

School Attendance is a Pre-Requisite for Student Academic Performance in Universal Secondary Education Schools

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Abstract

The study explored the effects of students' absenteeism on student academic and school performance in Uganda. The study also assessed the effectiveness of class attendance monitoring tool; the challenges faced by the school administration in dealing with absentee student(s); and established the relationship between students' absenteeism and academic performance of students. The relevant literature was reviewed to anchor the methodology and the findings. The study adopted descriptive cross-sectional survey design. A combination of stratified and purposive sampling was applied to accommodate the variety of respondents from Serere, Soroti, Kumi and Ngora districts in Teso sub-region; North Eastern Uganda. The study used questionnaires and interview schedules to collect primary data from 349 respondents who participated in the study out of the expected 384 obtained from a target population of 100,000 giving a response rate of 90.89%. The findings shows that the monitoring tools used for students' attendance are effective (good) and there is a very positive relationship between student attendance and academic performance. The researcher also found that school attendance affects both the students and the school performance. To the students; it leads to poor academic performance, students drop out, graduating half-baked students, poor curriculum coverage and loss of interest in learning whilst to the school; it affects the school image, lower the students' enrollment, transfer of students by parents, wastage of teachers' and administrators' time and affects the university/tertiary enrolment. However, the school administration faces challenges of; interruption of lessons, students being hostile/belligerent to teachers, and parents defending their children whilst dealing with absenteeism students. The study also provides the practical and most effective strategies to improve students' attendance. These strategies include; promoting Zero Tolerance to Students Absenteeism, parental involvement and participation, developing students' mentoring programmes, improving "rich" student's programmes, promoting guidance and counseling, promote good communication, reward students with regular attendance, and need to monitor and supervise school attendance. The researcher concludes that, to support students academically in and out of school; administrators, teachers, and families need to have a shared understanding of their children's learning and work as partners to meet their academic and social-emotional needs.

Keywords: School Attendance, Academic Performance, Excused and Unexcused Absenteeism, Universal Secondary Education

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1. Introduction

Secondary education has experienced tremendous growth during the last twenty nine years of National Resistance Movement (NRM) in Uganda. In order to facilitate the students' development of knowledge and an understanding of the various emerging needs of society and the economy, the secondary education sub-sector, came up with a number of policy objectives in Financial Year (FY) 2011/12 that include: to increase access and equity of secondary education, improving quality of secondary education, enhancing efficiency and effectiveness in the delivery of secondary education services, and enhancing Public Private Partnership(PPP) in the provision of Secondary Education to all Ugandans, (MoES: ESSAPR 2012). In 2012, the enrolment in secondary sub-sector increased from 1,251,507 (671,347 boys; 580,160 girls) to 1,257,378 (672,828 boys; 584,550 girls) in 2013. This represented a percentage increase of 0.5% in total secondary school enrolment. At a sub-regional level, the Lango sub region registered the highest percentage increase of enrolment in secondary school of 11%, followed by Buganda, Bukedi and Teso sub regions with 9%, Ankole 8%, Busoga 7%, Elgon 6%, Bunyoro, Karamoja, Toro all with 3%, Acholi with 2%, West Nile with 1% and Kigezi 1% in FY2012/13 as per the MoES, ESSAPR 2014. Consequently, student absenteeism rate increased from 19.3% and 21.3% among male and female students respectively in 2006 to 23.2% in 2014, (Komakech & Osuu, 2014). This high rate of absenteeism leads to a wastage of resources and tax payer's money.

Studies show that better attendance is related to higher academic achievement for students of all backgrounds, but particularly for children with lower socio-economic status, (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Ready, 2010). Additionally, students who attend school regularly score higher tests than their peers, who are frequently absent. Lochmiller, (2013) asserts that, given the consequences of chronic absenteeism and its prevalence in the nation's schools, researchers from education, counseling, and health fields have invested substantial energy in identifying factors that predict student absenteeism as well as estimate the cost of missing school for students both short and long term. The research suggests that individual, family, and school characteristics can all influence student attendance.

Furthermore, the researchers reveal that, students who are chronically absent are more likely to develop serious mental health issues, engage in drug and alcohol use, lower test scores, become violent or participate in criminal behaviors, increased risk of dropping out, and as well as sexual harassment, (Kearney, 2008; Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Komakech & Osuu, 2014).

Furthermore, the research conducted by the National Center for Children in Poverty at Columbia University as cited by Nauer, et al., (2008) shows that children who have poor attendance in kindergarten tend to do poorly in first grade; and that children with a history of poor attendance in the early elementary grades have lower levels of academic achievement throughout their school years. The study also reveals that, chronic absenteeism in the early elementary years hurts not only the students who miss school, but also affects the achievement of an entire school. In addition, a report by the Open Society Institute says, schools with high levels of absenteeism tend to have slower paced instruction overall, harming the achievement levels of strong students as well as those who struggle, Nauer , et al., (2008). In contrary, the authors urge that, it may seem obvious that children cannot learn if they are not in school, and that good attendance is a prerequisite for academic achievement; under No Child Left Behind (NCLB), schools are primarily judged on their students' performance not their attendance rates. However, for a student(s) to be truly engaged in their learning; s/he must participate socially, academically and intellectually in their schooling. This argument prompted the researcher to conduct empirical study on the relationship between class attendance and academic performance in universal secondary schools in Uganda.

1.2 Problem Statement

Higher student attendance is associated with higher student achievement, build social and emotional skills such as communication, teamwork and resilience. In America, school absenteeism within the public school system has reached a crisis point, primarily because it has been linked to school drop-out rates, which at the national level has reached the average of 30% of all students, Smink & Reimer, (2005). All students who drop out of high school experienced chronic school absenteeism at some point within their school career; however, not every chronically absent child drops out of school.

Similarly, in Uganda; student dropout and absenteeism are at rate of 10% and 23.2% respectively in Universal Secondary Education, (Komakech & Osuu, 2014). This is an alarming situation and has cost the government at least 9.2 billion shillings annually of tax payers and donor funds translating to about 27.6 billion shillings in the last three years (2011-2014).

Although education authorities are generally aware that student absenteeism affects the academic performance of student in the classroom, there is still insufficient understanding of the exact effect of absenteeism on student and school performance in Uganda. This study will therefore fill the information gap by exploring the effects of students' absenteeism on student and school performance; establish the relationship between students' absenteeism and academic performance; the effectiveness of the monitoring tools used; and the challenges faced by school administration in dealing with absentee student in Universal Secondary Schools in Uganda.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The objectives to the study include:

- i. To assess the effectiveness of class attendance monitoring tool used by Universal Secondary Schools in Uganda.
- ii. To find out the challenges faced by the school administration in dealing with absentee student(s) without a legitimate reason(s) in Uganda.
- iii. To establish the relationship between students' absenteeism and academic performance of students.
- iv. To explore the effects of students' absenteeism on student academic and school performance in Uganda.

1.4 Significance of the Study

The government seems not to be sensitive to students' attendance and how they affect the quality of education. Therefore, this study is likely to ignite public debate which will attract the attention of policy makers and donors to address the attendance problems so as to improve the quality of education in public schools. The findings of the study would contribute to the body of knowledge on the subject in question since there is no empirical study on students' attendance in universal secondary schools in Uganda. In addition, the outcome of the study will be useful to government policy makers, the media, researchers, students, as a bench-mark for future researchers.

2.0 Literature Review

This section examines and summarizes the literature that relate to the study. The literature was obtained from secondary sources such as; text books, journals, research papers and education reports.

2.1 The Effects of Students' Absenteeism in Secondary Schools

Schools can be a place where students feel safe and connected though it cannot address all the issues and problems that some students bring along with them. Studies show that schools can play a major role in how students feel about attending. Some educators and researchers refer to this process as school connectedness. When students feel cared for by teachers and others and feel like they are part of the school, they are less likely to engage in risky behavior, such as using drugs, engaging in violence, or starting sexual activity at an early age, (Mayer & Mitchell, 1993; Walsh, 1993; Lotz & Lee, 1999; Komakech & Osuu, 2014). It is in this regard that, the researcher was prompted to review literature on the main effects of students' absenteeism in secondary schools.

Absenteeism disturbs the dynamic teaching learning environment and adversely affects the overall wellbeing of classes, Segal, (2008). In quality terms, absenteeism is a waste of educational resources, time and human potential. Student absenteeism also causes rework and wasted time for teachers, (Lalek 1995; Rumberger, 1997). Teachers who spend class time re-teaching lessons take instructional time away from students who attend class regularly, and the extra time spent going over absentee homework and class assignments takes time away from teacher planning periods and time needed to provide individual assistance, Weller, (1996). This empirical research will elaborate the cost of students' absenteeism to the student, teacher, school and the government.

According to Williams, (2000) as cited by Wadesango, et al., (2011) states that, students who have absenteeism problems generally suffer academically and socially. Absenteeism has long term academic and social effects that is; absent students are at higher risk of poor performance, Oghuvbu, (2002); and repetition than the students who attend school regularly. Repetition leads towards a loss of confidence and low self esteem for students because of the social stigma associated with failure.

Ultimately, unable to cope up with the repeated failure, the child drops out of the education system, (Lewin, 2007; Oghuvbu, 2002). Further studies revealed that, sustained absences affect retention as it may degenerate into truancy as suggested by, Lotz & Lee, (1999); Barker & Jansen, (2000). However, the implications of absenteeism are felt outside the classroom as well, says Williams, (2000). Lotz & Lee, (1999) study added that, acts of delinquency are more frequent among students, who exhibit low grades, have spotty attendance, and later on drop out of school. This empirical research will examine whether excessive absences from class results in poor academic performance and drop out of the student(s).

It is also important to note that, students who missed class on a given date were significantly more likely to respond incorrectly to questions relating to material covered that day than students who were present, Enomoto, (1997). He further states that; students who are absent have lower achievement and may be penalized on test scores. Lamdin, (1996) study suggests that; students with better attendance score higher on achievement tests than their more frequently absent peers. Most surprisingly, most studies have found an inverse relationship between absenteeism and student performance, Marburger (2001). The difference in performance between a student who attends regularly and one who attends sporadically is about a full letter grade, Bowen et al, (2005). The researcher is therefore set to explore the effects of attendance and on students/school performance in Uganda.

Furthermore, Oghuvbu, (2002) asserts that, absenteeism results into loss of friends and partners, disruption in class when absentees return, affect the behavior of other students, difficulty in keeping accurate records, reduced ability to meet instructional targets and damaged school reputation. Marburger, (2001) postulates that; absences create a dead, tiresome, unpleasant classroom environment that makes students who come to class uncomfortable and the teacher irritable. Naz, (2005) urges that absences are wasteful from a purely financial standpoint, because it costs the government or the management the same amount whether 100% or 85% students are present. It is due to this reason in most of the states in USA funds to educational institutions are allocated on the average daily attendance of the students. The researcher will give the similar recommendation to the Government of Uganda through the Ministry of Education and Sports (MOES) since it keeps the institution alert in inculcating the habit of regular attendance among the students.

In another study, Mayer & Mitchell, (1993) observes that, the continued loss of instruction or poor academic achievement among students with high absenteeism is essential characteristics of students who later drop out of school. Those who drop out of school frequently move on to lives of delinquency and crime, which has a tremendous impact on society. Lotz & Lee, (1999) indicates that acts of delinquency are more frequent among students who exhibit low grades, have spotty attendance, and later drop out of school. Further, Walsh, (1993) agrees that truancy leads to delinquency and later to adult crime, citing statistics reporting 82% of inmates in Georgia are high school dropouts. This study will provide appropriate recommendation of rehabilitating weak and drop out students before engaging in criminal behavior in Uganda.

Finally, absenteeism also affects the teacher's ability to present class work in a sequential and organized way. Sleigh & Ritzer, (2001) says students who miss classes lose the benefit of having this application explained and demonstrated to them. This is because, these absentee students forfeit the benefit: of the auditory and visual supplementation of the textbook; the opportunity to learn from questions asked by other students during lessons and the resultant explanation provided by the teacher. The guidance provided in the critical thought process through the line of questioning followed by a teacher; and the ability to generate class notes as an additional source of information also misses as suggested by Marburger, (2001). This is in contrary to the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 of mandatory calling for 100% proficiency in mathematics and reading by 2014. Continued loss of classes results to loss of content and knowledge. Assignments and exercises would not be properly and correctly done leading to poor performance, (Ubogu, 2004). Indeed, Weller, (1996) and Williams, (2000) agrees that, when students are absent from class, they miss valuable information resulting from peer-teacher interaction and the benefits of the specific examples teachers use to clarify difficult concepts. This valuable part of the learning experience cannot be replicated when teachers re-teach the material to absentee students; thus this study will investigate the factor(s) responsible for loss content and knowledge.

3.0 Methodology

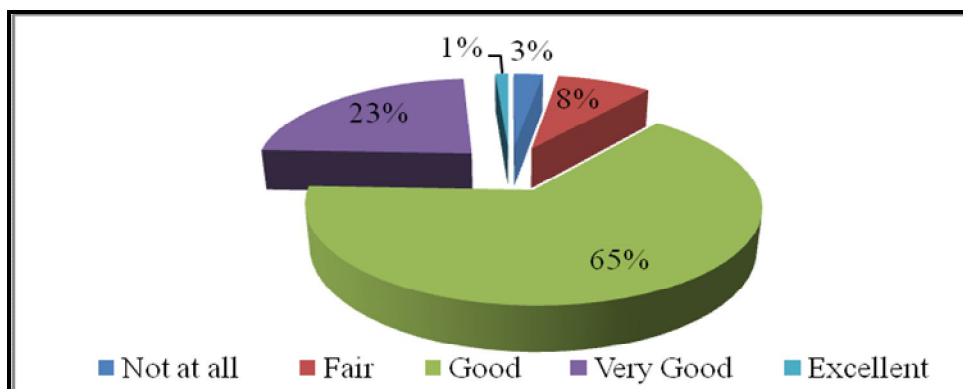
The study adopted descriptive cross-sectional survey design. The design adopted was appropriate because it enabled the researcher to collect information on the subject of study in its current state, Kothari, (2008). It also gathered extensive amount of information for large groups of individuals in short time span. The design is also concerned with describing the characteristics of an event, community or region, providing data about the population or item being studied by only describing the who, what, how, when and where of a situation at a given time and providing a systematic description that is as factual and as accurate as possible, Amin, (2005). The study also employed both qualitative and quantitative approaches/methods. The instruments for primary data collection were questionnaires and interview while secondary sources included; Education reports, Journals and text books. Data was analyzed using frequencies and percentages. The study was conducted in four (04) out of the nine (09) Districts of Teso, in North Eastern Uganda. Both stratified and purposive sampling methods were used to arrive at 349 respondents who participated in the study from a sample of 384 obtained from a target population of 100,000 giving a response rate of 90.89%. The population comprised of District Education Officer, District/Inspector of Schools, Teachers, Community Development Officers, Students, Opinion Leaders/Religious Leaders, Civil Society Organizations' Leaders, Political leaders and general public from Serere, Soroti, Kumi and Ngora districts. These were chosen because they are key stakeholders and possess special knowledge in the study making their contribution very valuable.

4.0 Results and Discussions

This section presents data collected from the empirical study; data analysis, interpretation and discussion. The study established that 223 (63.9%) of the respondents were male and 126 (36.1%) were female. This could be because; male respondents were most willing to participate in the study, they hold leadership positions and are the majority teachers in Uganda as compared to female respondents. Therefore, in order to address the research objective; the findings of the study are presented according to the stated objectives in part 1.3 above.

4.1 The Effectiveness of Students' Attendance Monitoring Tool in Uganda

Figure 1: The Pie-Chart Showing Respondents Opinion on Attendance Monitoring Tool

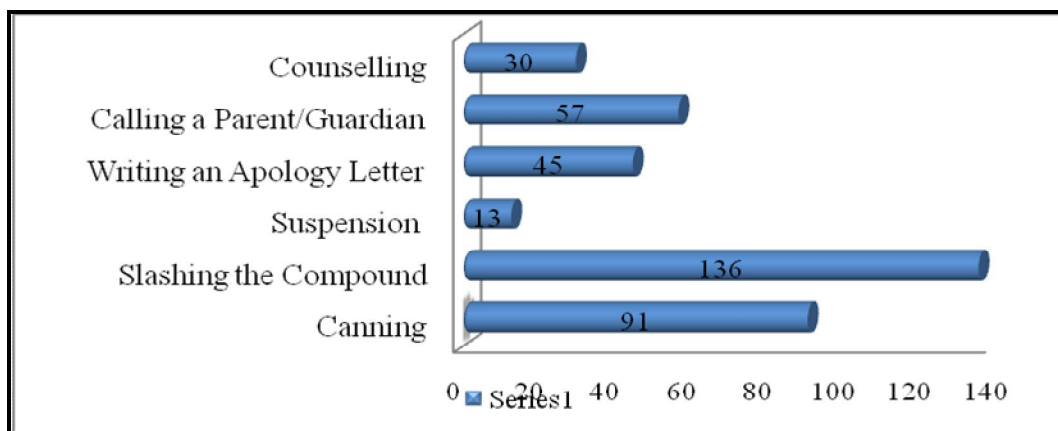


Source: Primary Data, November, 2014

During the study, the researcher found that all the sampled schools in the respective districts use class registers for roll call. The register is picked by the class monitor/captain from the office in the morning and afternoon; after the roll all it is returned. The register is managed by the class teacher who in turn report to the Director of Studies. The verification is done by head counting and physical check by the Master/Mistress on Duty (MOD) and the Director of Studies. On investigating on the effectiveness of the monitoring tool, the findings as thought by 89% of the respondents who says the monitoring tool is effective (good) while 11% says the tool is not effective. The tool is used to monitor the number of students present and learning. The data gathered is used for accountability for both the teacher(s) and student(s). On the side of the teacher(s) in some schools, teacher attendance is used to determine the Parent Teachers' Association (PTA) emolument that is everyday missed by the teacher, the emolument is deducted until the compensation is done. This time around, students monitor their teachers' class attendance. The system has influenced significantly the work of teachers in the classroom while on the side of students, attendance is attached to students' individual responsibility; for instance if a student absent him/her self, it is the students' responsibility to catch up any missing work. This has improved on student attendance in schools because sometimes a student is asked to repeat a year in case s/he has more that 10% of excused or unexcused absenteeism.

4.2 The Methods/ Approach of Dealing with Unexcused Absentee Students in Uganda

Figure 2: The Bar Chart Showing the Methods/ Approach of Dealing with Unexcused Absentee Students in Uganda



Source: Primary Data, November, 2014

Slashing the Compound

The majority of schools representing 136 (36.6%) always give the absentee students to slash, sweep and dig the anti-hills in the school compound. According to the respondents, the majority argued that cleaning the compound is the only available work since they can do it the time they are free from classes. In most of the schools, there are ground workers (supportive staff/non teaching staff) whose work is to manage the sanitation of the school. In addition, some schools have bought/hired mowers and stopped students from slashing with the reason that, students come to study and not to slash the compound. This has also helped in improving the performance of students, sporting activities and enrollment in the school.

Canning

From figure 2, the study findings show that many schools still use canning as approach to deal with absentee students as supported by 91 (24.5%) of the respondents. This act inflicts pain to students and it is one of the forms of corporal punishment (any punishment in which physical force is used and intended to cause some degree of pain or discomfort, however light).

Parents are very negative about this approach; some have ended up fighting the teacher(s) for humiliating their children and there are several reports in police regarding the practice. This implies the affected student is more likely to lose interest and develop a negative attitude toward schools and learning; hate a subject or teacher and will discourage other students from joining the school more so if the performance is poor. This result is in contrary with UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), 1990 Article 37 requires states to ensure that *"no child shall be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment."* Furthermore, the CRC states that; disciplinary action in schools should be administered in a manner that respects the child's human dignity. However, CRC does not specify what discipline techniques schools/parents should use, but it strongly supports schools/parents in providing guidance and direction to their children.

Calling a Parent/ Guardian

More than a tenth i.e. 57 (15.3%) of the respondents in the surveyed schools involve parents when dealing with absentee students. According to the respondents, they claimed that if the parent or guardian fails to notify the school about the frequent absenteeism of his/her child, the school/ head-teacher will send a letter to the parent(s) to notify them of their child's absence. This is done to bring cooperative effort between students, parents and staff. When parents or staff members are concerned about students, it will increase student achievement level while reducing the dropout rate. These finding rhythms well with NCLB belief that; high quality education cannot exist without parental involvement. Therefore, schools should always encourage parents to attend school Annual General Meeting (AGM), Parents and Teachers' Associations (PTA) meetings, be involved in students' discipline and other activities at the school.

Writing an Apology Letter

In the districts surveyed, 45 (12.1%) of the respondents states that students in their schools are punished by writing apology letters. Student(s) write a letter of apology explaining why s/he was absent. The approach is good for reflection, self-evaluation and will put the student in alert position since s/he has already made a commitment of not being deliberately being absent.

Guidance and Counseling

This exploratory study also found out that 30 (8.1%) surveyed schools use guidance and counseling as appropriate method of dealing with the absentee students. Since corporal punishment was abolished in all schools in Uganda, the Ministry of Education and Sports highly recommends guidance and counseling as an alternative discipline intervention. However, all the surveyed schools lack qualified guidance and counseling personnel. These schools depend highly on the services of Senior Woman and Man teachers who have no specialist/sufficient trainings and time in guiding and counseling students since they are loaded with normal class workload. Thus, career guidance at the secondary education level is limited, which results in students not being able to link the usefulness of the material they are learning to their future lives, career prospects and can lead to dropping out since they lack of motivation.

Suspension

The study explored on the forms of punishments given to unexcused absentee students and found that suspension is being used by some schools as thought by 13 (3.3%) of the respondents. Suspension means students are removed from school temporarily for a specific period of time. A student(s) may be suspended for a period of time ranging from one school day to 20 school days; under this a student(s) cannot take part in school activities or events while suspended. A student(s) is suspended after progressive discipline has already been tried and the student is not reforming to all disciplinary actions.

4.3 The Challenges of Dealing with Absentee Students in Uganda

Here, the data have been analyzed using percentages analysis of the responses of the subject on the major challenges of dealing with absentee students in secondary schools in Uganda.

Figure 3: The Table Showing the Major Challenges of Dealing with Absentee Students

S/N	Responses	Frequency	Percentage Frequency
1	Interruption of Lessons	179	51.29
2	Students being hostile/belligerent to Teachers	87	24.93
3	Parents defending their Children	83	23.78
TOTAL		349	100

Source: Primary Data, November, 2014

Interruption of Lessons

Over half 179 (51.3%) of the respondents agreed that interruption of lessons is the major challenge in dealing with absentee students. Absentee students disrupt the learning experiences of other students in the school hence it affect the school's ability to provide effective educational services. This will increased workload for teachers, forcing them to teach on non-school days such as, during weekends, during vacations and on public holidays. This finding concur with Oghuvbu, (2002) study which states that, absenteeism results into disruption in class when absentees return, affect the behavior of other students, difficulty in keeping accurate records, reduced ability to meet instructional targets and damaged school reputation.

Students being hostile/belligerent to Teachers

The study established one of the major challenges in dealing with absenteeism students is; students being hostile or belligerent as agreed by 87 (24.9%) of the respondents. One of the respondents emphasized during the study that, if a student has certain expectations about what they are going to be doing in a class or how they should be treated, and these expectations are violated, then they might be belligerent or hostile. According to students, they attributed their action to the discriminatory practices of the teachers such as verbal abuse; given to dig anti-hills in the compound, cleaning the school, and being given corporal punishment. This could results to gaps in communication between the school administration, parents, teachers and students.

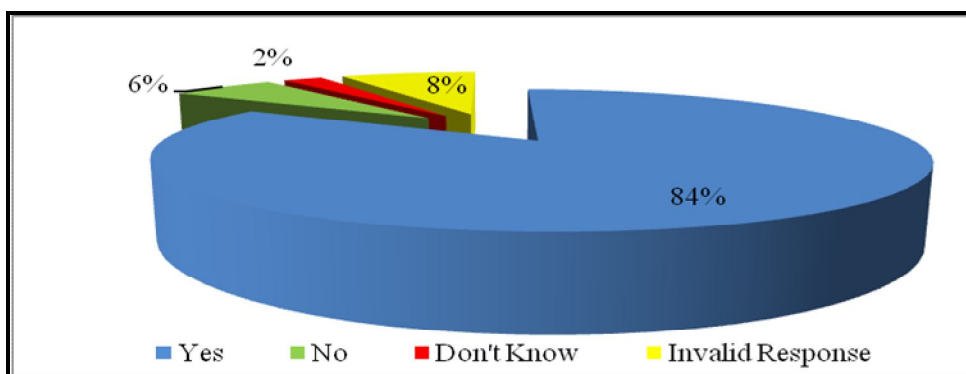
Parents defending their Children

During the study, 23.8% of the respondents acknowledged that parents always tend to defend their children whenever they are absent from school since they are in most cases responsible for the unexcused absenteeism of their children. When the school administration realizes that the particular student is frequently absent, students' parent/guardian is called to meet the Head-teacher or Director. After that, both a parent and student are given to sign a written pledge not to repeat the offence; a student is suspended for at least one week and s/he will receive any test administered during the suspension period; and absent days will be noted in the students' report card.

4.4 The Relationship between Students' Absenteeism and Academic Performance

In the third objective, the study sought to establish the relationship between students' absenteeism and academic performance of students in Universal Secondary Education schools in Uganda. Figure 4 provides the statistical glance to the results.

Figure 4: The Pie-Chart Showing the Relationship between Students' Absenteeism and Academic Achievement



Source: Primary Data, November, 2014

The statistical results above indicate the respondents' level on the relationship between students' absenteeism and academic achievement, 84% (292) agreed, 6% (21) disagreed while 10% (36) had no idea of relationship between the variables.

This implies that, students' attendance is a pre-requisite to student's academic performance. Students with higher rates of attendance have greater learning gains and lower rates of repetition as compared to the absentee or tyrant students. Therefore, most students with frequent absenteeism always failed examinations and wait to be pushed to the next level because of automatic promotion. In Uganda a student under Universal Secondary Education (USE) is not suppose to repeat a class because it is a waste of government money and students' time. It is true, class repetition is costly but its impact on students is more burdensome to the teachers. According to the findings, such students when pushed to the next class they still perform poorly with average marks of 30% and as a result they dropped out of school claiming that; "My Head is Heavy" implying that s/he is dense/dull and cannot continue with studies anymore.

Such decisions are supported by parents since they supplement on family labour force and after a period of one or two term(s) they are recommended to marry; that is why Uganda has a very high youth unemployment not because there are few jobs but it is also attributed by having too many out of school youth which have got no employable skills. This study is very consistent with many other studies conducted for instance, Redick & Nicoll, (1990) studies found that, students who attend school regularly have higher grades than those students with high absences while Wheat, (1998), findings upholds the view that; the connection between attendance and achievement is grounded in common sense. Unless a student attends, he or she will have difficulty learning what is taught in school.

4.5 The Effects of Students' Absenteeism

This section presents the effects of student's academic performance and the performance of the school. The results were obtained through indebt analysis of the questionnaires responses from the sampled population.

Figure 5.1: Table Showing the Effects of Students' Absenteeism on Academic Performance

S/N	Response	Frequency	% Frequency
1	Leads to poor Academic Performance	262	40.06
2	Students Drop out of school	125	19.11
3	Graduating half-baked students	100	15.19
4	Poor Curriculum Coverage	93	14.22
5	Loss of interest in Learning	74	11.31
TOTAL		654	100.0

Source: Primary Data, November, 2014

Leads to poor Academic Performance

The study findings revealed that; 262 (40.1%) of the respondents agreed that students' absenteeism leads to poor academic performance. Regardless of the IQ, a student will miss what is being taught, fail examinations and then is made to repeat. In addition, a student misses vital lesson segment taught on a particular topic and fails to follow the consequent lessons taught. Therefore, student absenteeism is connected with negative long-term consequences such as poor academic performance and being less likely to undertake further education or training.

This research findings is in agreement with Lotz & Lee, (1999) who says that, acts of delinquency are more frequent among students, who exhibit low grades, have spotty attendance, and later on drop out of school.

Students Drop out of School

Students' absenteeism can also lead to an increased risk of dropping out as thought by 225 (19.1%) respondents during the study. Frequent student absenteeism might make children more likely to avoid school and less likely to want to go to school. Furthermore, when students experience school failure, they become frustrated with lack of achievement and end up alienated and experience exclusion leading to eventual dropout. Students' 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. This conforms to Komakech & Osuu, (2014) study which shows that at least 9.2 billion shillings annually of tax payers and donor funds translating to about 27.6 billion shillings in the last three years (2011-2013) were lost from students drop out and absenteeism.

Graduating Half-Baked Students

Another effect of students absenteeism is that, it leads to graduation of half-baked students as supported by 100 (15.2%) of the respondents during the study. These students do not have sufficient coverage of the syllabus leaving them with content/knowledge gaps and they lack self-confidence, making them not able to express themselves properly. In most cases, they are engaged in examination malpractices because of fear of failure and job protection on the side of the teachers. Examination malpractice has adverse effects on the student, community, family, school, and the government because such students, lack understanding of even small issues which one expects them to be aware of even in areas they tell you they are acquainted with.

Poor Curriculum Coverage

Another effect of students' absenteeism on academic performance is poor curriculum coverage contributing to 93 (14.2%) of the respondents views.

Therefore, students' absenteeism is one of the factors that could be driving low pass rates for the secondary education level. Sleigh & Ritzer, (2001) says students who miss classes lose the benefit of having this application explained and demonstrated to them. The study also revealed that not all teachers always manage to teach the full curriculum for a given term and yet the final examination takes into account all the topics within the curriculum. The incomplete teaching time is a decisive factor, which impacts negatively on students and school results. This is due to teachers and pupils' absences for instance, in some schools teachers begin their classes ten minutes after the normal starting time with addition ten minutes taking class roll call which eventually lead to the reduction of effective teaching time in a year.

Loss of Interest in Learning

Most students come to school ready and willing to learn. But in contrary absentee students have low interest in learning as compared to the regular students as supported by 74 (11.3%) of the research findings. Therefore, it is important to note that, if a student feels alienated and disengaged from the learning contexts in school, his or her potential to master fundamental skills and concepts is likely to be reduce. They struggle to understand a topic or keep up with what is being taught. According to Marburger, (2001) the author claims that; absences create a dead, tiresome, unpleasant classroom environment that makes students who come to class uncomfortable and the teacher irritable.

Figure 5.2: Table Showing the Effects of Students' Absenteeism on School Performance

S/N	Response	Frequency	% Frequency
1	Affects the school image	354	59.10
2	Lower the students' enrollment	152	25.38
3	Transfer of Students by parents	51	8.51
4	Wastage of Teachers' and Administrators' time	31	5.18
5	Affects the University/Tertiary enrolment	11	1.84
TOTAL		599	100.0

Source: Primary Data, November, 2014

Affects the School Image

The majority of the respondents claimed that students absenteeism has the greatest effect on school image as thought by 354 (59.1%) of the respondents. The image of the school(s) is affected because the school will lose finances from students which have left for another school, lower the school national and international ranking level because of underperformance which will affect the leadership and education systems as a whole. Addressing this challenge is very difficult and requires improvements across an entire education system.

Lower the Students' Enrollment

More than a quarter of the respondents representing 152 (25.3%) agreed that students' absenteeism affects the performance of the school by lowering the students' enrolment in the school. This low enrollment will lead to smaller class sizes which educators and policymakers have long argued that smaller classes are better because it increase teachers' attention for each student/ more tailored teaching approaches, less class disruptions and increased student participation hence better results. In contrary, during the study the researcher found that schools/classes with fewer students had high failure rate as compared to high sized schools/classes. This implies that there is no relationship between class size and students performance. In addition, small sized schools/classes have greater cost in hiring teachers.

Transfer of Students by Parents/Guardians

From figure 5.2, 51(8.5%) of respondents highlighted that students absenteeism leads to the transfer of students by their parents/guardians. This reason is supported by one of the basic reform principles of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001. The NCLB Act holds educators accountable by giving parents more control over their children's education. When schools fail, the law gives parents a number of important options, including school choice. In choosing the new school, parents look at the school performance in national examinations, quality of teachers, smaller classes, parent-teacher partnership, and a challenging environment that sets high academic goals and expectations by employing unique learning opportunities, including hands-on learning experiences, class discussions, group projects, and field trips. This act of withdrawing a student(s) from school will create competition and an incentive for schools to improve.

Wastage of Teachers' and Administrators' Time

During the study, 31 (5.18%) of the respondents agreed that students' absenteeism leads to a wastage of teachers' and administrators time. They get involved in repeating the same topic taught, parading with students in picking rubbish/trash outside, attending to the indiscipline cases, and this results in loss of valuable teaching and learning time. According to Lalek, (1995) and Rumberger, (1997) the authors also claim that student absenteeism causes rework and waste time for teachers.

Affects the University/Tertiary Enrolment

Student absenteeism deters students' academic progress and limits many opportunities for the students' educational and career paths. Therefore, regular absenteeism higher the risk of dropping out school and as your child learns out of school behavior s/he will see education as a waste of time and resources (financial resources). This will affect the university or tertiary education enrollment as thought by 1.84% respondents. This implies that, secondary education serves as a link between the higher secondary stage and university or tertiary education. Thus, a child's future depends a lot on attendance received at the secondary level.

5.0 Conclusion

School attendance is part of the students' academic success and parents have the responsibility to ensure that their children are punctual and regular in schools. The study has shown that attendance improves the academic performance of the student/schools, builds the students' social and emotional skills, improves on students' knowledge and employment skills, and reduces the risks of dropout. Therefore, to support students academically in and out of school; administrators, teachers, and families need to have a shared understanding of their children's learning and work as partners to meet their academic and social-emotional needs.

6.0 Recommendations

Since the introduction of Universal Secondary Education in Uganda, students' attendance and performance has become a problem.

Therefore, this empirical study presents the most effective and promising interventions strategies that the Government of Uganda with support from development partners through the Ministry of Education and Sports would employ to improve school attendance in secondary schools:

Zero Tolerance to Student Absenteeism

The Ministry should put strict policy of “*Zero Tolerance to Student Absenteeism*” across the country in order to address the current students’ absenteeism of 23.2% and the escalating annual dropout of over 10% USE schools’ students in Uganda. This will reduce on teachers’ absenteeism, improve the quality of education, save the tax payers money, enhance the student’s performance, and improve on school’s reputation and ranking. Furthermore, the policy must make sure that children are enrolled and attend schools on all school days unless there is a reasonable excuse; in that case schools are mandated to monitor attendance of students and follow up with parents/guardians any unexplained absences.

Parental Involvement and Participation

Parental involvement and participation is very critical to students’ attendance and academic performance. Parents are key players in the development of a child’s character, confidence, motivation and personal responsibility for schoolwork. This involvement contributes positively to the child’s academic progress, wellbeing, and help children to build social and emotional skills such as communication, teamwork and resilience. However, National Parent Teacher Association defines parental involvement as the participation of parents in every facet of the education and development of children from birth to adulthood. The involvements therefore, include but not limited to; knowing what your child is studying at school, looking at their assignment books, asking what they discussed, get ideas and tricks from teachers to help their children from home, and have overall decisions about children’s education, health and wellbeing in order to influence children’s lives.

Developing Students’ Mentoring Programme

Mentoring systems for students help at risk students to improve on school attendance, academic performance, learn pro-social skills, establish goals, and increase self-esteem.

Furthermore, mentoring can strengthen the bond among schools, families, and community members. Therefore, to ensure the success of the program, a suitable mentor must be matched with a student need, and mentors must be appropriately recruited from teachers, credible leaders, older peers and members from reputable clubs such as Rotary Club and Lions Club among others.

Rich School Programmes

There is need to improve on more in-school as well as after school programs such as; Patriotic Clubs; HIV/AIDS Clubs; Music Dance and Drama Clubs; Debating and Writers Club in order to develop the students' writing, presentations and communication skills; Entrepreneurship Clubs so as to introduce students to business skills; and Environmental Clubs among others. These clubs should focus on problems that affect students and their community. Such programs can also be used as avenues of educating parents about the importance of exposing their children to more positive and educational aspects.

Effective Guidance and Counseling

Early student intervention through guidance and counseling will show an interest in your child's education, encourage your children to resolve issues that may make them want to stay home, and help better the chance for student success. Therefore, to have effective and counseling programs, school administrators should identify the specific needs of the student, their family, and match interventions to those needs.

Good Communication

Good communication between parents and schools allows better coordination and will encourage attendance. Therefore, parents should inform the school with reason(s) if the child is to be absent and the school need to excuse the student for any reason given by the parent. This will encourage parents to visit schools and improve on the communication systems instead of a school calling (inviting) parents/guardians to provide an explanation for the absence.

Rewards for Students with Regular Attendance

The school management should collaborate with other education stakeholders to provide rewards such as scholarship to students with 99% attendance rate, certificates, gifts (scholastics material) and monthly reorganization at assemblies among others. These incentives will promote and maintain good attendance levels and academic performance of students/school.

Monitoring and Supervision

The Government through the Ministry of Education and Sports should create office for the Directorate of School Attendance in the country so as to beef up the monitoring and supervision of students and teachers in schools. The monitoring will provide up to date data and challenges in every school which will enabled the Directorate to develop appropriate measure to curb the specific challenge hence enhancing students' performance and quality education.

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