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## **Students' Socio-Economic Factors Influencing Learners' Absenteeism in Primary Schools of Oldonyiro Division, Isiolo County**

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### **Abstract**

Education is viewed as a prime mover of the financial improvement of nations and societies to the extent of 20% of the Domestic Gross Product. This is particularly so, when the learners consistently attend classes, as well as, families give them the necessary push. However, learners' absenteeism adversely influences their scholarly accomplishments. The purpose of this study was to determine the effect of students' socio-economic factors on learners' absenteeism in primary schools of Oldonyiro Division, Isiolo County. The study utilized descriptive survey research design. Questionnaires were used to draw information from teachers. The findings revealed that poor performance in school and indiscipline cases among the learners were the main causes of absenteeism and therefore, raise a serious alarm on absenteeism in the division. The study concluded that students' factors have a great influence on pupils' absenteeism. The study recommended that the pupils should be encouraged to avoid absenteeism by creating awareness on importance of education, using role models from the society to enlighten the rest and finding or solving school challenges. This can be done through motivational talks organized by the school leadership in consultation with the parents and other stakeholders. In addition, pupils should be made aware of the need to be in school and the benefits and other skills they will acquire from learning. On the other hand, educational trips and bench marking can assist in motivating the pupils to make education be part of them and hence, treasure it.

**Keywords:** *Students, Socio-Economic Factors, Absenteeism, Primary Schools*

## **1.0 Introduction**

Learners' absenteeism is not just a pointer of low academic accomplishment but additionally a solid marker of reduced social life achievement (Williams, 2010). Absenteeism makes it hard to create a strong establishment, regarding control and awareness of others' expectations. Along these lines, it prompts issues in work and teaching propensities in future (Inziani, 2013). This may encourage potential future outcomes, for example, joblessness or low salary and powerlessness to work at a normal employment (Gentle-Genitty et al., 2015).

In addition, as absenteeism increases, learners are likely to encounter mental issues, for example, melancholy, depression or other mental related issues. They may likewise display personal conduct standards, for example, getting to be engaged with cruelty in and out of school, adolescent pregnancies, quitting school and gaining destructive tendencies (Muiru, 2005). In the long run, learners' absenteeism in school is considered as an indicator of scholarly disappointment and prompts numerous other harmful effects. If no measures are taken, truancy might be the start of a procedure running to low academic achievement.

A study conducted in Turkey by Yildiz (2018) revealed that, learners' home condition is a factor leading to disappointment or accomplishment in learning endeavours and pupils were absent from school daily without valid reasons. Roby (2013) found that in Ohio State in USA, persistent absence in class was related to pupils' performance in school. In the Republic of Honduras, school absenteeism increased with an increase in secondary school years (Ashida, 2015).

In Africa, various studies have revealed that pupils' absenteeism negatively affect their academic achievement. A comparative study on academic performance in Zambia observed that absenteeism was one of the major factors contributing to pupils' poor academic achievement (Mutesa & Nchito, 2013). Chimombo (2005) also observed that learners who were absent from school performed poorly than those who regularly attended school.

In Kenya, studies have shown that learners' absenteeism is a problem which negatively affects their academic achievement. A study by Matage and Begi (2017) on socio-economic factors causing absenteeism from school negatively affects academic achievement. The study also found that pupils who were persistently absent from school underachieved and dropped out of school. One way the Kenyan Government can accomplish Vision 2030 is to put more emphasis on fundamental education since the main limitation in accomplishing the social pillar is learner's absenteeism and school dropouts. This is regardless of the government's immense capacity in giving free primary and secondary education. As an outcome, a substantial measure of this utility was observed on the learners who drop out of school and those who absent themselves from school for any other reasons. This is wastage of the resources in light of the fact that they will not have attained the learning and abilities expected of them. While there has been increased primary school enrolment in Kenya as of late, the worry right now is with respect to the inner ability of schooling, especially the capacity to convince learners to fully participate on daily class attendance until when they accomplish their yearly grade education.

### **1.1 Statement of the Problem**

With the realization of the benefits to attain the goals of Basic Education for All (BEFA) through the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and subsequent Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), many governments globally made a commitment to expand and ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning educational opportunities for all children. This is in response to international conventions which recognized education as a necessity and a fundamental human right. Education is a key element in the socioeconomic development required to improve quality of life in Kenya.

Despite the introduction of free primary education, primary school enrollment and attendance levels in the country remain low (King et al., 2015). The major drawback in attaining universal free education and Kenya Vision 2030 is the rising cases of school absenteeism and drop-outs. Absenteeism not only affects the academic progress of the learner, but also influences the in-class planning of teachers and at the same time the motivation of the other learners in the class (Sahin et al., 2016). Schools in the division have been experiencing rampant cases of learners' absenteeism, hence, lowering the general academic performance in the area. According to Reid (2005) absenteeism in primary schools takes a number of forms and the literature offer some insights into definitions such as non-attendance, defined as persistent, habitual and unexplained absenteeism of learners from school. Learners' absenteeism is linked to high failure rate and a direct result could be a decline in the culture of teaching and learning experienced in our schools. However, learner absenteeism has over the years received very slight consideration and has gotten little attention compared to other educational studies (Mboweni, 2014). Thus, the research study sought to establish problems pertaining to learners' absenteeism and to address this knowledge gap by finding out the possible factors influencing persistent learners' absenteeism in primary schools of Oldonyiro Division, Isiolo County.

### **1.2 Objective of the Study**

The study sought to determine the effect of students' socio-economic factors on learners' absenteeism in primary schools of Oldonyiro Division, Isiolo County.

## **2.0 Theoretical Framework**

### **2.1 Voluntary and involuntary theory**

The dominant model of employee absenteeism in the academic literature is that of Brooke (1986). This model incorporates both voluntary and involuntary absenteeism and was based on a review of over 100 studies of absenteeism. Briefly stated, the model of Brooke (1986) posits that learners' school attendance is largely a function of two important variables, a learner's motivation to attend and a learner's ability to attend. Although not explicitly stated by them, the determinants of attendance motivation appear to relate to "voluntary" absenteeism, whereas the ability to attend variables seems to refer to "involuntary" absenteeism. The theory was applicable theory in this research as it links absenteeism with factors such as chronic illness, indiscipline and all other student factors. The choice to attend school from this theory can therefore be associated with a learner being voluntary or involuntary absent from school (Gül & Gunes, 2009).

### **3.0 Empirical Review**

#### **3.1 Concept of Absenteeism and its Measurement.**

There are different meanings of absenteeism as specified by different studies. Juliana et al. (2019) defined school absenteeism as "not going to class with or without a true reason". Özbas (2010) contends that absenteeism ought to be expressed as "being truant without reason" and thought to be a serious issue. Since there is a variety of fundamental directions and the meaning of "pardon" shifts all over the globe, it is hard to completely conceptualize what is viewed as absenteeism without "pardon" as an excuse. Juliana et al. (2019) clarified that it takes after: "with or without a substantial reason revealed by the learner not to be at school in a particular school day". A pupil may miss class because of medical issues, family trip, while another might be absent because of no acceptable reason at all.

In the literature, there are numerous definitions inside the extent of absenteeism. For instance, Lannegrand-Willems et al. (2012) defined absenteeism as, "missing school with or without a reason by a learner". Robinson (2009) considered absenteeism as "not going to school with or without a reason, miss a few classes or being late for class". The truth of the matter is that the learners who miss going to school with an excuse, for example, pupils avoiding school for quite some time because of medical problems, experiencing hard moments in adjusting when they come back to class, may build up a tendency of absenteeism without any justification.

In the long run, when a learner is absent from school with or without a sound reason, he/she is excluded from the extent of the associated school benefits and therefore, concern in learners' study practices are not attained. As Lannegrand-Willems (2012) observed, when absenteeism is uncommon, it is not considered to demonstrate a serious problem to the learners. On average, over 40% absenteeism during a school calendar year is considered to demonstrate a problem to the learners to achieve their intended goals while in school. Looking at the absenteeism inside a school day is additionally essential. A few learners may just miss a couple of lessons, others may miss a whole day, while others may miss days, weeks or even months from attending school. The term and order of absenteeism (with or without sound justification) differs from one nation to another. In any case, the basic perspective is that, as the learners' absenteeism expands, presentation to chances of associated effects would equally rise. School refusal is that learners decline to go to class even notwithstanding influence and reformatory measures from the parents, guardians and the school administration. These learners stay at home with the knowledge of their parents or guardians (Mbugua et al., 2012). Many anticipate, as demonstrated, that school refusal is an imperative measurement comprehended by the learners (Dube & Orpinas, 2009). School absenteeism is when pupils are missing from school in light of the fact that their folks keep them at home or far from school (Cunningham, 2005).

It is critical to recognize the diverse measurements of absenteeism in handling the issue since they will require distinctive interventions to correct the impacts created. Absenteeism would therefore, be measured by number of days a learner misses school in a week and the days of the week in which the learner consistently misses school. Similarly, academic performance at school will tell a lot about school absenteeism of a learner. Application of the Likert scale, a rate of "4" and "5" demonstrated a measure of seriousness of absenteeism in the division. In American context, starting from the kindergarten, learners who attend school regularly score higher on tests than their peers who are frequently absent (Ready, 2010). It is therefore, seen that learners who attend school regularly have higher academic success, standardized test

scores, graduation averages, as well as, university entrance rates and job opportunities (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). Compared to their peers, learners who do not attend school regularly have lower academic performance, limited future employment opportunities and will experience social and emotional problems in adulthood (Askeland et al., 2015).

### **3.2 Student factors**

Student factors are as a result of students' self-will. A portion of the components that are in the students control are unending illnesses, dissatisfaction levels, indiscipline and working in the private homes and organizations for money. For instance, absenteeism is the choice of the learner to stay away from school with or without parental knowledge. A few learners admitted their absenteeism from school was their own choice since they are sent to school by their parents or guardians, yet they do not go but rather avoid attending to their classes (Muiru, 2005).

Learner's individual characteristics may influence school absenteeism. Research demonstrates that absenteeism increased by rank as learners' progress and most habitually occurs at age of 15 years and below (Roby, 2013). Truant learners typically do not feel safe at school. They feel academically or socially insufficient. They consider attendance of classes to be exhausting and their positive encounters at school are not as much as for the individuals (learners) who go to class consistently (Juliana et al., 2019). In this regard, self-esteem, certainty, focus, self-management and social aptitudes of these learners are low. They curiously observed that a few learners miss school since they considered the courses troublesome, while others are truant because they discover the courses to be dull and exhausting. They feel feeble in school and assume that other fellow learners do not regard or acknowledge them as capable of doing well in school (Barlow & Fleischer, 2011).

According to Gentle-Genitty et al. (2015), several factors contribute to school absenteeism among learners. These include; not having any desire to get up early in the morning, avoiding strict discipline and school regulations, going to bed late, not finishing homework in time, poor academic performance, transfers to other schools, feeling outrageous on education assessment, feigning sickness, and having friends who are frequently truant. Excessive participation in school entertainment and sports exercises or competitions, and associating unnecessarily with their classmates outside school, are additional factors among the reasons for learners' absenteeism. There are also some reasons that lead learners to skipping school, for example, going to see friends at places of their residence and not caring about going to school, going to forests to smoke drugs and other substances, as well as, heading off to the waterway for swimming. Some pupils are known to participate in playing cash football and setting off to amusement shops and other social halls (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012).

Pubescence in young girls begins at around 11 years of age and in young boys it commences at around 13 years of age, this beginning of a new stage in life may contribute to school absenteeism (Jewitt & Ryley, 2014). This is because the young learners begin to experience extreme times in which they attempt to be autonomous and discover their own characters. The capability of the learners to carry out wrongdoing, depending on viciousness, partaking in the posse exercises, drug and substance abuse are comparatively higher in this period (Gül & Günes, 2009). In the event that the learner cannot find a role model (a teacher or somebody who will influence him/her to love school) in the society at this period which constitutes the defining moment of his/her life, it may create unwillingness to go to the school and this therefore, influences school participation among the learners.

#### **4.0 Methodology**

The study utilized descriptive survey research design since a sample out of a target population was used. Questionnaires were used to draw information from teachers. The questionnaires were delivered and administered to the subjects by the researcher. The data collected was analyzed using descriptive statistics such as means and standard deviations.

#### **5.0 Results and Discussion**

##### **5.1 Pupils’ Absenteeism**

The purpose of the study was to investigate the social economic factors influencing learners’ absenteeism from school in the division. To achieve this, pupils with the problem of school absenteeism, day of the week pupils were always absent and the number of times per week they were absent from school was determined from the responses given by the pupils. The researcher recorded the data and Table 1 presents the results.

**Table 1: Number of Times Pupils were absent from School per Week**

<b>Number of Times</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Never absent	1	1.4
Once	18	25
Twice	35	48.6
Thrice	11	15.3
Four times	7	9.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>100</b>

As can be seen in Table 1, out of 72 class seven pupils 99% of them were absent from school for at least a week, depicting absenteeism to be a serious problem in the division. Most of the pupils who were absent from school were absent twice in a week implying that learner absenteeism from school was an issue in standard seven class in the division. This, in some way could be one of the reasons why learners’ academic performance was poor in primary schools in the division because of lack of fully participation in school activities.

The findings of this study were similar to those reported from a study done in Meru County by Nkanatha (2013) who 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 which could lead to poor academic performance.

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

**Table 2: Days Pupils were absent from School**

		Response	
		No.	Percentage
Days of the week always absent	Monday	14	19.7
	Tuesday	21	29.6
	Wednesday	12	16.9
	Thursday	5	7.0
	Friday	19	26.8
<b>Total</b>		<b>71</b>	<b>100</b>

The results show that most of the pupils were absent from school on Tuesdays and Fridays. The pupils were asked reasons why they were absent from school and the main reasons were: Pupils stayed at home to help their parents carry home chores during the market days; sickness; no electricity at home and feared reporting to school having failed to complete their homework; helping parents to look for water thus, spending a lot of time fetching water, therefore, ending up missing school; sometimes roads were impassable to get to school; poor performance at school; lack of school examination fees; teachers being unfriendly; and fear of being punished in school.

A study done by Matage and Begi (2017), on socioeconomic factors influencing absenteeism in lower primary schools in Masaba Sub-county in Nyamira County, also found out that most of the children were absent from school on Tuesdays and Fridays because they stayed at home to help their parents to carry goods to the market during the market day. In the Republic of Honduras, Ashida (2015) found that in one cohort, 43% of students missed 40 days of a schooling year.

### 5.2 Student factors

The objective of the study was to determine effects of student factors on learners' absenteeism in public primary schools in the information. The teachers were requested to state the extent to which student factors influence learners' school absenteeism. Their responses were recorded as follows. Nineteen (59.4%) teachers indicated that student factors influenced pupils' absenteeism to a great extent while 13 (40.6%) teachers affirmed that student factors influenced pupils' absenteeism to a little extent. This shows that student factors greatly influenced the pupils' absenteeism, implying ultimately learners' individual attributes affected school participation. The teachers were also requested to rate the features of absenteeism using a Likert scale of 1-5 where, 1 represented "not at all", 2 represented "to a little extent", 3 represented "to a moderate extent", 4 represented "to a great extent" and 5 represented "to a very great extent" on the influence of various attribute division. The responses were as shown in Table 3.



**Table 3: Student Factors that Influence Learners’ Absenteeism as per the Teachers**

Attributes	Not at all	Little extent	Moderate extent	Great extent	Very great extent	Mean	Standard Deviation
Poor school performance	-	2	17	9	4	3.633	0.970
Chronic illnesses	2	6	13	4	7	3.111	0.963
Indiscipline	-	6	13	7	6	3.589	1.290
Negative school attitude	-	15	6	4	7	2.768	0.604
Peer influence	2	11	6	7	6	2.556	1.042

From the findings in Table 3, teachers indicated that to a great extent indiscipline influenced pupils’ absenteeism as shown by a mean of 3.589. Similarly, poor school performance as shown by a mean of 3.633. Chronic illnesses as illustrated by a mean of 3.111 had a moderate extent on learners’ absenteeism, negative school attitude as shown by a mean of 2.768 and peer pressure as depicted by a mean score of 2.556 influenced pupils’ absenteeism to a moderate extent, respectively. Poor school performance and indiscipline among the learners came out clearly to be of great influence on absenteeism. This demanded a great concern to the school management. Chronic illnesses, negative school attitude and peer influence affected absenteeism moderately and therefore, could be ignored as effect was very little. These findings correspond to Gül and Gunes (2009) who found out that several students admitted to truancy where they refer truancy as missing school with reason(s); they were sent to school by their parents or guardians, although they did not attend, but instead they detoured on their way to school.

From the findings, the common effects of students socio-economic factors influencing learners’ absenteeism in primary schools of Oldonyiro Division, Isiolo County were mainly; poor performance in school and indiscipline among the learners.

### 6.0 Conclusion

In relation to absenteeism, the study concluded that the rate of absenteeism from public primary schools is high in Oldonyiro Division, Isiolo County. Lack of school examination fees, unavailability of electricity in the area has a great influence on pupils’ absenteeism. Further, the study concluded that sometimes the impassable roads to get pupils to school, poor sanitation like toilet facilities and learners spending a lot of time looking for water influenced their rate of absenteeism to a great extent. Pupils helping their parents to perform house chores and their poor performance in school influenced their rate of absenteeism greatly. Further, the study concluded that poor performance in school and indiscipline cases among the learners were the main causes of absenteeism and therefore, raise a serious alarm on absenteeism in the division.

### 7.0 Recommendations

In relation to learners’ absenteeism in general, the study found that lack of school fees, as well as impassable roads influenced the rate of pupil’s absenteeism to a great extent. The study, therefore, recommends that parents should take a responsibility of paying school fees

for their children in time in order to make sure that they do not keep on moving up and down as they are sent home for school fees. The government should also support vulnerable parents via bursaries for the needy learners, as well as, making primary education completely free.

In relation to student factors, the study found that it had a significant influence on learners' absenteeism. The study therefore, recommends that the pupils should be encouraged to avoid absenteeism by creating awareness on importance of education, using role models from the society to enlighten the rest and finding or solving school challenges. This can be done through motivational talks organized by the school leadership in consultation with the parents and other stakeholders. In addition, pupils should be made aware of the need to be in school and the benefits and other skills they will acquire from learning. On the other hand, educational trips and bench marking can assist in motivating the pupils to make education be part of them and hence, treasure it.

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