



An Investigation into The Causes of Absenteeism Among Primary School Learners in Lufwanyama District

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated the causes of absenteeism among primary school learners in the Lufwanyama District and measures that could be put in place to curb the vice. The data collected through the questionnaires were analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The study also established the causes of school absenteeism among primary school learners and the study revealed that 13 (22.8%) said long distance from home to school makes them miss school, 17 (29.8%) said taking care of sibling keeps them away from school, 11 (19.3%) and 16 (28.1%) said lack of interest in school activities. Also, the result of the finding identified a lack of interest in school activities. Participants were asked about the effects of school absenteeism on primary school learners and the study revealed that 28 (49%) said poor academic performance, 14 (24.6%) said to drop out of school and unemployment, 10 (17.5%) said anti-social behaviour and 4 (7%) said Anxiety, depression, and phobia aggression and cruelty. Participants were asked about the strategies the school administrator should put in place to combat absenteeism and the findings revealed that the school needs to provide a conducive environment for teaching and learning. The schools are supposed to buy desks; chalk and other teaching and learning materials to enable the pupils to learn the required materials. In schools where infrastructure is dilapidated, the school administration in partnership with the community should build new classrooms.

Keywords: Absenteeism, Participants, Administrator, Learners and Teaching

1. Introduction

Regular school attendance has been described as the prerequisite for acquiring the skills and knowledge required for academic success. It enables a child to learn new information that will help him develop the desired skills and potential. But it may be difficult for a child to achieve these if he is continuously absent from school. School absenteeism is defined as excused or unexcused absences from school by a child (Reid, 2005).

Kearny (2008) puts it to be the persistent, habitual, unexpected, and unexplained absences from the school of a child of compulsory school age. It then implies that absenteeism occurs when a child absences himself from school for whatever reason or when constant learning is interrupted. School absenteeism is a serious problem in public schools which takes the form of truancy, school refusal, and school withdrawal. Truancy is the absence of a child from school without the knowledge or permission of parents (Cunningham, 2005). The child leaves home and pretends to be going to school but he turns away and gets himself involved in other activities.

Truancy is stated by Ihedioha (2003) as a conduct disorder and school disruptive behaviour problem which is an indication of self-assertion or rebellion traceable to the developmental and psychological problems associated with the very young. School refusal as stated by Mcshane, Walter & Rey (2001) is a situation where a child refuses to attend school even in the face of persuasion and punitive measures from parents and school authorities. The child stays at home with the knowledge of his parents and school administration. This form of absenteeism is always associated with anxiety, phobia, depression, and other psychosocial disorder.

1.1 Background

School withdrawal as pointed out by Loraine & Austin (2010) occurs when a child is regularly absent from school because the parents intentionally keep him away from school for their needs and priorities. School absenteeism varies with the level of education. The focus of this study is on primary school, the sub-variables of research related to truancy, school refusal, or other studies on the problem of pupils or students missing school for whatever reason will be examined.

Some researchers have identified school absenteeism as a complex and heterogeneous problem that can be influenced by many factors (Kearny, 2008; Kim & Streeter, 2006; & Lauchlan, 2003). Romero (2008) identified negative school environment, anxiety, personality traits, phobia, race/ethnicity and

learning disabilities, parental attitude, parental involvement, and family poverty as causal factors for school absenteeism. Poor teaching skills, interpersonal conflict, dissatisfaction with school, school disciplinary practices, bullying, and teacher's hostile attitude to Antiwi-Danson & Edet (2011) were the reasons why students miss school. Ubogu (2004); Estey (2005); Wither (2004) observed that sicknesses and diseases were the causes of absenteeism.

Maliki (2013) stressed that absenteeism and dropout can be caused by difficult terrain and long distances from school which tempt or force children to withdraw prematurely from school. Absenteeism as some studies have shown disturbs the dynamic teaching-learning environment. Chronic absenteeism jeopardizes the teaching-learning environment by creating a dead and tiresome unpleasant classroom environment that makes students who come to class uncomfortable and irritable. Absenteeism can be associated with poor academic performance and dropout of school. Pupils who are chronically absent from school are more likely to struggle academically and have a greater chance of becoming dropouts (Attwood, 2006).

In other words, those that missed classes regardless of the reason, lose the opportunity to gain skills and knowledge to be academically successful and subsequently lose long-run benefits. Dropouts are more unlikely than their peers who finished school to gain employment rather; they live in poverty, receive public assistance in prison or police custody, are in poor health, are divorced, and untimely single parenthood with children who are likely to be dropouts (Shadreck, 2013). Dropouts are also linked to depression and anxiety, and most times resort to the use of the substance and other problematic and risky behaviours (Kearny, 2011). It can also fail to fulfill major responsibilities in work and school (Abraham, 2004).

A study by Fredrickson (2013) posited that one of the significant costs associated with absenteeism is a violation of social norms and the right of others, criminal activity, and display of various anti-social behaviour. Achalu (2003) identified the use of drugs as the biggest cause of dropout. Given that absenteeism has been associated with poor academic performance (Robert, 2007), Chen &

Lin (2008) suggested that school attendance should be closely monitored, encouraged, and enforced. In their comment, Armstrong & Pearson (2010) argued that regular attendance at school does not guarantee academic success because many may show up in school without actual participation in learning activities. They went further to advise that teachers and pupils must be actively engaged in class attendance to provide the most academic value. Therefore, care must be taken to address absenteeism at the primary education level to ensure that pupils enjoy hitch free teaching and learning processes

1.2. Literature review

The literature review also improves the methodology, as it tells the researcher if others have used procedures and methods similar to the ones being proposed, meaning which procedures and methods have worked well for them, and what problems they have faced. The sources of information in the literature review included journal articles both open and closed access, reports from education organisations, books, and recommended readings from the supervisor among others. Therefore, the literature review was guided from the themes developed from objectives

Causes of school absenteeism among learners

Bradley, R. (2015) has defined absenteeism as when any student gets away his/herself from school maximum 20 days or more than 20 days in known as absenteeism. Dentech, W. O. et al., (2011) explain absenteeism as when someone get absent from school due to the disturbing reason is known as absenteeism. Ocake, G. et al. (2017) explore in their studies that male pupil's absentee rate is high as compare to the girls because they have high responsibility and pressure from their family sides. Girls are more focused towards their studies than boys, although girls also pressurize for homework, but they have patience and they control everything beautifully and intelligently. The study of the Masogo, G. D., (2015) illustrate that absenteeism is not the gender thought. Both girls and boys have different causes of absentee according to their age and nature. Both sense of experience life is change and their causes of absentee are almost change from each other due to change responsibly and nature.

There are a range of factors that cause may cause absenteeism among learners and family problems could be among those. According to Doepke and Zilibotti (2019), these could be death of a parent, violence, divorce in a home and caring for home or someone. These factors were observed in a study in Turkey which revealed that such factors really affect them.

Habbozya (2018) reveals that relationships with learners result into child absenteeism in schools. In this case, factors like lack of child care, oversleeping, transportation and working parents caused absenteeism of learners from school. These factors mostly affected learners at the point of preparing and leaving for school where other people around to stimulate them go to school.

Lubeya (2012) reflects that economic impossibilities affect learners' presence in schools which has to deal with issues such as finances, sibling care, difficult providing school supplies, and work at early age and failure to pay school fees among other factors. In this instance, it becomes really hard for the learners to go to school because they cannot meet the needs starting from basic needs in a home and then those that are needed for them to be in school.

Katanga (2016) explains that bad weather is also another problem that may cause learners to be absent from schools. This could be when there is a storm overnight until the time for going to school. To some extent, there may be floods which may eventually cause the environment to be very bad such that it does not favour the people to move to any place.

According to WHO, UNESCO, and UNICEF (2020), Coronavirus- Covid-19 is another factor that has cut across so many areas and caused tense effects. With covid-19 it is so dangerous that people can be in one place for a long time which affected almost all areas of life including education such that schools can be closed at any time so as to avoid spreading the disease.

Kirk (2006) explains that girls being girls have their own reasons of being absent from school and the cardinal one is issues to do with their sanitary health that is when they are attending their monthly periods. In this case, it becomes hard for them to be in school as it can cause embarrassment when one does not have the sanitary towels or anything that need to be used at that time of the month.

Effect of school absenteeism among learners

Absenteeism has a negative effect on student's life because students are not able to get knowledge which is necessary. Simuforosa, M. and Rosemary, N. (2016) stated, the students who are absent on regular basis from schools, they suffer a lot and absenteeism is the main issue in academies. Absenteeism affects all levels students learning. Further, the regular students get more marks and are considered intelligent students of the class, rather absent students do not get good marks, they mostly fail in achievement test and they are mostly considered weak or slow students of the class, Study further explore that the high rate of absenteeism is found in Africa. Poor attendance becomes the cause of students drop out from school and this not good for absentee student's career.

Bradley, R. (2015) stated in the paper that, attendance is the important part on any academic success because regular students result is always good and good result also benefit for the academy. For the successful academy it is necessary students should be present in academy on daily basis. Students' absenteeism from school is very serious issue in the academy. Family play a serious role in the student's attendance, if student is regular or not regular all credited goes to family. Most of the time parents are responsible for child absentee, because of their less attention toward their children. A child attendance can improve by parents, if parents become serious towards their child education then they will be regular and also can solve all those issues which child face in school and out of the school. Especially they can build strong relationship among teachers and students and it is very necessary for students and their success. The absent student's performance in school can improve their parents if their parents get proper information or training from school authority or teachers.

Kenton, W. (2019) explain absenteeism in his work, absenteeism refers to a person is not visible in organization or school. Students who do not come to school due to any reason is called absenteeism. Mostly, students do not attend school due to the fear of harassment, mental sickness, injuries and low interest in studies. Absenteeism is the broad term in the field of education. The absenteeism effects come on students' performance, as well on academy performance. Absenteeism in school does not let discipline in academies because it creates disturbance in school, this disturbance not only affect school management but also other students in the classroom.

Measures in addressing pupil's absenteeism

Dube (2009) stated that, coming up with feeding activities within the school is one of the activities that has been initiated to reducing absenteeism. This is so because when a child comes from a family that does not have food, they will prefer going to school to staying at home where there is hunger. This activity in the actual sense is implemented deliberately to bring the pupils who are fond of staying back at home due to poverty in their homes. As already alluded to, poverty is the factor that weighs highest on the rank leading to pupils' absenteeism and therefore, coming up with such invention would prove to be of help to learners coming from poverty-stricken homes.

A study done by Dube, (2009) state that providing sponsorship to vulnerable children has been another measure put in place in most schools where their user fees are catered for by the government or any organisation in order give them an opportunity to acquire education regardless of their prevailing circumstances. It has been observed that school fees have been a major challenge for children who cannot afford paying and as a result, they will resort to not coming to school for fear of being embarrassed by the teachers for not paying which will in turn be a draw back on their school attendance. Therefore, providing sponsorships to the underprivileged children could reduce the rate of absenteeism in schools

Researchers have suggested that school managements need to take a more supportive approach to addressing student absenteeism (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). This however, would require school leaders to embrace the complex task of exploring their role in promoting student absence by evaluating their current attendance practices and policies (Garcia-Gracia, 2008). For example, most schools do not frequently carry out class registration and as a result this contributes to a teacher not knowing the high levels of absenteeism in his or her classroom.

Habbozya (2018) explains that there is need for parents to contact school management, counsellors and other members of staff to find ways and means of helping the learners attend school without problems for additional help. This may even show further engagement.

Agbemabiese (2009) reveals that educators have a big role to play in this matter where they have to do so many things. In school, they have to raise awareness about so many issues that affect the learning of the learners and absenteeism is not exceptional. They need to study and report absenteeism data as this may help them study the patterns and common features that are aligned to absenteeism.

2. Material and method

The research design refers to a plan and technique incorporating stages of comprehensive expectations to detailed methods of how data was collected, analysed and interpreted (Chetty, 2019). This study approach will select quantitative in that it will be able to quantify the study on hand via the generation of numerical data, converted into statistics. The quantitative research method operates with statistics and anything quantifiable in an organized way of investigating occurrences and relationships. This approach also makes it easy for this researcher to apply statistics in the analysis of the problems. The approach encompassed the explanations, forecasts, and regulation of occurrences.

A plan of how and where data was collected and analysed. To investigate the causes of absenteeism among primary school learners and a descriptive research design was employed. Hale (2018) defines descriptive research design as explaining the characteristics of a sample taken from the population and generalizing their conclusions to represent the entire population. This study used a survey method of descriptive research design as participants were meant to provide answers from questionnaires. The survey method of descriptive research design is suitable for this study as it help in getting data that describe occasions thereafter, arranges, tabulates, portrays, and defines the data that assisted in responding to research questions.

The sample size is a collection of items from the population or a subset of a group of interest that is studied in research (Macnee & McCabe, 2008). To select the number of teachers to be part of the study, the researcher established the total number of teachers to be 90. Therefore, the following formula by Cochran, (1963) was used to come up with the sample size for teachers.

The formula:
$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Whereas: N= Target population

n=Total sample size

e = Desired margin error

N=90 desired margin error (0.05)

$$n = 90/1+90(0.05)^2 = 73 \text{ teachers}$$

In the study, out of the 90 teachers as the population size, 73 participants were sampled using the formula above; this is because there were limited resources and time for the researcher to collect data from a sample size bigger than the one used.

Data Collection/Instruments

The study will use questionnaires to collect data from the respondents. The reasons why the researcher preferred questionnaires over other instruments are highlighted below.

Questionnaires

A reliable data collection instrument is questionnaire. It is used when collecting data over a large sample. They equally save time especially when time was a limiting factor in the study. The administration of the questionnaires to respondents was arrived at after creating an understanding between the researcher and the respondents, by explaining the purpose of the study. Also, the availability of many respondents at a time made it possible for the researcher to collect data within a short period, get a high response rate and also reduce the financial expenses.

Data Analysis

The analysis of data will be done at the end of the data collection. The responses will be categorized based on information provided by respondents. The software called Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 20) was used to present and interpret data using frequency distribution tables, percentages, pie charts, and bar charts.

3. Results and Discussion

The study was investigating into the causes of absenteeism among primary school learners in Lufwanyama District. The findings were summarized as stated below: The study established that 32 (56%) were females teachers compared to male teachers 25 (44%) who took part in the study. This shows that the majority of the teachers in Lufwanyama District females.

Teachers were asked to state their highest level of qualifications, out of the total number of participants, the study discovered that 57, 11 (19.3%) were certificate holders, 24 (42.1%) were diploma holders, 19 (33.3%) were degree holders, 3 (5.3%) had Master's degrees and none of the respondents had a PhD. According to the findings of the study, teachers had different working experiences, with the majority 21 (37%) having 5-8 years of working experience. The next big share had 1-4 years of working experience forming 14 (25%). The other one had 9-12 years of work experience forming 11 (19%), 1 year was forming 7 (12%) and the least was 12 years and above had 4 (7%).

Causes of school absenteeism among primary school learners

Participants were asked if they are you aware about the habit of absenteeism at your school and the study revealed that 46 (81%) said that they are awareness about the habit of absenteeism at school, 8 (14%) said they are not awareness about the habit of absenteeism and 3 (5%) said they are not sure. Participants were asked how alarming is the level of absenteeism among primary school learners and the study established that 24 (42%) said very high, 19 (33%) said high, 11 (19%) said low and 4 (7%) said none.

Participants were asked the causes of school absenteeism among primary school learners and the study discovered that 13 (22.8%) said long distance from home to school makes them miss school, 17 (29.8%) said taking care of sibling keeps them away from school, 11 (19.3%) and 16 (28.1%) said lack of interest in school activities. Also the result of the finding identified lack of interest in school activities. It is in line with the findings of (Elliot, Kratochwill; Cook & Travers (2000) who stated that interest is an enduring characteristics expressed between a person and a particular activity or object. It then follows that a child who lacks interest in school activity will not be motivated to learn, so he will stay away from school to engage in any activity that interest him most. In relation to these findings Jodi (2003), concluded that teaching style contributed to student Absenteeism as a result of boredom; created by incompetent teachers. Jodi (2009) concluded that teaching styles contributed to student absenteeism as a result of boredom; created by incompetent teachers. This is in line with what Railsback (2004) who stated that long distance and lack of transport was a problem which led to the rise of truancy and absenteeism and in worst cases drop outs.

The result finding also revealed that as a result of long distance from home to school and difficult terrain, pupils are tempted to be absent. It, is in consonance with the observations of Maliki (2011) opined that swampy, wetland terrains where utilities and social amenities are epileptic or non-existent, children are easily tempted to leave school before graduation. On the effect of school absenteeism, the finding showed that school absenteeism can lead to poor academic performance thereby leading to school dropout and affecting their career. It can also undermine societal peace and encourage social vices such as prostitution rape, kidnapping, armed robbery.

This finding corroborates with the observation of Ojekudo (2013) who identified time wastage, prevention of actual learning, poor academic performance, bullying crime and drug related issues as the effect of school absenteeism. It is either the child is sent out of school for chronic absenteeism or he drops out of school to join his likes which can ultimately affect the career of such child. It implies that school absenteeism has serious setback on teaching-learning processes and can even destroy the future career of a pupil if not checked. This was in agreement with what Burton (1945) who added that on the psychological aspect, some pupils may not actually be ready to learn or basically have that negative mind-set towards learning. This often leads to pupils absconding class to go do other activities with their peers. For example, a pupil who thinks education is a waste of time would obviously absent themselves from class or eventually drop-out.

Effect of school absenteeism among primary school learners

Participants were asked if they aware about the effects of school absenteeism among primary school learners and the study discovered that 47 (83%) said yes, 7 (12%) said no and 3 (5%) said they are not sure. Participants were asked the effects of school absenteeism on primary school learners and the study revealed that 28 (49%) said poor academic performance, 14 (24.6%) said drop out of school and unemployment, 10 (17.5%) said anti-social behaviour and 4 (7%) said Anxiety, depression and phobia aggression and cruelty.

This was in line with a similar study that was made by Weiss and García (2018) which pointed out that missing school has a negative effect on performance regardless of how many days are missed. In fact, when one misses a single topic, it will affect his/her understanding of subsequent topics. However, the more days of school a pupil misses, the poorer his or her performance will be. It was further revealed during the finding that early graders who absconded school had difficulties to breakthrough in reading and writing. As observed by Kelly (1999), a child must be physically present in school if he/she is to derive maximum benefit. Irregular attendance led to wastage of government resources and stagnation in a child's educational progress, and as a result it affects the government objectives of increasing access to quality education.

According to Mulauzi, et al (2013) they stated that the danger of non-attendants of school is that they become prematurely sexually active as they turn to have so much time on their hands, they get to involve themselves in sexual activities which in turn leads to early pregnancies. Furthermore, it was discovered majority of male truants often engage themselves in drug abuse of substances such as marijuana and cigarettes because of so little meaningful activities such as school to engage them.

These remarks were in line with what Weideman, et al, (2007) were they stated that learner's absenteeism leads to schools failing to meet their targets which affected their internal efficiency and put the school in a bad picture before society. When a school has a bad reputation it hardly records high enrolment rates as the community will not be wanting to take their children to that particular school, as they will believe that their children will not have the skills needed as the school will be known not to have pupils performing well.

According to Burton, (1945) the image of the school(s) is affected because the school will lose finances from students that have left for another school (Daka, Banda and Namafe, 2020), lower the school national and international ranking level because of underperformance which will affect the leadership and education systems as a whole. Another effect of pupil absenteeism on teaching and learning revealed by the study is that of interruptions of lessons which in most cases render the teacher unable to cover the syllabus adequately. This was confirmed by Komakech (2015) who observed that not all teachers always manage to teach the full syllabus for a given term and yet the final examination takes into account all the topics within the syllabus. The incomplete teaching time is a decisive factor which impacts negatively on students and school results (Daka, Chipindi and Mkandawire, 2020).

Komakech (2015) submitted that students' absenteeism led to an increased risk of dropping out because pupils who miss school are more likely to avoid school and less likely to want to go to school. Besides, when a pupil experiences school failure, he/she becomes frustrated with lack of achievement and end up alienated and experience exclusion leading to eventual dropout. Pupil drop out is a wastage in the education system since it prevents the completion rate and has a negative impact on the socio-economic status of the community. Further, findings revealed that pupil absenteeism affected class attendance and management of the system making it difficult for teachers to deliver lessons effectively. According to the findings, pupils that often-missed classes were likely to be indisciplined and rude making it difficult for teachers to handle the class which later affected the rest of the pupils' performance. Thus, pupils who are chronically absent are not only at serious risk of falling behind in school and having lower grades and test scores but also are likely to have behavioural issues, and ultimately dropping out of school (Weiss and García, 2018).

Strategies school administrator should put in place to combat absenteeism

Participants were asked the strategies the school administrator should put in place to combat absenteeism and the findings revealed that the school needs to provide a conducive environment for teaching and learning. The schools are supposed to buy desks; chalk and other teaching and learning materials to enable the pupils learn the required materials. In schools where infrastructure is dilapidated, the school administration in partnership with the community should build new classrooms. In situations where staffing is low; the schools through the District Education Board Secretary's (DEBS) office need to provide enough qualified teachers to teach and prepare the children for the examination adequately. Additionally, the school has a role of motivating children.

From the research findings, it was observed that the schools and all stakeholders in education needed to make a firm decision to stop absenteeism from examinations among the learners. It is worth noting that some of the roles that schools need to play to curb pupil absenteeism can at the same time be taken as measures that can be put in place to curb this pupil absenteeism. For instance, guiding and counselling the pupils, providing teaching and learning materials and building more schools to mention but a few. It is for this reason that, in this section reference is made to caption.

These remarks were in line with Douglas and Ross (1965) who stated that schools which offered many interesting school activities such as debates, sport tournaments and others recorded less cases of absenteeism among their learners, therefore it can be said that interesting school activities do play a huge role in reducing absenteeism in schools.

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