe and supportive learning environments, providing effective guidance and counselling, supporting learners with disabilities, and sustaining meaningful collaboration with parents and communities. These challenges may be more pronounced in rural settings such as Busega District, where schools and communities may have limited resources to address educational needs and mobilise additional support (Ngobeni, 2024). Consequently, inadequate or unreliable service delivery may reduce parental confidence, affect students' learning experiences, increase absenteeism and dropout, and ultimately limit students' enrolment. Therefore, examining service delivery requires attention not only to the availability of school places but also to the quality, adequacy, timeliness, responsiveness and inclusiveness of services provided to learners.

Tanzania provides an important setting for examining the contribution of service delivery to students' enrolment because it is a predominantly rural district where schools serve communities with diverse educational and socio-economic needs. The issue is particularly important because evidence from the study shows that teachers perceived effective academic

service delivery, quality teaching and learning, timely educational support services, efficient administration, and improved overall service delivery as important contributors to student enrolment and retention (Lameck, 2025). These local findings are consistent with recent evidence showing that school quality, learning conditions, instructional resources, and the broader educational environment can influence educational participation and parents' perceptions of schools (Jabar et al., 2022). They are also consistent with Tanzanian evidence showing that shortages of teachers, infrastructure, and learning resources can constrain the provision of quality education (Mollel & Lyimo, 2024). Therefore, examining the contribution of service delivery to students' enrolment in public secondary schools is important for understanding how improvements in and student-support services can strengthen access, retention, and participation in secondary education.

Enrolment of students in public secondary schools plays an important role in enhancing access and participation in education. Even though the government in Tanzania has been working towards increasing access to secondary education in the country, some schools still face various problems like lack of classrooms, shortage of teachers, inadequate teaching and learning materials, lack of student welfare services and administrative services. Such challenges might be deterring factors in making the schools attractive to students and enrolment in such institutions could be discouraged. There is little empirical evidence in Busega district regarding how the provision of educational services contributes to student enrolment in public secondary schools. This study will therefore examine how service delivery, which includes teaching and learning, school facilities, student welfare and administrative services, contributes to student enrolment in public secondary schools in Busega district.

Literature Review

1. Theoretical Review

The study is anchored on Decentralization Theory. This theory describes how decentralization of power, duties, and resources from central government to local government improves delivery of public services and addresses issues of service delivery. The relevance of the theory in this study is that local government authorities are entrusted with implementing education policies, organizing communities, resource allocation, and provision of educational services at the district level. Delivery of services through quality teaching and learning, proper infrastructure, administrative support, community participation, and timely provision of educational services eliminates barriers of attending school and makes students enroll and attend secondary education.

But decentralization could face challenges due to inadequate resources, poor institutional capacity, and varying capacity of local government leaders. Therefore, Decentralization Theory gives a good basis of analyzing the delivery of educational services at the local level and its effect on the enrolment of students in secondary schools in Busega District.

2. Empirical Literature Review

Studies from different countries have demonstrated that effective service delivery plays an important role in improving students' enrolment and retention in public secondary schools. Loeb et al. (2020) argued that schools providing services such as transportation, counselling, extracurricular activities, and health services experienced greater enrolment stability and increased enrolment, particularly among disadvantaged students. Similarly, Smith and Taylor (2022) reported that well-structured students' support services contributed to enrolment stability by reducing absenteeism and dropout rates. These findings indicate that service delivery extends beyond classroom instruction and includes various services that create favourable conditions for students to enroll and remain in school.

Studies in Africa also indicate that improvements in educational service delivery can enhance access and participation. The World Bank study in Indonesia found that efficient transportation, adequate teacher availability, and accessible health services were associated with higher enrolment and lower dropout rates, particularly among disadvantaged learners. In Nigeria, Mbarawii and Amabibi (2024) established that monitoring, evaluation, resource allocation, and accountability significantly contributed to students' enrolment stability and retention. These findings demonstrate that both direct student-support services and effective management of school resources are important components of service delivery that can influence students' participation in secondary education.

Furthermore, according to Otugo and Okaforcha (2025), there is a very significant and positive correlation between culture and the provision of service by teachers in public secondary schools; innovation, flexibility, and creativity are associated with better educational service delivery and performance of the learners. This implies that for schools to have good educational service delivery, they must create supportive environments for teachers to be able to offer good education services. This may help keep the learners in schools.

In Kenya, Ong'injo et al. (2023) found a statistically significant negative relationship between increased students' enrolment and accommodation service delivery in public boarding secondary schools in Kisumu West Sub-County. The study indicated that increasing enrolment

without corresponding improvements in accommodation facilities could reduce the quality of services available to learners. Similarly, Ong'enge et al. (2025) found that government grants contributed to a 16% increase in students' enrolment in Busia County between 2019 and 2023, although some schools continued to experience financial barriers and hidden costs. These findings suggest that increasing enrolment requires adequate investment in school facilities and financial support to ensure that educational services remain accessible and sustainable.

In Tanzania, Opalo (2023) found that improvements in public secondary school enrolment were associated with better infrastructure, teacher deployment, availability of learning materials, and accountability systems for resource allocation and monitoring. This evidence demonstrates that service delivery is closely connected with the availability and effective management of essential educational resources. However, most existing studies have examined service delivery in broader national or international contexts or focused on specific dimensions such as accommodation, teacher service delivery, or government financing. Therefore, there remains a need to examine comprehensively how academic, administrative, infrastructural, and student-support services contribute to enrolment in public secondary schools at the local level. The present study addresses this need by examining the contribution of service delivery to students' enrolment in public secondary schools in Busega District, Tanzania.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a mixed-methods approach with a predominantly quantitative orientation and an explanatory research design to examine factors influencing students' enrolment in public secondary schools in Busega District. The study targeted 655 respondents from 30 public secondary schools and selected a sample of 104 respondents, comprising 85 teachers, 6 head teachers, 6 WEOs, 1 DEO, and 6 school board chairpersons, using systematic, stratified, simple random, and purposive sampling techniques. Data were collected through questionnaires to teachers, semi-structured interviews to head teachers, WEOs and DEO, and observation. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics in the SPSS version 26 through frequencies and percentages, while qualitative data were analysed thematically in which different themes were formulated from the interview. Ethical procedures, including informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, and institutional permissions, were also observed throughout the study.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study sought to examine the contribution of service delivery to students' enrolment rate in public

secondary schools in Busega District. The study had two key aspects: the contribution of service delivery to students' enrollment from the Likert scale questionnaires and interview. The second aspect is about the contribution of service delivery to student enrollment from open-ended questions and complemented by quotations from the interview.

The Contribution of Service Delivery to Students' Enrollment obtained through the Likert Scale

In this section, teachers were required to indicate their level of agreement by selecting 1 for Strongly Disagree, 2 for Disagree, 3 for Neutral, 4 for Agree, and 5 for Strongly Agree for the given statements. The responses has been presented in Table 1 and complemented by qualitative responses obtained from heads of schools, Ward Executive Officers (WEOs), the District Education Officer (DEO), and school board chairpersons which collected by using interview.

Table 1.
Teachers' Responses on the Contribution of Service Delivery to Students' Enrolment Rate in Public Secondary Schools (n = 85)

Statements		SD f (%)	D f (%)	N F (%)	A f (%)	SA f (%)
i.	Effective academic service delivery in this school contributes to increased student enrolment.	2 (2.4)	3 (3.5)	1 (1.2)	34 (40.0)	45 (52.9)
ii.	The quality of teaching and learning services provided by teachers positively influences parents' decisions to enrol their children in this school.	3 (3.5)	1 (1.2)	1 (1.2)	29 (34.1)	51 (60.0)
iii.	Timely provision of educational support services enhances student enrolment rates.	3 (3.5)	2 (2.4)	4 (4.7)	40 (47.1)	36 (42.3)
iv.	Efficient administrative services improve the school's reputation and attract more students.	3 (3.5)	1 (1.2)	3 (3.5)	23 (27.1)	55 (64.7)
v.	Improved overall service delivery in public secondary schools leads to higher student retention and enrolment rates.	3 (3.5)	0 (0.0)	3 (3.5)	36 (42.4)	43 (50.6)

Source: Field Data (2026)

Table 1 shows that the majority of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that effective service delivery contributes significantly to increased student enrolment in public secondary schools. Teachers believed that quality

teaching and learning, timely educational support services, efficient school administration, and overall improvement in service delivery enhance the school's reputation, influence parents' enrolment decisions, and promote student retention. The consistently high levels of agreement across all statements indicate that teachers perceive quality service delivery as a key factor in attracting and retaining students.

Effective Academic Service Delivery Contributes to Increased Student Enrolment

The findings indicate that 79 teachers (92.9%) agreed or strongly agreed that effective academic service delivery contributes to increased student enrolment, with 45 (52.9%) strongly agreeing and 34 (40.0%) agreeing. Only 5 teachers (5.9%) disagreed or strongly disagreed, and 1 (1.2%) remained neutral. This overwhelming consensus suggests that teachers view academic service delivery not as a peripheral administrative function but as a decisive factor shaping parents' and students' school choices. Effective academic service delivery involves providing quality teaching, adequate learning support, appropriate academic guidance, regular assessment, and timely feedback to students. When schools provide quality academic services, students are more likely to achieve better learning outcomes, while parents develop confidence in the school's ability to support their children's education. During interviews, one respondent observed:

> "*When teachers deliver lessons consistently and mark students' work promptly, parents notice the difference and begin referring other families to enroll their children here. Word travels fast in this community, and a school known for reliable academic delivery quickly builds a reputation that draws in new students every year.*" (HoS, June 2026)

This finding implies that academic service delivery functions as a visible signal of institutional quality that parents use to guide enrolment decisions, particularly in rural districts where formal accreditation information is scarce. This underscores the value of investing in classroom-level service quality as a driver of enrolment growth rather than relying solely on infrastructure expansion (Nakanyika & Sikalumbi, 2026). The observation findings supported the views expressed by teachers and interview participants that effective academic service delivery contributes significantly to increased student enrolment. During the observation visits, schools that demonstrated strong academic service delivery practices were characterised by regular classroom teaching, the availability of lesson plans and teaching records, timely marking of students' exercises,

effective classroom management, and visible academic support mechanisms, such as remedial sessions and guidance services. These practices created the impression of organised, learner-centred academic environments that could enhance parents' confidence in the schools. This finding is consistent with Loeb et al. (2020), who found that public secondary schools with effective service delivery systems experienced greater stability and increased enrolment, particularly among low-income student populations. The finding also resonates with Decentralization Theory, which holds that when authority over service delivery is placed closer to the community, local actors such as teachers and school leaders are better positioned to respond to the specific expectations that drive enrolment decisions within their locality (Rondinelli, 1981).Consequently, a positive academic environment enhances the school's reputation, encourages parents to enrol their children, and increases the likelihood of attracting more students. Therefore, the findings highlight that improving academic service delivery is essential for public secondary schools seeking to increase enrolment rates and strengthen community trust.

Quality of Teaching and Learning Services Positively Influences Parents' Enrolment Decisions

Regarding the second statement, 80 teachers (94.1%) agreed or strongly agreed that the quality of teaching and learning services positively influences parents' decisions to enrol their children, with 51 (60.0%) strongly agreeing and 29 (34.1%) agreeing. Only 4 teachers (4.7%) disagreed or strongly disagreed, and 1 (1.2%) remained neutral. This near-unanimous agreement reflects a strong belief among teachers that pedagogical quality directly shapes household enrolment choices. Quality teaching and learning services include effective lesson delivery, appropriate teaching methods, regular assessment of students' progress, teacher commitment, and a supportive learning environment. When parents observe that a school provides effective instruction and enables students to achieve good academic outcomes, they are more likely to develop confidence in the school and choose it for their children. Furthermore, schools with a reputation for quality teaching often attract more students through positive community perceptions and parent recommendations. During interviews, one respondent noted:

> "*Parents in this ward talk to each other about which schools produce good results and which teachers explain topics clearly. If they hear that a school's teachers are dedicated and students are performing well, they will choose that school over others even if it means walking a longer distance.*" (WEO, June 2026)

This finding shows that the perceived quality of teaching services operates as a form of social currency within communities, where reputational information circulates informally and shapes enrolment patterns independent of formal marketing efforts. For school leadership, this highlights the importance of sustaining visible teaching quality as a continuous enrolment strategy. The observation findings confirmed that the quality of teaching and learning services plays a significant role in influencing parents' decisions regarding school enrolment. During the observation visits, schools that demonstrated effective teaching practices were characterized by well-prepared teachers, organized classroom instruction, active student participation, and the use of appropriate teaching and learning approaches. Teachers were observed delivering lessons systematically, explaining concepts clearly, involving students in classroom discussions, and guiding learners during instructional activities (Oktradiksa & Santri, 2025). These practices reflected a commitment to improving students' learning experiences and academic achievement. This is supported by Smith and Taylor (2022), who found that schools with well-structured service delivery frameworks recorded greater stability and increased enrolment, especially among disadvantaged households seeking dependable educational provision. Within the framework of Decentralization Theory, this finding illustrates how empowered local leadership, through capable teachers and school administrators, translates into more equitable and responsive service delivery that communities can directly observe and reward with enrolment. Therefore, the findings suggest that improving the quality of teaching and learning is a critical strategy for increasing student enrolment and strengthening the competitiveness and attractiveness of public secondary schools.

Timely Provision of Educational Support Services Enhances Enrolment Rates

For the third statement, 76 teachers (89.4%) agreed or strongly agreed that the timely provision of educational support services enhances students' enrolment rates, with 36 (42.3%) strongly agreeing and 40 (47.1%) agreeing. Five teachers (5.9%) disagreed or strongly disagreed, and 4 (4.7%) remained neutral, the highest neutral proportion among the five statements. These findings indicate that teachers generally perceive educational support services, such as guidance and counselling, provision of learning materials, academic assistance, student welfare support, and other learner-centred interventions, as important factors influencing parents' and students' decisions to join and remain in a school. Timely provision of these services helps address students'

academic and social challenges, creates a supportive learning environment, and improves students' satisfaction with the school experience. When schools respond promptly to students' needs, parents are more likely to develop confidence in the institution's ability to care for and support their children, which can encourage increased enrolment. During interviews, one respondent reflected:

> "*Support services such as school meals, counseling, and health checkups matter a great deal to families, especially those with limited income. When these services arrive on time and consistently, parents feel reassured that their children are cared for, and this reassurance often determines whether they enrol or withdraw their children.*" (DEO, June 2026)

This finding indicates that timeliness, not merely the existence of support services, is what parents evaluate when deciding on enrolment, meaning delays can undermine confidence even where services nominally exist. For district education offices, this suggests that monitoring the punctuality of service delivery should be treated as seriously as monitoring its availability. The observation findings supported the views of teachers and key informants that the timely provision of educational support services contributes to improved student enrolment rates (Khan et al., 2019). During the observation visits, schools that demonstrated effective support service delivery were observed to have functional student welfare systems, guidance and counselling arrangements, academic assistance programmes, and mechanisms for addressing students' social and learning needs. These services created a supportive school environment in which students appeared more comfortable, engaged, and motivated to continue their education. This finding aligns with the World Bank (2019), which found that schools with efficient transport, adequate teacher presence, and accessible health services recorded higher enrolment and lower dropout rates, particularly among disadvantaged groups. The finding is further supported by Mbarawii and Amabibi (2024), who established that monitoring, evaluation, and resource allocation made a significant contribution to the stability of student enrolment rates. This is consistent with Decentralisation Theory developed by Rondinelli (1981), which posits that decentralised systems increase administrative efficiency by enabling faster decision-making on service timing and greater awareness of local conditions.

Efficient Administrative Services Improve the School's Reputation and Attract More Students

Concerning the fourth statement, 78 teachers (91.8%) agreed or strongly agreed that efficient

administrative services improve the school's reputation and attract more students, with 55 (64.7%) strongly agreeing and 23 (27.1%) agreeing, the highest strong agreement recorded across all statements. Four teachers (4.7%) disagreed or strongly disagreed, and 3 (3.5%) remained neutral. These findings suggest that teachers recognize the importance of effective school administration in shaping public perceptions and influencing enrolment decisions. Efficient administrative services involve proper management of student records, timely communication with parents, effective management of school activities, transparent decision-making, and a supportive environment for learners and stakeholders. When administrative processes are well managed, schools are perceived as organised, reliable, and responsive to students' needs, thereby enhancing their reputation within the community. A positive school image can increase parents' trust and encourage them to enroll their children in the institution. During interviews, one respondent commented:

> "*This school used to struggle with enrolment because records were poorly kept, and parents faced delays whenever they came to register their children. Since we improved our administrative processes, registration is faster, communication with parents is clearer, and more families are choosing to bring their children here.*" (School Board Chairperson, June 2026)

This finding implies that administrative efficiency functions as a gateway experience that shapes parents' first impressions of a school, meaning inefficiencies at the point of entry can deter enrolment regardless of academic strengths elsewhere. For school boards, this highlights the strategic value of streamlining administrative procedures as a low-cost, high-impact enrolment intervention. The findings confirmed that efficient administrative services significantly improve school reputation and attract more students (Khan, & Jamil, 2024). During the observation visits, schools with effective administrative practices demonstrated organized management systems, proper record-keeping procedures, clear communication mechanisms, and coordinated delivery of school activities. Administrative offices were observed to maintain student admission records, attendance registers, academic documents, and other important school records in an orderly manner, reflecting effective institutional management. This finding is corroborated by Otugo and Okaforcha (2025), who established a strong positive relationship between organisational flexibility and effective service delivery by teachers, and concluded that improved institutional culture enhances service delivery and learning outcomes. Within Decentralization Theory, this finding reflects the assumption that citizen participation and accountability rise

when service delivery structures, including administrative processes, are placed closer to the people they serve (Rondinelli, 1981).Therefore, the results highlight that strong administrative practices are an essential component of service delivery, contributing to the attraction and retention of students in public secondary schools.

Improved Overall Service Delivery Leads to Higher Retention and Enrolment Rates

The fifth and final statement recorded strong agreement: 79 teachers (93.0%) agreed or strongly agreed that improved overall service delivery leads to higher student retention and enrolment rates, with 43 (50.6%) strongly agreeing and 36 (42.4%) agreeing. Only 3 teachers (3.5%) disagreed, none strongly disagreed, and 3 (3.5%) remained neutral. These findings indicate that teachers strongly perceive overall service delivery as a key factor in maintaining students' continued participation in education and attracting new enrolments. Effective overall service delivery involves the combined provision of quality teaching, adequate learning resources, effective administration, student support services, and a safe and supportive school environment. When schools consistently provide satisfactory services, students are more likely to remain in school, while parents are encouraged to recommend and select such schools for their children. Improved service delivery also strengthens students' academic experiences and satisfaction, reduces dropout tendencies, and builds a positive institutional reputation within the community. During interviews, one respondent observed:

> "*Retention and enrolment go hand in hand in this district. When a school delivers reliable services across teaching, support, and administration, students who are already enrolled tend to stay, and their continued presence encourages younger siblings and neighbors to join the school as well.*" (HoS, June 2026)

This finding shows that service delivery generates a compounding effect on enrolment, whereby retained students serve as informal ambassadors who influence future enrolment within their households and communities. For education planners, this suggests that investments in service delivery yield returns beyond immediate enrolment figures, extending into long-term demand generation. This finding is consistent with Ong'enge et al. (2025), who found that financial support and service improvements were effective in reducing barriers to access and sustaining enrolment gains over time. It is also supported by Opalo (2023), who concluded that institutionalizing delivery mechanisms and strengthening local government capacity would help sustain enrolment gains achieved through improved

infrastructure and resource allocation. These findings collectively affirm the central proposition of Decentralization Theory, that empowered local leadership, closer to the community it serves, produces more equitable and responsive service delivery, which in turn secures both the retention and expansion of student enrolment in public secondary schools in Busega District (Rondinelli, 1981).

Contribution of Services Delivery to Students' Enrollment Rate from Open-Ended Questions

The second aspect of the study required teachers to give their own views about the contribution of service delivery in open-ended questions. The findings presented in Table 2 are complemented by qualitative responses obtained from heads of schools, Ward Executive Officers (WEOs), the District Education Officer (DEO), and school board chairpersons.

Table 2.
Teachers Responses on the Contribution of Service Delivery to Students' Enrollment Rate from Open-Ended Questions (n=85)

Items	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Effective school-community relationships	39	45.9
Availability of adequate learning facilities and infrastructure	24	28.2
A safe and supportive school environment contributes	22	25.9

Source: Field Data (2026)

Table 2 shows that teachers identified effective school-community relationships as the most frequently mentioned factor contributing to student enrolment, followed by the availability of adequate learning facilities and infrastructure, and a safe and supportive school environment. These open-ended responses reinforce and enrich the Likert-scale findings in Table 4.3, revealing that enrolment is shaped not only by classroom-level academic service delivery but also by the school's relational, physical, and psychosocial environment.

Effective School-Community Relationships

Of the 85 teachers who responded to the open-ended question, 39 (45.9%) identified effective school-community relationships as a key contributor to students' enrolment, making it the most commonly cited factor. Teachers explained that schools which actively engage parents, village leaders, and community members in school affairs tend to enjoy stronger local support, greater parental cooperation, and higher willingness among households to enroll and retain their children. Effective school-community relationships were described as involving regular communication between school administration and parents, participation of community members

in school committees, and joint efforts to address challenges affecting learners. During interviews, one respondent observed:

> *"When the school leadership works closely with parents and village leaders, trust builds up quickly. Parents feel they are part of the school, not just spectators, and this connection makes them more willing to bring their children here rather than schools where no one from the community is ever consulted."* (HoS, June 2026)

This finding suggests that school-community relationships serve as a foundation for social trust on which enrolment decisions are built, particularly in rural settings where formal information about school quality is limited. Households may rely heavily on their relationships and interactions with the school when assessing the quality and responsiveness of educational services. For school leadership, this underscores the value of sustained community engagement as a deliberate enrolment strategy rather than an incidental benefit of good administration. The observation findings supported this view, as schools with visible community involvement, such as active school committees, parent meetings, and joint community-school initiatives, demonstrated stronger cooperation between staff and local leaders during the observation visits. This finding is consistent with Fargas Malet and Bagley (2024), who found that school-community practices in rural schools can strengthen relationships, a sense of belonging, community identity, and shared spaces between schools and the communities they serve. Similarly, Ngobeni (2024) established that sustainable school-community partnerships can provide valuable support and resources to address the needs of learners and staff, particularly in under-resourced secondary schools. Therefore, sustained engagement with parents, community leaders, and local organisations can strengthen trust, improve the responsiveness of school services, and create a more supportive environment for student enrolment and participation.

Availability of Adequate Learning Facilities and Infrastructure

Regarding the second most cited factor, 24 teachers (28.2%) mentioned the availability of adequate learning facilities and infrastructure as contributing to student enrolment. Teachers explained that classrooms, desks, laboratories, libraries, and sanitation facilities directly influence parents' perceptions of a school's capacity to provide a conducive learning environment. Schools with sufficient infrastructure were seen as better equipped to accommodate more students comfortably. At the same time, inadequate facilities were viewed as a deterrent to enrolment, particularly for parents seeking a stable and dignified learning environment for

their children. During interviews, one respondent noted:

> "*Parents ask about classrooms and toilets before they ask about anything else. If a school has enough desks and clean facilities for both boys and girls, parents see it as a place that respects their children, and this encourages them to enrol here instead of schools that are overcrowded or poorly maintained.*" (WEO, June 2026)

This finding indicates that infrastructure serves as a tangible and easily observable indicator of institutional quality that parents may use to evaluate schools even before assessing academic performance. For district planners, this reinforces the continued relevance of infrastructure investment as a complementary strategy for improving educational service delivery and attracting students. The observation findings confirmed that schools with adequate classrooms, furniture, and sanitation facilities appeared more organised and better able to accommodate growing student populations than schools with visible infrastructural deficits. This finding is consistent with Nasuna et al. (2022), who established that physical and service infrastructure had a positive and significant relationship with pupil enrolment, emphasizing the importance of improving school facilities to make schools more attractive to families. Similarly, Asif et al. (2021) found that the presence of sanitation facilities in schools was associated with higher enrolment, demonstrating that specific aspects of school infrastructure can influence participation in education. Therefore, adequate classrooms, furniture, sanitation facilities, and other essential infrastructure can strengthen the attractiveness and capacity of public schools to accommodate and retain increasing numbers of students.

A Safe and Supportive School Environment

Concerning the third factor, 22 teachers (25.9%) identified a safe and supportive school environment as contributing to student enrolment. Teachers explained that schools free from bullying, corporal punishment abuse, and safety hazards, and which provide emotional and social support to learners, are more attractive to parents, particularly those with younger or vulnerable children. A supportive environment was described as one in which teachers are approachable, discipline is fair and consistent, and students feel secure both in classrooms and on school grounds. During interviews, one respondent commented:

> "*Parents want to know their children are safe from the moment they leave home until they return. A school known for protecting its students and treating them with care earns a good name quickly, and that reputation brings in more families, especially for young girls whose parents worry*

about their safety." (DEO, June 2026)

This finding implies that perceived safety is an important condition for enrolment, particularly among parents of vulnerable learners, because even strong academic or infrastructural services may fail to attract students when safety concerns persist. For school boards and administrators, this highlights the importance of incorporating child protection, guidance and counselling, discipline management, and welfare mechanisms into broader service delivery strategies. This finding is consistent with Owan et al. (2024), who found that parents were more satisfied with public schools that provided adequate safety, supportive learning environments, and appropriate care for learners, suggesting that school safety is an important component of parents' perceptions of school quality. Similarly, Kibriya et al. (2020) found that unsafe school environments negatively affected students' learning outcomes in Tanzania, demonstrating the importance of creating safe and supportive learning environments for effective educational participation. Therefore, strengthening school safety measures can improve parental confidence, enhance students' sense of security, and create conditions that support enrolment and continued participation in secondary education.

CONCLUSION

The study concluded that service delivery made a substantial contribution to student enrolment rates in public secondary schools in Busega District. The findings showed that effective academic service delivery, quality teaching and learning, timely educational support services, efficient administrative services, and improved overall service delivery positively influenced parents' enrolment decisions, student retention, and the attractiveness of schools. In addition, effective school-community relationships, adequate learning facilities and infrastructure, and a safe and supportive school environment were identified as important factors contributing to enrolment. Overall, the findings demonstrated that responsive and quality service delivery strengthened community confidence, improved school reputation, and encouraged both enrolment and retention of students in public secondary schools.

Recommendations

The study recommends that Busega District Council and public secondary school authorities strengthen the quality and timeliness of educational service delivery by improving teaching and learning practices, providing educational support services promptly, strengthening administrative efficiency, and ensuring effective student welfare and guidance systems.

Schools should also strengthen relationships with parents, village leaders, and other community stakeholders through regular communication and participation in school activities. Furthermore, the district authorities should prioritize the provision and maintenance of adequate classrooms, furniture, sanitation facilities, and other essential learning infrastructure while ensuring safe and supportive school environments. These measures would strengthen parental confidence, improve school reputation, support student retention, and contribute to increased enrolment rates in public secondary schools.

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