

An Investigation of Influence of Student Absenteeism on Academic Performance of Secondary School Students in Nyandarua, Kenya

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Abstract

The influence of student absenteeism on academic performance has always concerned all stakeholders in education. Schools in Nyandarua, Kenya have recorded high levels of absenteeism in their institutions. This has made teachers wonder whether student absenteeism significantly influences student academic performance in their schools. This study targeted a population of 869 Form Three students from 11 schools sampled for the study. The sample was made up of 72 respondents, comprising of 54 students, 9 class teachers and 9 school counsellors. Stratified, simple random and purposive sampling methods were used to arrive at a representative sample of students who displayed chronic absenteeism during the previous school term. To validate the research instrument, piloting was carried out in two schools outside Nyandarua in order to avoid contamination of data. Cronbach's coefficient alpha at 0.79 was achieved as the reliability level of the instrument. Computer software *SPSS- v20* was used for the analysis of data for both descriptive and inferential statistics. Pearson's product moment was used for data analysis. All hypotheses were tested at 95% significance level. The results indicated that student absenteeism influenced academic performance although the significance level was not good enough to conclusively confirm that. However it was evident that, level of student absenteeism mattered in academic performance. The study recommended that, the government needed to meet the whole cost of education at secondary school, so that students may not have to absent themselves from school for whatever reason, thereby compromising their academic performance.

Keywords: Student Absenteeism, Academic Performance, Secondary School Students

Introduction

The influence of student absenteeism on academic performance has often been a subject of concern for schools for a long time. This has largely been because the teacher and the school authorities have always been under extreme pressure to complete a given syllabus and also to perform well in national examinations. They have therefore felt that, those students who absent themselves from regular instruction for whatever reasons, miss important knowledge and competencies, a fact that is bound to influence somehow their academic performance and achievements at the end of the course (Bantu, 2003).

Most researchers in educational institutions have concentrated on the relationship between other school characteristics like class size, teacher-student ratio, expenditure per student and differences between public and private schools and not academic performance (Staffolani, S. and Massimilano, B. (2002). Nevertheless it shouldn't be overlooked that a student will occasionally miss class due to sickness, lack of school fees, student delinquency and truancy, suspension, time out on games and sports or because of many other causes. Civil strife and natural disasters like tribal clashes, drought and famine will also often make a child miss school (Kipkemboi and Silsil, 2006).

Kenya has adopted universal primary education (U.P.E), and is striving to achieve education for all (EFA). Educations both in primary and secondary school levels have been decreed by the government to be free and compulsory. The children's act Cap. 114 of the laws of Kenya also provides for every child's unhindered access to quality education. This can largely be effective if the students' attendance of instruction is always guaranteed. If children will occasionally and in some cases chronically be absent from this instruction for whatever reasons, then the goals so sought by the students themselves and other stakeholders including the state, will not be met. It is therefore important that influence of absenteeism on students' academic performance be investigated and determined because students still miss school regularly in Nyandarua County.

Literature review

Student Absenteeism and Academic Performance

Glasure (2002), sought to find out whether class attendance influenced non-traditional students' academic performance of university students in the U.S.A. The study revealed a statistically significant and quantitatively larger relationship between days absent and academic performance. Days absent alone accounted for 44% of the variation in performance. The researcher finally concluded that class attendance mattered for improved academic

performance.

Similarly, Staffolani, S. and Massimilano, B. (2002), Chan et al (1997), Stanca (2004), Smidt (1983), Burts (1969); in studies on absenteeism and academic performance found out a significant positive relationship between class attendance and student academic performance of college students. These studies found out that absenteeism was the most direct cause for lack of good achievement in class and that low achievers had prolonged or short but frequent non-attendance of classes. These studies have however been done in developed countries and have focused on college students and therefore it would be interesting to find out whether absenteeism and academic performance would have the same relationship among secondary school students in a developing country like Kenya.

It is notable however, that Bantu (2003) has looked at the subject of student absenteeism in Kenyan schools. His focus was on the factors that influence absenteeism of students from school in primary schools. He cited among others; peer pressure, deficient and un-innovative curriculum, delinquency and parental poverty. His study did not bring out empirical evidence that show how absenteeism of students influenced their academic performance. Further the study did not determine the level of absenteeism that influences academic performance.

Another notable study in Africa was done in Senegal to determine the causes of absenteeism of primary school children. It was found out that among the causes of student absenteeism from school included indiscipline, parental poverty, and poor curriculum (Etsey, 2005). Like Bantu (2003), this study did not relate empirically the influence of student absenteeism to academic performance. These are some of the gaps in literature that informed this study. Figure 1 below was the conceptual framework that was used to conceptualize the variables at play and how they might have affected the study.

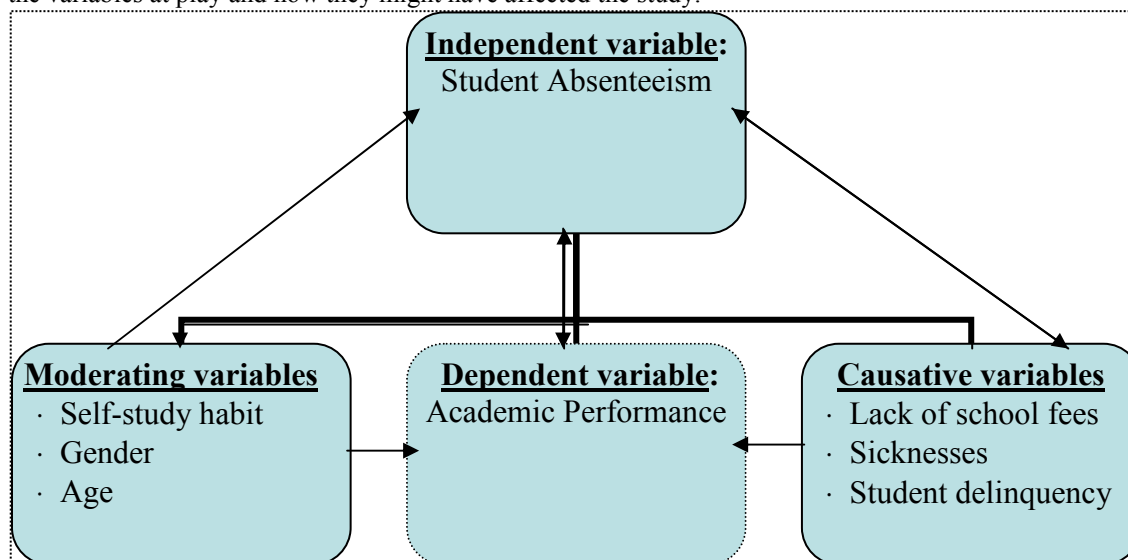


Figure 2: Conceptual Framework of the relationship between absenteeism and academic performance

Objective of the Study

The study had the following objective:

To investigate the influence of student absenteeism on academic performance of secondary school students in Nyandarua, Kenya

Hypotheses of the Study

The following hypothesis was formulated for the study;

Ho₁: There is no statistically significant influence of student absenteeism on academic performance at secondary school in Nyandarua, Kenya

METHODOLOGY

This study was grounded on mixed methodology; where both quantitative and qualitative data was collected, managed and analysed. Quantitative data included days students were absent in a school term and mean marks obtained by a student absentee at the close of the term; while qualitative data included students', teachers' and school counsellors' opinions on the influence absenteeism had on students' academic performance. Both quantitative and qualitative data was collected concurrently and processed through sequential explanatory strategy, where both quantitative and qualitative data is collected and analysed separately and finally interpretations are based on results of both procedures (Creswell, J. 2009).

During this process, the study employed the *ex-post- facto* research study design that examines the

effects of a naturalistically occurring phenomenon after changes have already occurred, rather than creating them for the study. The design was appropriate for investigating the relationship among variables that could not be manipulated by the researcher (Kathuri and Pals, 1993 and Mutai, 2000). Student absenteeism was a phenomenon which had already occurred in the schools under study and any effect or relationship among those variables pertaining to the study, could not be manipulated by the researcher in any way.

Simple random, stratified, proportionate and purposive sampling methods were used to ensure a fair distribution of respondents across the different schools in the population. Stratification was based on the type of school either large or small that formed the sampling frame. Random sampling was used to select the schools that participated in the study. Proportionate sampling was used to ensure that the sampled schools in each cluster were representative of the total form 3 population in the county, while purposive sampling was used to select only those cases that displayed chronic absenteeism.

The sample for this study comprised of 72 respondents- 54 students, 9 class teachers and 9 counsellors. 48 respondents were sampled from the large school cluster while 24 came from the small school cluster. Class teachers were advised to select an equal number of boys and girls in order to ensure gender equality for the study. The student sample consequently comprised of 27 boys and 27 girls.

Finally, quantitative data collected was analysed through, inferential statistics while qualitative data was analysed through descriptions and explanations. Finally, data was analysed with aid of Statistical Software Package for Social Sciences (*SPSS version 20*) and all tests were done at a significant level of $p=0.05$.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Hypothesis aimed at determining if there existed any influence of student absenteeism behaviour on academic performance of secondary school students. Selected factors related to student absenteeism were collected and explanations on their possible influence on academic performance secondary school were made. The hypothesis formulated for the study was;

H₀₁: There is no statistically significant influence of student absenteeism on academic performance at secondary school in Ol-kalou division.

To test this hypothesis a student was required to state how many days in a fortnight he or she was likely to be absent from school while the class teacher was required to give the total number of days the student was absent during the previous school term and his/her end of term results. This hypothesis was therefore tested in two parts;

(i) *There is no statistically significant influence of student absenteeism on academic performance based on number of days absent in a fortnight and the student's end of term mean marks.*

When days students were likely to be absent from school in a fortnight were correlated with the end of term mean marks using the Pearson's Product Moment correlation, a significant correlation of .287 was obtained at a significant level of 95% and consequently the null hypothesis was rejected. However this was a small significance and the study could not conclusively say that student absenteeism was significantly related to academic performance. Table 1 is the correlation between days absent in a fortnight and the student end of term marks.

Table 1: Correlation of days absent in a fortnight and end of term marks

		End of term marks
In a fortnight I am likely to be absent from school for --- days	Pearson Correlation	-.287(*)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.035
	N	54

** Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

When students were asked how many days they were likely to be absent in a fortnight, 42.6% said that they were usually absent for 4 days, 20.4% said 3 days, 16.7 gave 2 days, 13% had 5 days while 3.7% reported to be absent for 6 and a similar number for 7. The minimum number of days students reported to be absent in a fortnight were 2 while the maximum was 7. The mean number of days students reported they were absent in a fortnight was 3.78. This indicated that there was significantly high level of absenteeism among chronic absentees in secondary school in Nyandarua Kenya. In a school term of about 12 weeks or 60 days a chronic absentee student was likely on the average to be absent for 23 days. This accounted for 38% of the school term. Table 2 shows the frequency pattern of student absences in a fortnight.

Table 2: Frequencies pattern of students absences in a fortnight

Days absent in a fortnight	Frequency	Percent
2.00	9	16.7
3.00	11	20.4
4.00	23	42.6
5.00	7	13.0
6.00	2	3.7
7.00	2	3.7
Total (N)	54	100.0

The second part of the main hypothesis was tested used the following hypothesis;

(ii) *There is no statistically significant influence of student absenteeism on academic performance based on the total days a student was absent in a school term and his/her mean end of term mean marks.*

When the total number of days students were absent the previous school term was correlated to their corresponding end of term mean marks, again a significant correlation of .564 was obtained, at a significant level of 95% and consequently the null hypothesis was rejected. This reinforced the assumption that there could be some influence of student absenteeism on academic performance. Again just like in the first part of this hypothesis, some chronic absentees did not seem to follow the assumed trend; that those students who had fewer absences in a term were likely to perform better than those whose absenteeism was high. The affected student's academic performance could therefore have been influenced by other variables and not just absenteeism. While some had fewer absences but yet performed poorly, others had higher rates of absenteeism yet they scored highly. The discrepancies in their performance could be caused by other variables. Table 3 gives the correlation between total days absent in term to mean end of term marks.

Table 3: Correlation of total days absent in term to mean end of term marks

		No. of days absent in term
Mean end of term marks	Pearson Correlation	-.564(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
N		54

**** Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).**

In further examination of the hypothesis the researcher categorized the sampled students into 5 classes based on their academic performance at the end of the previous school term. This was necessary in order to find out what trend absenteeism had on academic performance based on the average days absent in the term and the end of term marks. Table 4 gives the category, marks interval, the frequency in the category and average absenteeism for the category.

Table 4: Categorized average performance and absenteeism

Category	Marks interval	Frequency	Average days absent in term
1	01- 100	4	20
2	101-200	24	18
3	201-300	15	13
4	301-400	5	14
5	Over 401	6	12
		54	

When academic performance as indicated by the end of term marks in column two was compared to the corresponding level of absenteeism for the category as indicated in the fourth column, it was found out that only the students in the 201-300 category of academic performance failed to conform to the general trend that showed: - the fewer the days students absented themselves from school the more likely they were to do better. This group comprised of 15 students which comprised only 27% of the sampled students and therefore it could be reasonably assumed that all other factors notwithstanding, student absenteeism influenced academic performance of students. Figure 13 shows end of term marks plotted against average days absent in term.

Conclusion

The research found out that the number of days a student absented himself/herself from school in a term influenced his/her academic performance at the end of the term, although the significance levels were not big enough to rule out other variables as the cause of the observations. However there was strong evidence to suggest that chronic absenteeism in fact influenced academic performance of students in secondary school in Nyandarua Kenya.

Recommendations

The study recommended that, it was important for the government to meet the whole cost of education and students welfare needs, so that they may not have to absent themselves from school for whatever reason, thereby compromising their academic performance.

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About the Author

Maina Kariba was born in Murang'a County, Kenya. He is a trained teacher and counsellor who has headed and taught in many schools in Kenya. He has Med. in Guidance and Counseling, from Egerton University and Bed; from the University of Nairobi. Maina Kariba is an Associate Faculty at Mount Kenya University, where he teaches Counselling Psychology and Education Courses. He also supervises degree students in research project work. He has authored a book on student absenteeism; ISBN- 978-38484-2559-4, available online at moorebooks.de.com. He has co-authored other books also available online. Maina is currently doing Phd.; (Course work and thesis) at Mount Kenya University in Thika, Kenya.

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