

# Learner Characteristics and the Quality of Secondary Education at Ordinary Level: A Case of Elgon Zone, Eastern Uganda

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## Abstract

This study examined the influence of learner characteristics on the quality of secondary education at Ordinary Level in Elgon Zone, Eastern Uganda. A cross-sectional survey design was employed to collect data from students and teachers in selected secondary schools. Data were collected using structured questionnaires and analyzed using descriptive statistics and chi-square tests. Findings revealed that learner characteristics such as motivation, prior academic ability, and socio-economic background significantly influence the quality of education. The study concludes that enhancing learner-related factors improves educational outcomes. It recommends targeted interventions aimed at strengthening learner support systems and reducing socio-economic disparities.

**Keywords:** Learner characteristics, quality of education, secondary education, Uganda, academic performance

## 1. Introduction

Quality education is widely recognized as a fundamental driver of socio-economic development. In Uganda, efforts to improve the quality of secondary education have been prioritized through curriculum reforms and assessment frameworks. However, disparities in educational outcomes persist, particularly at the Ordinary Level.

Learner characteristics play a critical role in determining how students interact with instructional processes. These characteristics include cognitive abilities, motivation, attitudes, and socio-economic background. While institutional factors such as teacher quality and infrastructure have been extensively studied, less attention has been given to the role of learner-specific factors in influencing educational quality.

## Problem Statement

Despite increased investment in education, variations in student performance continue to be observed across schools. This suggests that factors beyond institutional inputs may be influencing outcomes. The extent to which learner characteristics contribute to the quality of education remains insufficiently understood.

## Objective

To examine the influence of learner characteristics on the quality of secondary education at Ordinary Level.

## Research Question

How do learner characteristics influence the quality of secondary education at Ordinary Level?

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Theoretical Review

This study is guided by behaviorist and constructivist theories. Behaviorism emphasizes observable changes in learner behavior as a result of stimuli, while constructivism focuses on learners actively constructing knowledge based on prior experiences. Together, these theories highlight the importance of learner attributes in shaping educational outcomes.

### 2.2 Conceptual Review

Learner characteristics refer to the inherent and acquired attributes that influence learning. These include cognitive ability, motivation, attitudes, and socio-economic background.

Quality of education is defined as the degree of excellence produced by an education system, reflected in learners' academic achievement and overall development.

### 2.3 Empirical Review

Previous studies indicate that motivated learners tend to perform better academically. Socio-economic background has been found to influence access to learning materials and support systems. Additionally, prior academic achievement is a strong predictor of future performance.

### 2.4 Research Gap

Most existing studies emphasize institutional determinants of educational quality, with limited focus on learner-specific variables, particularly in the Ugandan context.

## 3. Conceptual Framework

The study conceptualizes learner characteristics as the independent variable and quality of education as the dependent variable. Learner characteristics include motivation, cognitive ability, and socio-economic background.

## 4. Methodology

### Research Design

A cross-sectional survey design was adopted.

### Study Area

The study was conducted in Elgon Zone, Eastern Uganda.

### Population and Sample

The study targeted students and teachers in secondary schools. A representative sample was selected using stratified and random sampling techniques.

### Data Collection

Data were collected using structured questionnaires.

### Validity and Reliability

Validity was ensured through expert review, while reliability was tested using pilot studies.

### Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and chi-square tests with the help of SPSS.

## 5. Results

The findings indicated that learner motivation significantly influences academic performance. Students from higher socio-economic backgrounds demonstrated better access to learning resources. Chi-square analysis confirmed a significant relationship between learner characteristics and quality of education.

## 6. Discussion

The findings suggest that learner characteristics are critical determinants of educational quality. Motivation enhances engagement and academic achievement. Socio-economic background affects resource availability, while prior ability shapes learning outcomes. These findings are consistent with existing literature but highlight regional disparities.

## 7. Conclusion

Learner characteristics significantly influence the quality of secondary education. Addressing these factors is essential for improving educational outcomes.

## 8. Recommendations

- Schools should strengthen guidance and counseling services.
- Government should address socio-economic inequalities.
- Teachers should adopt learner-centered teaching approaches.

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