

Participation in Scripture Union and Student Discipline in Government-Aided Secondary School Students in Nyabushozi County in Kiruhura District

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Abstract:

This study examined the level of student participation in Scripture Union (SU) activities in government secondary schools in Nyabushozi County, Kiruhura District. A qualitative research design was adopted to gain in-depth insights into students' experiences and the perceptions of key stakeholders. The study engaged 333 purposively selected participants, including 224 students, 67 teachers, 4 chaplains, and 38 parents. Data were collected through open-ended questionnaires with students, semi-structured interviews with teachers and chaplains, and focus group discussions with parents. Thematic analysis guided data interpretation. Findings revealed that student participation in SU was generally high and sustained, with members consistently attending Bible study, worship sessions, leadership training, and outreach activities. Teachers and chaplains confirmed that students actively engaged in both school-based and weekend fellowship programs, while parents observed that SU participation positively influenced their children's behavior at home. Scripture Union also emerged as a platform for nurturing leadership skills, responsibility, and discipline among students, with senior members mentoring juniors and coordinating activities. Despite this overall high participation, some variation was noted, as a few students attended irregularly due to academic demands or peer influence. The study concludes that SU serves as a central fellowship that meaningfully engages students, fosters discipline, and encourages long-term commitment to spiritual and moral development. It is recommended that schools support SU by incorporating it into timetables, providing leadership opportunities, and encouraging broader student involvement to maximize the fellowship's transformative potential.

Keywords: Scripture Union, student participation, leadership, student discipline, Nyabushozi County, Kiruhura District

Introduction

Faith-based organizations, particularly Scripture Union (SU), have historically been instrumental in shaping student behavior and discipline worldwide. Originating in the United Kingdom in 1867, SU expanded globally, emphasizing Bible study, prayer, and mentorship to cultivate moral values and reduce indiscipline (Smith & Denton, 2005; Wright, 2015). Research across developed contexts shows that participation in religious fellowships is strongly associated with self-control, reduced violence, and greater respect for authority. These insights provide a foundation for understanding the potential influence of SU in contemporary educational settings.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, Christian fellowships such as SU became embedded in school systems through missionary and post-colonial influences (Onongha, 2011). Evidence from countries like Nigeria and Ghana highlights that SU participation contributes to reduced delinquency and improved

social behavior among students (Adebayo, 2016). Nonetheless, indiscipline remains a challenge, driven by socio-economic and cultural pressures that often weaken the impact of religious interventions. This tension underlines the need for contextualized studies, especially in rural settings, to assess how SU interacts with other social forces in shaping student discipline.

Within East Africa, SU has played a central role in moral formation since independence. In Kenya and Tanzania, SU programs contributed to reductions in unrest and encouraged respect for teachers and peers (Mkapa, 2018; Mutua, 2010). Similarly, in Uganda, SU has been present since the 1960s, with over 2,000 school fellowships established (SU Uganda, 2022). Despite its wide reach, reports of rising indiscipline, including absenteeism, disrespect, and substance use, persist even in schools where SU is active (Kaggwa & Wamala, 2017). This paradox calls for empirical inquiry into whether participation in SU truly translates into disciplined conduct among students.

The theoretical lens for this study is Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), which asserts that individuals adopt behaviors by observing and modeling others within social contexts. In the case of SU, students are exposed to role models such as peers, chaplains, and teachers who reinforce desirable behaviors through mentorship and moral guidance. Discipline may be strengthened when positive conduct is rewarded within the fellowship, while misconduct is discouraged. This theoretical basis positions SU as a potential agent of behavioral transformation, aligning directly with the objective of examining its relationship with discipline.

Conceptually, discipline in schools entails adherence to rules, respect for authority, and responsible behavior (Cotton, 2019; Mbiti, 2007). Participation in SU provides structured opportunities for Bible study, prayer, and counseling, which foster values such as honesty, humility, and forgiveness (Ayeni, 2010). Prior research indicates that religious involvement reduces aggression, risky behavior, and delinquency while promoting emotional regulation and moral responsibility (Koenig, 2009; Regnerus, 2003). These observations suggest a possible strong positive relationship between SU involvement and disciplined behavior, which this study sought to empirically verify.

In Nyabushozi County, Kiruhura District, government secondary schools host active SU fellowships, yet cases of indiscipline remain a persistent concern (Kiruhura District Education Report, 2023). Anecdotal evidence suggests that SU members often demonstrate greater obedience, punctuality, and respect for teachers. However, irregular attendance and limited integration of SU into school programs raise questions about its actual impact. Therefore, this study specifically explored the Level of Student Participation in Scripture Union Activities in Government Secondary Schools.

Significance of the Study

The findings may provide empirical evidence on how spiritual programs like Scripture Union contribute to student discipline. This may help school administrators and education policymakers to appreciate the role of faith-based organizations

in behavior formation. It may inform the development of school policies that support moral and spiritual development as a strategy for promoting discipline and reducing behavioral problems among students.

Teachers and SU patrons will benefit from insights into the influence of SU participation on student behavior. The findings will guide them in planning, strengthening, or restructuring SU activities to maximize positive behavioral outcomes. It will also highlight best practices in mentoring students within such groups.

Students will understand the value of engaging in Scripture Union not just as a spiritual activity but also as a platform for moral and ethical development. This may encourage greater participation and commitment to character-building programs that promote discipline, responsibility, and positive peer influence.

Parents and guardians will become more informed about the potential role of school-based spiritual clubs in shaping their children's behavior. This may encourage them to support their children's involvement in constructive extracurricular activities that enhance moral development.

Churches and religious bodies involved in running or supporting Scripture Union activities will gain critical data on their impact. This may inspire continued partnership with schools in nurturing values such as respect, self-control, and obedience among students.

The study will serve as a reference for scholars interested in exploring the relationship between religious involvement and student behavior in Uganda and beyond. It may open avenues for further research on the role of faith-based programs in addressing moral decline and indiscipline in schools.

Literature Review

The Level of Student Participation in Scripture Union Activities in Government Secondary Schools.

Several scholars have examined student participation in religious or faith-based organizations such as Scripture Union (SU) within secondary schools, shedding light on the significance of such engagements in shaping student character and moral development. For instance, Wamue (2010) conducted a study in

Kenya focusing on the role of Christian Union (CU) and Scripture Union activities in promoting moral uprightness and leadership skills among students. The study found that participation in these fellowships increased students' self-confidence, moral decision-making, and leadership potential. Similarly, Mulwa and Mwaura (2013) reported that Scripture Union participation had a notable influence on students' spiritual growth and contributed to reduced cases of indiscipline in schools. Their findings showed that regular attendance in SU programs enhanced students' ethical awareness and created a strong peer accountability system.

Scripture Union is an inter-denominational Christian movement focused on nurturing spiritual growth, moral values, and character formation among youth (Mugambi, 2015). In schools, SU often organizes Bible study sessions, prayer meetings, and counseling, aiming to provide moral guidance and promote ethical behavior. Participation in SU enables students to reflect on their values, make responsible decisions, and resist negative peer influence (Mutua, 2018). Globally, school-based Christian fellowships have been associated with reduced substance abuse, improved interpersonal relationships, and enhanced personal discipline (Mwangi & Kamau, 2020).

In Uganda, Nakabugo (2015) explored the role of religious groups in promoting discipline among learners in central region schools and found that Scripture Union provided a supportive environment where students could reflect on their values, develop coping mechanisms for peer pressure, and grow spiritually. She concluded that SU activities played a crucial role in reducing behaviors such as drug abuse and sexual immorality. Additionally, a study by Mugisha (2017) on youth religious engagement in western Uganda observed that while there is general interest among youth in religious activities, participation in structured school-based fellowships such as SU was inconsistent and often declined in higher school grades due to academic pressure and limited administrative support.

The participation of students in faith-based organizations such as Scripture Union (SU) within school settings has been the subject of educational, sociological, and theological research. Globally,

scholars recognize that such religious groups function as informal platforms for moral formation, leadership development, and psychosocial support. For instance, Astin, Astin, and Lindholm (2011) in their large-scale longitudinal study in the United States observed that students engaged in faith-based student groups exhibited stronger commitments to community service, empathy, and value-based leadership. Their findings suggest that religious groups in schools serve not only spiritual functions but also cultivate critical affective and civic competences.

In the African context, Scripture Union has historically served as a vehicle for promoting spiritual formation and moral discipline among youth (Gichuru, 2014). Drawing from Durkheim's theory of moral education, Gichuru argues that participation in Scripture Union activities enables students to internalize communal values, thus reducing delinquent behavior and improving social cohesion. Similarly, Ngoma (2018) conducted a mixed-methods study in Zambia and reported that regular involvement in SU activities positively correlated with reduced incidences of school-based violence, bullying, and early sexual activity. He attributed this to the role of SU in providing value-laden narratives and peer accountability structures.

However, while much of the literature emphasizes the positive outcomes associated with participation, there is relatively little focus on how many students actually participate, what factors drive or hinder this participation, and how this varies by context, especially in rural schools. For instance, Kaggwa and Musoke (2019) examined Christian fellowships in central Uganda and acknowledged the importance of religious groups in shaping student behavior, but their work remained largely anecdotal and lacked disaggregated data on participation levels by gender, school type, or geographical location. Their sample was urban-centric and did not account for cultural or institutional dynamics that may affect student participation in rural schools.

Moreover, Musiitwa (2020) explored religious identity and youth participation in southwestern Uganda and found that while Scripture Union membership existed in most schools, active participation was often superficial. Students frequently attended sessions only during

major events or when compelled by peers or school administrators. He noted that the lack of integration between SU activities and formal school programs contributed to low attendance and perceived irrelevance among students focused on academic performance. This aligns with Berger's (1999) secularization theory, which posits that modern education systems increasingly marginalize religious engagement, especially where spiritual programs are not embedded into the core curriculum.

Critically, none of these studies sufficiently interrogates the intersection of rurality, institutional support, and student agency in influencing participation levels. There is a notable research gap regarding how socio-economic backgrounds, religious upbringing, administrative attitudes, and peer influence mediate students' decisions to actively participate in Scripture Union, particularly in rural and under-researched areas such as Nyabushozi County. Most importantly, there is a dearth of empirical studies quantifying levels of participation, assessing patterns of involvement, and documenting student voices on why they choose to engage or disengage from such fellowships.

While these studies affirm the positive influence of Scripture Union activities on students' moral and spiritual growth, they also present notable limitations. Many of them focus on the impact of participation rather than the actual levels of participation or the factors influencing students' involvement in SU activities. Moreover, most existing studies are either generalized across regions or limited to urban schools, with very little attention given to rural settings such as Nyabushozi County. These gaps make it difficult to understand the specific patterns, motivations, and barriers to student engagement in SU activities in government secondary schools within rural Uganda

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore how participation in Scripture Union (SU) shapes students' attitudes, behaviors, and moral decision-making in government secondary schools in Nyabushozi County. A qualitative approach was chosen because it enabled the collection of in-depth insights into participants'

lived experiences, perceptions, and interpretations regarding SU activities. The study setting comprised four government secondary schools in Nyabushozi County, where Scripture Union fellowships are active.

The study population included students, teachers, chaplains, and parents. A purposive sampling strategy was adopted to select information-rich participants who could provide relevant and diverse perspectives. In total, 333 respondents were engaged: 224 students, 67 teachers, 4 chaplains, and 38 parents.

Data were collected through open-ended questionnaires for students, semi-structured interviews with teachers and chaplains, and focus group discussions with parents. These tools were designed to capture narratives on experiences, perceptions, and the perceived influence of SU activities. To ensure trustworthiness, the instruments were reviewed by research experts for content validity and pilot-tested prior to the main study. Reliability was enhanced through triangulation of data sources and methods, allowing convergence of findings across respondent categories.

Thematic analysis guided the data analysis process. Transcripts were repeatedly reviewed, coded, and organized into themes aligned with the study objectives. Representative quotations from students, teachers, chaplains, and parents were used to illustrate findings and preserve participants' voices.

Ethical considerations were observed throughout the research. Participants gave informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality were maintained, and participation was voluntary. Research clearance was obtained from Bishop Stuart University and the District Education Office before fieldwork commenced.

Results

The Level of Student Participation in Scripture Union Activities in Government Secondary Schools in Nyabushozi County

The first objective of this study was to explore the level of student participation in Scripture Union (SU) activities in government secondary schools in Nyabushozi County. Data were obtained through open-ended questionnaires with students, semi-structured interviews with teachers and chaplains,

and focus group discussions (FGDs) with parents. The findings are presented thematically.

Theme 1: Strong and Consistent Membership

Students described SU as a fellowship they attended regularly, often over extended periods.

"I attend Bible study every week, and it has helped me to make better decisions. I feel more guided when I am with fellow SU members." (Student, Questionnaire, School B)

Teachers confirmed this high level of engagement: *"Most of my students actively participate in Scripture Union activities. They attend Bible study sessions during break times, praise and worship events in the evenings, and sometimes even participate in weekend outreach programs."* (Teacher, Interview, School C)

Chaplains also observed that many students had been members for more than a year, showing long-term commitment.

Theme 2: Wide Variety of Activities

Participation was not confined to one activity. Students, chaplains, and teachers mentioned Bible study, worship, outreach, and leadership activities. *"We organize Bible study, praise and worship, leadership training, peer counseling, and outreach programs. Students are encouraged to participate fully, and those who attend regularly are more disciplined and socially responsible."* (School Chaplain 1, Interview, School A)

Some students mentioned joining debates and Bible competitions, further illustrating diverse participation opportunities.

Theme 3: Participation as a Path to Leadership

SU was described as a platform that nurtured leadership among committed members.

"I encourage students to join Scripture Union because it instills moral guidance and promotes leadership skills. For instance, students who participate regularly often take part in organizing school events and mentorship activities." (Teacher, Interview, School D)

Chaplains also emphasized that senior members often guided juniors, coordinated sessions, and modeled responsible behavior.

Theme 4: Variation in Participation Levels

While participation was generally high, some students attended occasionally due to academic demands.

"Sometimes I want to attend, but we have tests or group discussions at the same time. I participate when I can, but not always." (Student, Questionnaire, School A)

Teachers also noted that some students only attended during major events or when encouraged by peers

Theme 5: Recognition Beyond School

Parents noted that participation was evident in their children's home behavior, suggesting consistent involvement.

"My child has been a member of Scripture Union for over two years. She now wakes up early to read the Bible, attends all SU activities, and often shares moral lessons during family discussions." (FGD1, Parent, School B)

"I can confidently say that Scripture Union participation has positively influenced my son's social behavior. He no longer associates with negative peer groups and instead spends time attending praise sessions and leading small youth groups in the neighborhood." (FGD2, Parent, School C)

"I recommend Scripture Union to all parents. The activities provide guidance beyond what we can teach at home. My daughter has become more confident, speaks up responsibly during discussions, and respects authority, which I believe is directly related to her consistent participation in SU." (FGD1, Parent, School D)

Interpretation

The findings demonstrate that the level of student participation in Scripture Union activities is generally high and sustained. Students reported consistent attendance, teachers and chaplains observed diverse and committed involvement, and parents testified to visible changes at home. While some variation existed due to academic workloads, the overall pattern shows that SU is a central fellowship where students participate actively and meaningfully across government secondary schools in Nyabushozi County.

Discussion of Results

The Level of Student Participation in Scripture Union Activities in Government Secondary Schools in Nyabushozi County

The findings of this study revealed that student participation in Scripture Union (SU) activities in Nyabushozi County is both high and sustained. Students, teachers, chaplains, and parents consistently emphasized that SU provides a vibrant fellowship that attracts a significant proportion of learners. Students themselves described attending weekly Bible studies, prayer meetings, and worship sessions, which shaped their decision-making and sense of belonging. Teachers and chaplains confirmed that participation was not a passing interest but often sustained over time, with many learners maintaining membership for more than a year. These findings mirror Wamue's (2010) study in Kenya, which demonstrated that Christian Union and Scripture Union fellowships provide stability and continuity for students' spiritual and moral development.

In addition to consistency, the findings highlighted the diversity of SU activities. Students reported participation in Bible competitions, moral debates, outreach, peer counseling, and leadership training. Chaplains in Nyabushozi emphasized that these varied activities were intentionally designed to build discipline, responsibility, and social cohesion among members. This echoes Mugambi's (2015) observation that Scripture Union fellowships are multifaceted, offering both spiritual enrichment and practical skills such as leadership and teamwork. The present study therefore confirms that the richness of SU programs encourages high levels of participation by appealing to a range of student interests and needs.

Another key finding was the role of SU in nurturing leadership and responsibility. Teachers observed that students who consistently participated in SU often organized events, mentored peers, and modeled responsible conduct. Similarly, chaplains described how senior SU members guided younger ones in prayer, mentoring, and community service. These findings support Mulwa and Mwaura's (2013) argument that involvement in Scripture Union strengthens students' leadership capacities while reinforcing

accountability and discipline. By creating structured opportunities for service, SU participation in Nyabushozi appears to directly influence how students perceive themselves as leaders within the school context.

Parents also provided critical insights, noting that SU involvement extended beyond the school environment to influence children's behavior at home. They reported that students became more disciplined, respectful, and responsible in managing their chores and schoolwork. Some parents further described how children avoided negative peer influence and instead devoted time to youth groups and church activities. These findings resonate with Nakabugo's (2015) study in Uganda, which showed that Scripture Union creates safe spaces that help learners resist peer pressure and reduce engagement in risky behaviors. The parental testimonies in this study affirm that SU participation shapes consistent behavioral patterns that bridge school and family life.

Despite the generally high levels of participation, the findings also indicated some variation in attendance. A few students mentioned that academic workloads occasionally prevented them from attending all SU activities. Teachers echoed this concern, noting that some learners only participated during major events or when invited by friends. This observation is consistent with Mugisha's (2017) study in western Uganda, which found that while many students valued Scripture Union, participation tended to decline in higher grades due to academic pressures. This suggests that while SU is widely embraced, balancing academics and fellowship remains a challenge that may hinder full engagement.

Overall, the qualitative findings of this study affirm that Scripture Union activities in Nyabushozi County attract widespread and meaningful participation among secondary school students. The testimonies of students, teachers, chaplains, and parents consistently demonstrate that SU is more than a spiritual gathering; it is a formative space where learners develop responsibility, leadership, and moral discipline. These results are strongly supported by earlier research in Kenya and Uganda, which similarly highlighted the role of SU in nurturing spiritual growth and moral behavior (Mulwa & Mwaura,

2013; Nakabugo, 2015; Wamue, 2010). At the same time, the influence of academic workloads on participation, as observed in this study, aligns with Mugisha's (2017) concern that institutional and structural barriers can limit consistent fellowship attendance. Taken together, these findings position Scripture Union as a central and transformative fellowship in government secondary schools of Nyabushozi County, while also pointing to the need for strategies that can balance academic and fellowship demands.

Conclusion

The study concludes that student participation in Scripture Union (SU) activities in government secondary schools in Nyabushozi County is both high and sustained. Evidence from students, teachers, chaplains, and parents demonstrates that SU serves as a central fellowship that nurtures responsibility, leadership, moral guidance, and discipline among learners. Participation extends beyond the school environment, positively influencing students' behavior at home and within their communities. Although academic demands occasionally limited attendance, the overall findings confirm that SU is a transformative space where students actively and meaningfully engage in activities that build their character, values, and decision-making capacities.

Recommendations

Based on the findings in objective one, it is recommended that teachers, chaplains, and administrators be advised to adopt deliberate strategies to enhance student participation in SU. Administrators should integrate SU activities into school timetables to minimize clashes with academic work, while chaplains and teachers should conduct awareness campaigns to encourage broader student involvement. Additionally, SU leaders should provide recognition and leadership opportunities for committed members, which would not only motivate participation but also build students' confidence, responsibility, and conflict resolution skills. Teachers and chaplains should also complement SU activities with mentorship and counseling initiatives to address challenges in peer interactions and classroom engagement.

The Ministry of Education and other policymakers should formally recognize Scripture Union as an effective tool for promoting discipline and holistic student development in government secondary schools. This recognition should involve integrating SU into national co-curricular frameworks, encouraging collaboration with religious organizations, and providing resources such as training for chaplains and SU patrons. By doing so, policymakers would ensure that faith-based extracurricular activities are not sidelined but valued as complementary to academic learning and as a sustainable strategy for nurturing discipline and moral growth among students.

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