



Original Article

Teacher Absenteeism and Curriculum Implementation in Primary Schools in Nyamagana District in Mwanza Region of Tanzania

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23 May 2022 This study sought to explore teacher absenteeism and its impact on curriculum implementation in primary schools in Nyamagana District. The study employed a

Keywords: quantitative research approach and cross-sectional survey design. A sample of 3 head teachers, 1 Teachers Service Commission Officer, 30 teachers, and 56 pupils were involved in the study. A questionnaire was employed as a method of data collection with a Cronbach alpha coefficient of correction of 0.733, meaning that it was reliable. Descriptive statistics basically frequency and percentages, were used to analyse data with the aid of SPSS. The study found that teacher absenteeism is less experienced in the visited schools. The findings revealed that poor coverage of syllabi and indiscipline among pupils are some of the effects of teacher absenteeism which indicate that the tragedy accelerates poor curriculum implementation. Thus, the study recommends a suitable legal framework and incentives to improve teachers' welfare and hence limit teacher absenteeism.

Teacher Absenteeism, Curriculum Implementation, Primary School.

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INTRODUCTION

The role of teachers as academicians in a school is indispensable. For this reason, their absence jeopardises the teaching and learning process. Knoster (2016) argues that teachers are supposed to be in class to teach. Unfortunately, some of these teachers miss lessons taught hence inhibiting learners' success. Statistical data indicates that teacher absenteeism is experienced in both developed and developing countries. For example, the World Bank report found that one in four teachers in Indian primary schools was absent and one in two teachers was teaching on that particular working day (Saijhee, 2011). Similarly, Porres (2016), based on the 2013 US National Council on Teacher Quality Report, found that 44% of more than 200,000 teachers missed more than 10 days between the periods 2012 – 2013 school years. Statistics further maintain that the rate of teacher absenteeism in Bangladesh, Ecuador, India, Indonesia, Peru, and Uganda was reported to be 16%, 14%, 25%, 19%, 11%, and 27%, respectively (Guerrero, Leon, Zapata & Gueto, 2013).

Experience shows that the government of Tanzania employs the use of teacher attendance registers as one way to establish the presence and absence of teachers. The other strategies include encouraging teachers to ask permission before they absent themselves from school, stopping payments for teachers who are frequently absent from school unnecessarily, and dismissing these teachers from work. Despite these strategies, teacher absenteeism in the Tanzanian education system remains to be a silent challenge because there are no clear operational strategies against the issue. For example, teacher absenteeism is not discussed in the essential programs meant for the development of primary education in Tanzania, like the Educational Policy of 1995, Primary Education Development Program Phase I and II of 2002-2006 and 2007-2011, respectively. Thus, the strategies employed by the government of Tanzania to solve the problem seem to be not effective. In other words, they have become business as usual because teacher absenteeism is still experienced in public primary

schools. Studies on teacher absenteeism are also limited in the Tanzanian context. Therefore, this study examined the problem of teacher absenteeism in Tanzanian settings, and it concentrated on the reasons for the occurrence of such problem, its impact, and the promising ways forward to avoid unnecessary absenteeism among teachers in public primary schools in Nyamagana District.

Statement of the Problem

There is a slogan that teachers are second to none. Thus, unnecessary teacher absenteeism jeopardises the teaching and learning process, specifically in elementary schools. Enos and Francis (2016) argue that this level of education is critical in determining the excellent achievement of pupils when entering other levels of education and the realisation of the provision of quality education. In other words, if primary education is messed up, the whole education system will mess up, and education institutions will produce unqualified graduates who cannot transform society.

Evidence from literature indicates that teacher absenteeism results in reduced instructional time and wastage of financial resources by paying either irresponsible teachers or substitute teachers (Cheng, 2013, Hakielimu, 2010; Hanover, 2012; Uwezo, 2010; Yiga & Wandega, 2010). Studies further reveal that teacher absenteeism affects the job performance of the committed teachers by reducing their work morale, increasing pupils' misbehaviour like violence, truancy, and dropout (Alhassan & Adzalie-Menshah, 2010; Gyansah et al., 2014). In other words, teacher absenteeism results in poor curriculum implementation, and thus poor academic achievement is likely to be experienced among learners. In this regard, this study sought to investigate the effects of teacher absenteeism on curriculum implementation in public primary schools in Nyamagana District in the Mwanza region, from which promising recommendations to mitigate this phenomenon may be obtained.

Research Questions

To pursue this study, two research questions were involved, including: -

- What is the nature of teacher absenteeism in primary schools in Nyamagana District?
- What are the effects of teacher absenteeism on curriculum implementation in public primary schools in Nyamagana District?

The findings of this study have the potential to alert policymakers on the need to rethink and formulate new policies that favour teachers' needs. Furthermore, this study may potentially inspire political, government, and educational leaders to initiate a legal framework and guidelines for teacher employment that can effectively limit teacher absenteeism. In addition, the findings of this study may awaken pupils and the public to demand their right to quality education influenced by effective teaching. This study may also help primary school teachers formulate self-directed principles to limit their absence from the workplace. Finally, this study also adds new knowledge to the existing body of knowledge on teacher absenteeism and it is hoped that future researchers will find it a useful guide and a source of reference in conducting research on the related problem.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

This section presents an overview of the material and methods employed in the current study. It includes a study area, research approach and design, population and sample size, instrumentation, and data analysis.

Study Area

The current study involved three public primary schools located in the Nyamagana District of the Mwanza region, Tanzania. Nyamagana District is one of the seven (7) Districts of the Mwanza Region. The other districts which belong to this region are Ilemela, Magu, Sengerema, Kwimba, Ukerewe, and Misungwi. Nyamagana District is bordered to the North and West by Lake Victoria, to the South by the Ilemela District, and East by Magu District. The district was selected as the study area

because there were no similar studies that have been conducted in primary schools in the entire district.

Research Approach and Design

This study employed a mixed research approach because it gives a wide range of research methods and techniques of sampling, data collection, and data analysis. Creswell (2012) asserts that the mixed research approach provides a better understanding of the research problem by allowing the collection of both quantitative data and qualitative data. In order to convince policymakers, the findings in terms of numbers and explanations are needed. For this reason, a mixed research approach was right for this study because it is the one through which the two types of data can be generated. A convergent parallel mixed research design provides a researcher with a wide range of research tools for data collection and data analysis as well as brings a complementarity between the quantitative data and qualitative data; this is room for critical completeness of the study, and the problem will be fully addressed (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013).

Population and Sample Size

A population is a set of units from which the sample is to be drawn. Nyamagana district has 80 public primary schools with a total of 1880 teachers (469 male teachers and 1411 female teachers). 9399 pupils (4456 boys and 4943 girls) were registered in public primary school. Therefore, the target population for this study was 11279 people. Through the Yamane formula (Polonia, 2013; Singh & Masuku, 2014), the study involved 100 participants, including 56 teachers, 40 pupils, three headteachers, and 1 Teachers Service Commission Officer. Teachers and students were sampled through a stratified sampling technique based on gender. The rest of the participants-head, teachers and the Teachers Service Commission were sampled through purposive sampling techniques. These were key informants (Pacho, 2017; Okurut, 2012).

Instrumentation and Reliability

In this study, a questionnaire was employed as a method to collecting primary data whose reliability was calculated using SPSS version 20 and found to have a Cronbach alpha correlation coefficient α of

0.733. The questionnaire is a method of collecting primary data with questions written and printed in a definite order and administered to respondents to attempt the items independently by writing and returning them to the researcher (Kothari, 2004; Creswell, 2012). The questionnaires consisted of both closed-ended and open-ended questions.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data from questionnaires was organised with respect to specific objectives, coded,

and analysed through statistical procedures with the aid of SPSS version 20. The codes were determined based on the number of variables.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Prior to discussing the findings emanating from the research questions, respondents were asked to indicate their demographic information, including gender, age, and the highest education qualification. This enabled the realisation of the nature of the respondents who participated in this study.

Table 1: Respondents' Demographic Information

	Variables	Frequency	Per cent
Gender	Male	48	48
	Female	52	52
	Total	100	100
Age range	20 and below	56	56
	21 – 30	24	24
	31 – 40	17	17
	41 and above	3	3
	Total	100	100
Education	Certificate	23	52.3
	Diploma	12	27.3
	Bachelor Degree	7	15.9
	Postgraduate Diploma	1	2.3
	Master's Degree	1	2.3
	Total	44	100
Work Experience	10 and below	22	50
	11 – 21	18	40.9
	22 and above	4	9.1
	Total	44	100
Marital status	Single	9	20.5
	Married	32	72.7
	Widow	3	6.8
	Total	44	100

Table 1 shows that both males and females were involved in the study. This implies that the study obtained views on teacher absenteeism from both male and female respondents who in one way or the other might have different perceptions of the incidence. However, the number of female respondents outweighed that of male respondents by 4%. This was due to the fact that there were few male teachers in public primary schools. Age-wise, table 1 informs that majority of the participants, 56%, were 20 and below years. These were STD VII

pupils who were sampled because they have stayed in school for a long time and thus, they were experienced enough to provide relevant responses concerning teacher absenteeism in their respective schools. The other groups were occupied by teachers; which majority of them (24%) have the age range of 21 – 30 years. This implies that many of the teachers in public primary schools were young enough to engage in other economic activities because they were still energetic. Very few respondents (4%) were aged 41 and above

years. An assumption could be made that teachers abandon the teaching profession before approaching the retirement age. Thus, the respective schools may have been experiencing a shortage of teachers.

Additionally, *Table 1* presents that the majority of the participants (52.3%) have a certificate as their highest educational qualification. This is the minimal professional qualification for one to teach in primary schools in Tanzania. Thus, all teachers who participated in this study were trained and qualified to carry out their roles as teachers. Education qualification was considered in this case because there is a notion that educational qualification is likely to influence one's perception of the world.

The findings in *Table 1* also indicate that majority of the respondents (50.0%) have a work experience of 10 and below years. 40.9% and 9.1% of the respondents have worked for 11 – 21 years and 22 – above years, respectively. Experience provides an individual with the opportunity to understand the

world more. This indicates that all of the respondents were experienced enough to respond precisely to the items on teacher absenteeism in the schools they teach.

The results in *table 1* further show that majority of the respondents (72.7%) were married. This means that most of the respondents, specifically teachers, were stranded with roles other than teaching. They are required to work efficiently at school and at the same time work for the welfare of their families. This might have a negative impact on teacher school attendance and performance in class.

Status of Teacher Absenteeism

This section establishes the basis that there was a problem and therefore, strategies to address it are to be sought in advance. Included in this section is the existence of teacher absenteeism, conceptualisation, its magnitude, and the extent to which pupils were informed in case a teacher was absent

Table 2: Status of Teacher Absenteeism

Statements		Frequency	Per cent
Existence of teacher absenteeism	Yes	74	77.1
	No	22	22.9
	Total	96	100.0
The magnitude of teacher absenteeism	Minor	70	72.9
	Major	26	27.1
	Total	96	100.0
Information provided to Pupils	Always	2	3.6
	Sometimes	22	39.3
	Not at all	32	57.1
	Total	56	100.0

The findings in *Table 2* denote that the majority of the respondents (74.0%) agreed that teacher absenteeism exists in their respective schools. Far from that, most of the respondents (78.0%) indicated that teacher absenteeism was a minor problem in their respective schools. It can also be realised from *Table 2* that pupils were not given any

information about the absence of their teachers. This may trigger tensions among learners, especially those who cannot adjust and manage their studies effectively. Based on the findings in *Table 2*, it can be concluded that participants were aware of the existence and effects of the problem.

Table 3: Concept of Teacher Absenteeism

Conceptualisation of teacher absenteeism	Frequency	Per cent
A condition in which a teacher fails either to attend his/her work station or teach as scheduled.	11	27.5
An intentional disturbance to labour laws by a teacher not attending his/her assigned station without prior information.	6	15.0
A situation in which a teacher fails to attend his/her workstation without informing the headteacher.	16	40.0
Teacher's failure to attend his/her work station as scheduled.	3	7.5
A state in which a teacher either fails to attend school to teach or leaves school before time without permission.	4	10.0
Total	40	100.0

The findings in *Table 3* indicate the majority of the respondents (40.0%) conceptualised teacher absenteeism as a situation in which a teacher fails to attend to his/her workstation without informing the headteacher. This conceptualisation is similar to the one given by other scholars. For instance, Sezgin et al. (2014) define teacher absenteeism as a situation in which a teacher is not performing the assigned duty for any reason, which is more or less similar to Musyoki (2015), who contends that teacher absenteeism means a teacher's failure to attend the scheduled activity regardless of the reason. However, in Tanzanian schools, a teacher is likely

to be at school or counted present but not teaching, and it is difficult to victimise a teacher based on absenteeism.

Effects of Teacher Absenteeism on Curriculum Implementation

This research objective explored the effects of teacher absenteeism in public primary schools in the Nyamagana District. Through questionnaires as a method of data collection, the respondents explicitly supplied the following effects, which are summarised in *Table 4*.

Table 4: Effects of Teacher Absenteeism

Effects	Frequency	Per cent
Poor coverage of syllabus	66	32.7
Poor academic performance	73	36.1
Pupils' misconducts	50	24.8
Overcrowded classes	13	6.4
Total	202	100.0

The findings in *Table 4* indicate that the effects of teacher absenteeism highlighted by the majority are poor academic performance, poor coverage of syllabus, and pupils' misconduct.

Poor Coverage of Syllabus

Teachers are professionals designated to teach and effectively cover the prescribed content of the intended course. However, this study found that unnecessary teacher absenteeism results in poor coverage of the syllabus. In other words, with teacher absenteeism, pupils are deprived of their right to quality education. The prescribed content

for learners to be taught and learned needs to be covered. However, the findings indicated that teacher absenteeism has resulted in poor curriculum implementation. Similar findings were reported by Musasia, Nakhanu, and Wekesa (2012), who noted that teacher absenteeism is among the factors contributing to late or poor coverage of the syllabus. These findings can be further deduced that an absent teacher misses the lessons assigned to teach and makes no strategies to recover the loss periods. It was evident from the findings that none of the headteachers recommended in the documents like class journals for teachers to compensate for their lessons.

Poor Academic Performance

There is a notion that teachers have the power and zeal to influence pupils' academic attainment in either a positive or negative way. However, this study found that teacher absenteeism resulted in poor academic achievement among learners. Based on these findings majority of the respondents argued that poor academic performance and negative school image were experienced in the respective schools because teachers were not entering classes to teach as scheduled. Recent studies also came up with similar results. For example, Brown and Arnell (2012); Dentel, Yeboah, Sam, and Monkah (2011) independently indicated that teacher absenteeism significantly influences pupils' scores. In other words, higher rates of teacher absenteeism result in lower pupils' scores.

This is a kind of inverse proportionality in educational matters. These findings tell that teacher absenteeism jeopardises the teaching and learning process marked by poor academic performance among learners. However, the findings of this study are opposite to the findings of the study by Cooper (2013), in which most of the respondents agreed that a clever student would do well academically regardless of either presence or absence of a teacher. This sounds like the role of teachers in influencing learners' academic achievement is perceived differently in different contexts.

Pupils' Misconducts

Based on the findings of this study, the majority of the respondents said that teacher absenteeism in their respective schools resulted in pupils' misbehaviours, including truancy, noise-making, dodging, and bullying. It was found that no information concerning the absence of teachers was given to pupils in advance. Therefore, the condition was likely to be worse than if the information could be passed to such pupils and staff so that necessary steps, including looking for substitute teachers, could be taken to recover the gap.

Nevertheless, the use of substitute teachers was found not encouraging because some respondents argued that a substitute teacher could not effectively teach as the teacher who is responsible for that class. These findings concur with the findings of the study

by Sezgin et al. (2014), who noted that if teachers do not come to school, the students will be absent too. In other words, pupils' behavioural change and development are in the hands of teachers. The presence of a teacher in schools can easily see and rectify learners' behaviour contrary to if he/she is away.

Overcrowded Classes

The study also found that overcrowded classes were experienced in the sample schools. Overcrowded classes were experienced due to joining of classes either in favour of the absent teacher or compensating missed lessons. Associated with these findings, the majority of the respondents indicated that the school timetable was highly disturbed in which some teachers were over teaching without considering the scheduled time by understanding that a teacher of a particular class was not there. These findings are similar to the findings of the study by Gyansah et al. (2014), who reported clearly that teacher absenteeism resulted in overcrowded classes due to the combining of classes to learn subjects other than the subject of an absent teacher. However, overcrowded classes are complex during the teaching and learning process, and therefore these findings give an implication that there is no true teaching and learning in primary schools with combined classes.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, it was revealed that teacher absenteeism is still a problem in the visited school, although statistical data presented a significant decline in its magnitude from year to year. In other words, teacher absenteeism poses detrimental effects on curriculum implementation. In this way, the realisation and attainment of sustainable development goal number 4, which intends to ensure inclusive quality education, may become an unachievable dream. Thus, this study calls for inclusive-participative measures to turn off teacher absenteeism in schools to enhance quality learning for the development of quality minds.

Recommendations

The findings also revealed that teacher absenteeism has a lethal impact on the teaching and learning

process marked by poor coverage of syllabus and poor academic achievement among learners. Based on these findings, this study has implications for the education sector, which has an influence on teachers' welfare in schools. Therefore, this study presents the following recommendations.

- To begin with, this study has implications for the government leaders that they should plan in advance to balance inputs and outputs. This can be done by allocating enough budgets for the education sector in each fiscal year.
- The Ministry of Education should implement in-service training for teachers. The ministry can manage to fulfil this by developing training manuals on the crucial areas that need clarifications and delegating the role of training at schools or the district level.
- Policymakers should prepare an education policy that spells out teachers' welfare, including employment matters, powers of education leaders, and clear procedures for acquiring permits to be absent from school. The situation of teacher absenteeism may be intensified in the future unless necessary steps are undertaken.
- This study calls for an informed curriculum development in which at least all teachers should be involved, and their insights should be respected. Informed curriculum change should also focus on important areas that can improve teachers' morale. These may include reduced workload, the use of technology in teaching, and financing projects that teachers may see important to improve learning among pupils.
- Thus, this study poses implications to educational leaders, including those at the school level to the national level, to make sure that they are available to attend to their teachers' needs. If it is necessary for them to leave, a delegation of power and duties should be done, and this information should be communicated to all staff to avoid inconveniences.
- This study has implications for teacher training institutions that they should develop and implement compulsory courses on legal service frameworks, including labour laws and standing orders. This may help in creating awareness

among teachers on their responsibilities and obligations as well as the DOs and DONTs when serving the public.

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