



SOCIOECONOMIC AND SCHOOL FACTORS CAUSING PUPILS' ABSENTEEISM IN LOWER PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN MASABA SUB-COUNTY, KENYA

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Abstract:

Pupils who regularly attend school perform better in school than those who do not. Absenteeism from school makes pupils not to achieve their maximum. This paper presents results from a study that was conducted to explore the socioeconomic and school factors causing pupils to be absent from school in lower primary schools in Masaba Sub-county, Nyamira County in Kenya. The results from data analysis had shown that pupils' absenteeism was an issue in lower primary schools in the sub-county and pupils' were often absent from school on Monday and Fridays. Several socio-economic and school factors made pupils to be absent from school. The socioeconomic factors included: children staying at home to help parents in family business and lack of money for basic needs. The school factors included: Un-conducive school environment; and poor relationship with peers and teachers. The strategies that could be used to reduce pupils' absenteeism from school include: Strict implementation of school rules, banning of unauthorized levies, and effective teaching.

Keywords: socioeconomic; school factors; pupils; absenteeism; lower primary school

1. Introduction

When pupils are absent from school, teaching-learning processes are interrupted and learners' performance is poor (Berg and Louw, 2006). School absenteeism also makes it

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very difficult for teachers to achieve their objectives (At-Risk Youth in Crisis Handbook, 1993). Research has shown that there is a link between school attendance and pupils' performance (Dekalb, 1999). This means that pupils who attend schools regularly perform better than those who are sometimes absent from school (Ziegler, 1972). Ford and Sutphen (1996) also add that pupils who fail to attend all lessons lag behind their classmates.

Pupils' absenteeism is when learners do not attend school regularly (Teasley, 2004). It is also when pupils continue to be absent from school for a long time without valid reasons (Bond, 2004). Articles 20, 35, 42, and 43 of the constitution of Kenya; states that 'every person has the right to education'. In addition, articles 53, 60 and 59 of the constitution provides for children's right to free and compulsory basic education (Republic of Kenya, 2010). Since the inauguration of the new constitution, the trend in school enrolment has been impressive since 2003, but with concerns as regards to retention, attendance and pupil achievement (Ministry of Education, 2009).

Student absenteeism from school is a global issue. A study conducted in USA had revealed that in New York City approximately 15% of 1 million students were absent daily from school without valid reasons (Fox and Levin, 1999). Econorthwest (2011) had found that in Oregon USA, chronic absence in grade one was related to pupils' performance in school. In the United Kingdom school absenteeism increased with an increase in secondary school years (Marburgerm, 2001).

In Africa, various studies have revealed that pupils' absenteeism negatively affected their academic achievement. A comparative study on academic performance in Ghana had found that absenteeism was one of the major factors contributing to pupils' poor academic achievement (Etsey, 2005). Enomoto (1997) had also found that learners who were absent from school performed poor than those who regularly attended school.

In Kenya studies have shown that student absenteeism from school was a problem which negatively affected pupils' academic achievement. A study by Gitonga (1997) on absenteeism had established that pupils' absenteeism from school negatively affected their academic achievement. The study had also found that pupils who were persistently absent from school underachieved and dropped out of school.

2. Research Problem

Basic education is free and compulsory for all Kenyan children (Republic of Kenya, 2010). This is meant to ensure that all children in Kenya irrespective of their gender, tribe or economic status have access to education. The Basic Education Act 2013 also

states that a parent who fails to take his/her child to school commits an offense and can be prosecuted (Republic of Kenya, 2013). However, Uwezo (2011) had found that in many sub-counties in Kenya, Masaba sub-county included more than four out of ten children missed school daily. The question then was, if primary education is free and compulsory, why will some pupils be absent from school? This means that there were some factors which caused pupils to be absent from school. This study had focused on the socioeconomic and school factors which were making pupils' to be absent from school in the sub-county.

3. Objectives of the Study

The study was designed to achieve the following objectives:

1. To establish pupils' absenteeism from school in Masaba sub-county of Nyamira County.
2. To find out the socioeconomic factors which cause pupils to be absent from school in the sub-county.
3. To determine the school factors which cause pupils to be absent from school in the sub-county.

4. Research Methodology

Descriptive survey research design was used to guide this study. The dependent variable was pupils' absenteeism from school, while the independent variables were socioeconomic and school factors which caused pupils to be absent from school. The study was conducted in Masaba Sub-county of Nyamira County. The area was selected for the study because of its poverty index of 48.6% which was ranked number 22 in Kenya, an indication that many people in the sub-county were poor (Commission of Revenue Allocation, 2010). The sub-county had also been performing poorly in national examination results in KCPE and KCSE which had also influenced the selection of the location. Uwezo report (2011) also indicated that there was a problem of pupils' absenteeism from school in the sub-county.

The target population was class three pupils in public primary schools in the sub-county. The reason of conducting the study in public primary schools was that parents do not pay tuition fees and absenteeism is an issue in public primary schools. The sub-county was purposively selected because there was a problem of pupils' absenteeism from school in the sub-county (Uwezo, 2011). Class three was also selected using purposive sampling because the class was the most affected by pupils'

absenteeism. Questionnaires for teachers and interview schedule for pupils were used to collect data. Content validity and test-retest methods were used to ensure that the instruments were valid and reliable. Results were presented using tables and text.

5. Results and Discussions

They are presented in the following subsections:

5.1 Pupils' Absenteeism from School

The first objective of the study was to establish lower primary school pupils' absenteeism from school in the sub-county. To achieve the objective, pupils with the problem of school absenteeism and the number of times they were absent from school was determined using class attendance registers. Table 1 presents the results.

Table 1: Number of Times Pupils Were Absent From School per Week

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Once	4	22.2
	Twice	9	50.0
	Thrice	4	22.2
	Four time	1	5.6
	Total	18	100.0

As it can be seen in Table 1 most of the pupils who were absent from school were absent twice in a week implying that pupil absenteeism from school was an issue in lower primary schools in the sub-county. This, in some way could be one of the reason why pupils' academic performance was poor in lower primary classes in the sub-county.

The findings of this study were similar to those reported from a study done in Meru County by Nkanatha (2013) had found that 75% of the students were absent from school for more than three days per term which translates to more than a day per month and lead to poor performance.

Days of the week pupils were often absent from school was also determined and the results have been presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Days Pupils Were Often Absent From School

		Responses	
		No.	Percentage
Days of the week always absent	Monday	8	25.8
	Tuesday	8	25.8
	Wednesday	2	6.5
	Thursday	5	16.1
	Friday	8	25.8
Total		31	100.0

The results shows that most of the pupils were often absent from school on Monday, Tuesday, and Friday. The pupils were asked reasons why they were absent from school and the main reasons why. The common factors were: Pupils stayed at home to help their parents carry goods to the market during market day; to help parents in selling goods during market days; to care for siblings when parents had gone to the market; help in picking tea; help in doing house chores; sickness; lack of school uniform; lack of school levies; to attend funerals; and fear of being punished in school.

A study done by Loraine and Austin (2010), on factors influencing pupils' absenteeism in primary schools in Jamaica had also found out that most of the children were absent from school on Fridays because they were given too much work on Friday. In USA, Plank (2009) had found that in one cohort, 22 percent of students missed 40 days a year.

5.2 Socioeconomic Factors causing Pupils' to be absent from School

In the second objective the researcher was to establish socioeconomic factors which caused pupils to be absent from school in the sub-county. To achieve the objective teachers were asked to state the socioeconomic factors which caused pupils to be absent from school. The results have been presented in Table3.

Table3: Socioeconomic Factors Causing Pupils to Be Absent From School

Reasons	Frequency	Percent
Parents' negative attitude towards education	8	100
Parents do not understand the value of school attendance	5	62.5
Helping in family business	5	62.5
Long distance from school	6	75
Lack of money for basic needs	8	100
Domestic problems	8	100

As shown in Table 3 the main socioeconomic factors which caused pupils to be absent from school were: Parents' negative attitude towards education; parents do not understand the value of school attendance; children stayed at home to help in family business; long distance from school; lack of money for basic needs; and domestic problems.

Results from interviews had confirmed that the failure of parents to understand the value of school was due to illiteracy, ignorance, and low level of education. Long distance to and back from school made pupils to avoid going to school due to being tired and therefore preferred to rest. Family problems which made pupils to be absent from school included: Irresponsible parents; sick parents; poverty; parents' ignorance of the importance of education; lack of family planning; HIV/AIDS; and parents staying away from their children.

The findings of this study are in agreement with those reported by Reid (2005) who had found that lack of money for basic needs like food, and clothing made children to be absent from school. Similarly a study on causes of absence from school in Scotland by Heather, Valerie, Julia and Susan (2013) had found that parents only valued attendance because of its contribution to getting certificates. This therefore meant that they did not really understand the importance of school attendance.

In Kenya, Awuor (2012) who did a study on the effects of economic activities on pupils' academic performance in Kiambu County had found that academic performance of pupils was adversely affected by inadequate support by parents, attitude of parents towards schooling, initiation practices for boys before completing primary education and religious affiliation of parents. The study had also found that pupils participated in child labour and domestic related cores which made them to be absent from school and perform poor. Aluoch (2002) investigated the factors that contributed to student absenteeism in Nakuru East Division in Day Secondary Schools and found that student absenteeism was a major problem and the main causes of student absenteeism were lack of school fees, sickness, and family problems.

5.3. School Factors Causing Pupils' Absenteeism from School

The study had also investigated the school factors which caused pupils to be absent from school and the results have been presented in Table 4.

Table 4: School Factors Causing Pupils to Be Absent From School

Reasons of being Absent from school	Frequency	Percent
Lack of adequate Physical Facilities	6	75
Lack of Adequate teaching-Learning Materials	8	100
Poor Relationship with Peers and Teachers	6	75
Poor Performance in Class	5	75
Total	8	100

As shown in the above table the main school factors which caused pupils to be absent from school were: Lack of adequate physical facilities; lack of adequate teaching-learning materials; poor relationship with peers and teachers; and pupils' poor performance in class. The lack of adequate teaching-learning resources led to high teacher/pupil ratio, poor hygiene and poor learning environment.

The results are in agreement with those from a study conducted by Asmawati, Abdul, and Norliana (2012) who had found that unpleasant school environment made students not to go to school. A study by Elinor, Syni-An, Edward, Christine, and Shao (2010) on school building condition had found that unfavourable school building conditions influenced pupils absenteeism from school. Similar results were reported by Asmawati et al (2012) who had found that when teaching and learning was boring, hostile and not effective it enhanced pupils' absenteeism from school. The study had further revealed that peer relations influenced students to be absent from school, results similar to the findings of this study.

The findings are also similar to those from a study by Cullingford (1999) on the relationship between delinquency and non-attendance which had shown that student absenteeism was associated with hostile school culture. Heather et al (2013) in their study had found that due to academic competition, children who performed lowly were de-motivated to attend school.

In Kenya, Kamande (2011) who studied hygiene and sanitation education and the factors influencing school absenteeism among pupils in Kibera slums had found that school environmental factors made pupils to be absent from school. Similar results were reported by Gitonga (1997) who did a study in Nairobi on absenteeism and its effects on academic achievement among marginalized urban children and found that lack of learning materials contributed to pupils' absenteeism from school. Bironga (2002) had also found that the major causes of students' absenteeism were lack of school fees, sickness, and lack of learning materials. Similarly, Muiro (2005) who investigated the factors leading to children's absenteeism in public primary schools in Ruiru Division, Thika District had found that pupil absenteeism was a major problem in

public primary schools. The major causes of absenteeism were illness, lack of interest and bad company results which were similar to the findings of this study.

6. Summary of Findings

The results from this study have shown that pupils' absenteeism was an issue in lower primary schools in the sub-county and most of the pupils were absent from school twice per week.

Many socio-economic factors caused pupils to be absent from school including:

- Parents' negative attitude towards education. Due to the negative attitudes parents asked their children to stay at home so that they can take care of the younger siblings; to be sent to their relatives; and to assist parents in doing house chores.
- Children staying at home to help parents in family business. Pupils were absent from school so that they can assist parents to sell goods during market days; to take care of the younger siblings when parents were busy in family business activities; and to assist parents in doing house chores.
- Lack of money for basic needs such as food, clothing, learning resources and transport.
- Domestic problems which make pupils to run away from home. The problems also contributed to lack of basic needs, separation of parents, drug abuse, and single parenthood.
- Lack of basic needs due to irresponsible parents, sickness of parents, poverty, lack of family planning, HIV/AIDS, and parents staying away from their children.

The school factors which caused pupils to be absent from school included:

- Lack of adequate physical facilities. This was informing of lack of adequate classrooms and toilets which led to high teacher/pupil ratio, and poor hygiene.
- Lack of adequate teaching-learning materials which led to poor teaching-learning environment.
- Poor relationship between peers and teachers which included confrontation between teachers and pupils; and teacher harshness.
- Poor performance in class caused pupils' to lose interest in school and hence make them to be absent from school.

7. Conclusion

Several socio-economic and school factors caused pupils to be absent from school. The socioeconomic factors were inform of parents negative attitudes towards education, lack unsuitable school and home environment which affected pupils poor performance in class and school attendance.

8. Recommendations

The recommendations for the key stakeholders are described in the following sub-sections:

8.1 Recommendations for Parents

1. Parents should ensure that their children attend school every day. The findings had revealed that pupils were absent from school twice a week.
2. Parents should also attend parent-teacher meetings to understand why children should attend school. The results of the study had shown that parents asked pupils to be absent from school due to lack of understanding of the value of school attendance and education.
3. Parents should stop involving their children in family activities during school days. The findings of the study had shown that parents asked pupils to be absent from school to help in family activities and to assist parents to sell goods during market days.
4. Parents should provide their children with basic needs. This is because lack of money for basic needs such as food, clothing, learning resources and transport caused pupils to be absent from school.
5. Parents should ensure that there are no domestic problems that make pupils to run away from home in case of fights which lead to separation of parents, drug abuse, and lead to single parenthood and finally school absenteeism.

8.2 Recommendations for School Management

1. School management should provide conducive school environment. This is because un-conducive school environment contributed to pupils' absenteeism from school. This was due to lack of adequate classrooms, high teacher/pupil ratio, lack of adequate teaching-learning materials, confrontation, poor relationship between teachers and pupils and teacher harshness which eroded pupils' interest in schooling.

2. School management should also ensure that there is good relationship between teachers and pupils. This was because poor relationship with peers or teachers was one of the main factors making pupils' to be absent from school.

8.3 Recommendations for Government

The government should abolish school levies. This is because some children were absent from school due to school rules which many parents could not afford.

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