

Investigate the Causes of Absenteeism and its Effect on Performance Among Primary School Pupils. A Case Study of Kapiri District

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Abstract

This study examined pupil absenteeism among secondary school pupils in Kabwe District, identifying its causes and suggesting solutions. Using a descriptive survey design with both qualitative and quantitative methods, data were collected from 62 Grade 11 teachers and 10 parent focus groups through purposive sampling. Findings revealed that absenteeism remained relatively constant from 2010–2019, with a noticeable increase in 2021, particularly among girls. Major causes included physical factors (long distances, poor weather), health issues, and negative pupil attitudes. Home-related factors such as lack of parental support, household chores, and seasonal activities also contributed. Additionally, cultural practices, teacher absenteeism, and poor school environments (e.g., inadequate facilities and resources) were identified as key drivers. The study highlighted the importance of parental and school involvement through guidance, provision of necessities, and community sensitization. It recommended improved teacher monitoring, better school environments, and increased access to schools to reduce absenteeism.

Keywords: Pupil Absenteeism, Secondary Education, School Attendance Causes of Absenteeism Parental Involvement.

1. INTRODUCTION

The definition of absenteeism varies depending on the source, field, or purpose of the data being collected. Absenteeism may be defined as the non-attendance or non-appearance of a pupil at school without permission (Encarta Dictionary, 2007). This implies that absenteeism is similar to truancy, and a learner who engages in it is referred to as an absentee or truant. In other words, a learner at pre-school, primary, or secondary level stays away from school for various reasons without informing school authorities. Such a learner misses both curricular and co-curricular activities that contribute to their overall development.

Absenteeism and school dropout rates are important indicators of the quality of education in any country. Regular school attendance is essential for academic achievement, language development, and social growth. Students who attend school consistently are more likely to succeed in their future careers by developing important skills such as persistence, problem-solving, and teamwork (Kearney & Graczyk, 2014). Studies show that regular attendance is associated with higher academic performance and better standardized test results.

In Zambia, the government, private sector, and religious institutions have introduced strategies to encourage learners to attend school regularly. Inclusive education policies have also been implemented to accommodate learners from diverse backgrounds. However, while much focus has been placed on increasing enrolment, less attention has been given to ensuring consistent attendance. As a result, absenteeism remains a significant challenge.

According to Özbaş (2010), absenteeism is often overlooked, as identifying its causes is seen as time-consuming by educators focused on completing the syllabus. However, absenteeism is not only a problem in Zambia but a global concern affecting education systems worldwide.

This study focuses on factors contributing to high absenteeism rates at Makululu C Primary School and Mansa Trades Secondary School in Mansa District. These government institutions, established in 1968 and 1971 respectively, face challenges such as inadequate staffing and high pupil enrolment. For example, Makululu C Primary School has only 4 teachers for 318 pupils, while Mansa Trades Secondary School has 6 teachers for 734 pupils. Rapid population growth has further increased class sizes, leading to overcrowding and multiple learning sessions (morning, mid-morning, and afternoon).

Objectives of the Study

- To establish the extent of absenteeism at Makululu C Primary School
- To investigate the causes of pupil absenteeism
- To examine teachers' and administrators' perceptions of possible solutions

Research Questions

- To what extent is absenteeism prevalent at Makululu C?
- What are the causes of absenteeism at the school?
- What are the possible solutions to absenteeism?

Assumptions of the Study

- Pupils are engaged in domestic activities, leading to absenteeism
- Some children are too playful and lack interest in school
- Parents do not take sufficient interest in their children's education

Significance of the Study

This study aims to provide useful information to stakeholders to help reduce absenteeism at Makululu C and other institutions. It may improve learners' academic performance and support the implementation of effective education policies in Zambia. Beneficiaries include:

- School administrators and teachers
- Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) and community members
- Colleges and universities
- Ministry of Education
- Non-governmental organizations and donors

Scope of the Study

The study focuses on school attendance and academic performance using data from 2015 to 2018. Monthly and end-of-term results will be used to examine the relationship between attendance and performance.

Limitations of the Study

The study may face limitations such as limited time due to the researcher's professional and personal responsibilities, as well as financial constraints since the research is self-funded.

Operational Definitions of Terms

- Absenteeism: Habitual absence from school without permission
- Dropout: Leaving school before completion for various reasons
- Holding Power: Efforts made to retain learners in school
- Inclusive Learning: Education that accommodates learners from diverse backgrounds
- Re-entry Policy: Government policy allowing girls who become pregnant to return to school after childbirth

2. REVIEW LITERATURE

This chapter examines the factors contributing to pupil absenteeism from Grade 9 composite examinations in Zambia. It situates the Zambian experience within a global context, exploring statistics from primary and secondary sources across various regions. Furthermore, it analyzes the gender-based variations in absenteeism and the socio-economic drivers that prevent learners from completing their basic education.

Global and National Statistics on Absenteeism

Absenteeism is a global challenge affecting both developed and developing nations. In Britain, research by Sharma (2005) indicated that approximately 6.2% of registered pupils failed to attend examinations. Similarly, the O.E.C.D. (2001) reported that over 9% of Grade 7 pupils globally miss final assessments due to various factors, primarily illness.

In the Zambian context, the scale of the issue is significant. Despite near-universal pass rates for those who sit for exams, thousands remain excluded. For instance, in 2012, 39,702 pupils missed their examinations after successfully registering (Mwaanga, 2012). This represents a "waste of educational resources, time, and human potential" (Segal, 2008).

Regional Variations and Progression Rates

Data from the Examinations Council of Zambia (ECZ) reveals a complex picture of progression. While some provinces like Luapula and North-Western recorded 100% progression rates in 2009, others struggled with high attrition.

The national absenteeism rate doubled from 4.1% in 2004 to 9.7% in 2009. This upward trend is particularly alarming given the implementation of the Free Basic Education policy. The data suggests that even when financial barriers like exam fees are removed, secondary factors continue to drive pupils out of the system before they "test the waters" of a summative assessment.

Factors Contributing to Absenteeism

Socio-Economic Drivers and Child Labour

Poverty remains a primary catalyst for absenteeism. In many Zambian households, children are viewed as a vital source of cheap labor (Kelly, 1999).

- **Agricultural Cycles:** During rice harvesting seasons, parents often withdraw children from school to assist in the fields (COS, 2010).
- **Gender-Specific Labor:** Boys are frequently engaged in fishing, cattle herding, and caterpillar collection. Girls are burdened with domestic chores, including cooking, cleaning, and caring for the sick or younger siblings (UNICEF, 2014).
- **The Hunger Factor:** Poverty manifests in "school hunger," where pupils cannot afford meals, leading to a lack of physical energy and concentration required for school attendance (Ministry of Education, 2003).

Cultural and Health Factors

Cultural practices and health challenges significantly impede regular attendance:

- **Initiation Ceremonies:** In certain provinces, traditional ceremonies (such as Mutomboko) require children to be in seclusion for up to six months. In 2010, reports from Mansa District confirmed that numerous pupils missed exams because they were in seclusion (EMIS, 2010).

- **Healthcare Access:** In rural areas, the lack of adolescent-friendly health services and the prevalence of chronic conditions like asthma, malaria, and epilepsy lead to long-term absences. Many families rely on traditional healers, which can delay recovery and return to school.

Teacher-Related Factors

The quality of instruction directly impacts learner retention. Agerman (1993) notes that teachers lacking professional qualifications often fail to engage students effectively. When pupils feel inadequately prepared for examinations due to poor teaching, they are more likely to absent themselves out of fear of failure.

Gender Variations in Absenteeism

Zambia has made strides toward gender parity through policies like the **30% enrolment reservation for girls** and the **1995 Re-entry Policy**, which allows girls to return to school after pregnancy. However, statistics from 2010 show that girls consistently record higher absenteeism rates than boys in almost every province.

- **Example (Western Province):** Boys recorded a 14.02% absenteeism rate, while girls reached 15.62%.
- **Example (North-Western):** Boys stood at 13.53% compared to 15.16% for girls.

These disparities are largely attributed to early marriages, teenage pregnancies, and the disproportionate demand for girls to perform household duties.

The Role of Stakeholders in Curbing Absenteeism

The responsibility for student attendance is shared between parents, the school, and the state.

1. **Parental Responsibility:** Research shows a strong correlation between a parent's value of education and a child's achievement (Balster-Lionto, 1992). Parents must prioritize examinations over seasonal labor.
2. **Government Initiatives:** Programs such as the **School Health Nutrition (SHN)** program and deworming initiatives aim to increase retention by addressing the physical well-being of the learner.
3. **School Interventions:** Guidance and counseling are essential measures to motivate pupils and address the "psychological dropout" that occurs before the physical absence.

Chapter Summary

The literature confirms that while the Zambian government has removed many fiscal barriers through Free Basic Education, absenteeism from Grade 9 examinations remains a critical hurdle. The intersection of poverty, cultural obligations, and health issues creates a complex environment where registration does not always guarantee participation. To meet Universal Primary Education goals, stakeholders must move beyond enrollment statistics and focus on the socio-cultural factors that prevent learners from completing their final assessments.

4. METHODOLOGY

This chapter examines the research design, target population, sample size, sampling procedure, research instruments, data collection and data analysis that will be employed in the proposed study, concerning how deforestation contributes to global warming. In order to have clear focus, the proposed research will include both qualitative and quantitative approach. It will generally involve the systematic collection of data from people at the selected people in Mansa District, Luapula Province.

Sample Size: The research was conducted using a sample size of forty (5) respondents who will be drawn from Mansa Trades Secondary school in Mansa on the Luapula Province of Zambia. Systematic sampling was used to target the selected members of this community. This was done in order to collect expected and relevant information from the right sources without any biases.

The source of data for the proposed research will be both primary and secondary data. Information will be collected directly from respondents at the same time.

Primary Sources of Data: Primary data in the proposed research include the information that will be collected using interviews and questionnaires.

Questionnaires: Data will be collected using structured questionnaires. Ten (2) respondents will be given questionnaires. The questionnaires will use both open-ended and closed-ended questions. The open-ended questions will require the respondents to answer in their own words. The close-ended questions will require respondents to answer by choosing from the options provided. The questionnaires will be collected from the respondent by the researcher after a week.

Research Design

A research design was arrangement of conditions for collection, analysis of data and interpretation of observed facts in a manner that combines relevance to the research. In order to get a clear picture of how deforestation contributes to Global Warming the study will employ a descriptive design.

The qualitative and quantitative approaches to describe what will be obtained on the ground will be utilized. The research design will be a case study of how deforestation contributes toward Global warming.

Study Population

A population is the total number of persons inhabiting a country, city, or any district or area. The researcher will target Mansa Residents, Teachers and pupils surrounding area from the communities under study people from selected communities will also be part of the population under study.

Sample and Sampling Techniques

The samples of the study will be convenient sampling which will include 2 Teachers, 10 Kabwe residents from the communities handling how deforestation contributes to global warming 5 pupils from Makululu Primary School under study. On the part of the 2 teachers was interviewed, 10 pupils from Makululu and 2 Spark Extension residents person from each community surrounding the area of Makululu District.

The researcher use purposive sampling procedure and random sampling with the view of every member of the population.

Research Instruments/Validation and Reliability of Research Instrument

In the study, the researcher used questionnaires and interviews to collect data from respondents and participants because they will convenient to both the researcher and the respondents and will reduce researcher biasness in interpreting research findings.

Data Collection Procedures/Strategies

The researcher collected data from the people in phases. The respondents to complete self-administered questionnaires first and then hold discussions later where necessary. The researcher will orally interview the headman and 2 people how to overcome these challenges.

Data Analysis

The data was collected through questionnaire and be analyzed in two ways, part of it will be analyzed quantitatively and the rest qualitatively. The researcher will check the questionnaires manually to ensure that questions are well attended to. Above all statistic and influential statistical analysis techniques.

Presentation of Results

The results was presented in tabular form to ensure proper interpretation of data is correctly done pie charts, bar, graphs, photographs shall be use.

Self-Administered Questionnaire

The research also used self-administered questionnaire to solicit the individual views of heads of households regarding the research questions. A questionnaire is a research instrument mostly used for social survey design and involves a battery of usually closed ended questions completed by respondents themselves (Bryman, 2008, p.216). Respondents had equal range of questions to answer under the supervision of the researcher.

Ethical Considerations

The basic understanding of ethics concerns acceptable and unacceptable standards of human behavior and their environment. In social research, ethical considerations may arise at various stages. This is probably because the object and field of study is the human and his environment. It is identified that discussions on ethical considerations have been variedly approached by the different researchers and writers of social research, but these have centered around certain issues which Dierner and Crandall (1978) classified into four areas namely, harm to participant; lack of informed consent; invasion of privacy.

5. CONCLUSION

From the findings the major drivers of pupil absenteeism were physical factors such as long distance to school and climate especially in the rainy season where roads become impassible due , health factors such as illnesses and death in the family and personal attitude like pupils not being interested in school, peer pressure and laziness, home related factors like parents and guardians having a negative attitude towards school, house chores, parents' failure to provide food and other school requirements, and children being withdrawn from school during the farming season. Furthermore, the other causes include the cultural and social factors such as early marriages, early pregnancies and initiation ceremonies and also teacher related factors like teacher's absenteeism from work and lack of commitment, teachers' failure to cover the syllabus adequately and failure to prepare the pupils for examinations.

The research also revealed that parents had a role to play in curbing pupil absenteeism during examinations such as guidance and counseling their children and providing school requirements.

Taking note of the views brought forward in this research and critically important taking resolute action in response to it, should enable the Ministry of Education, and all other stake

holders to move forward in this direction. This is not a research that should be shelved, but one that should be called upon regularly to provide evidence and guidance for the improvement of completion rates among Pupils. The research should galvanize every stakeholder towards this. The problems and difficulties highlighted in this dissertation do not present limits that cannot be crossed, but new challenges to be faced, new opportunities to be welcomed, new pathways to be opened up as Zambia progresses towards Vision 2030.

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