

## Strategies Used to Reduce Rate of Teachers Absenteeism in Public Primary Schools in Kilifi County, Kenya

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### Abstract

Studies have shown that teachers are strong drivers of quality learning and that their presence in a school and class is paramount. If a teacher is out of school for a whole day, pupils miss out on learning and contact time with their teachers. Teacher absenteeism has been a big problem in Kenya, particularly in rural public primary schools. Uwezo Learning Assessment report of 2016 shows that, on average, 12 per cent of teachers are absent from schools every day which translates to 2,520 learning contact minutes lost daily. It is from this background that this study seeks to investigate strategies that can be used to reduce the rate of teacher absenteeism in public primary schools in Kilifi County. The study will be guided by the following objectives: To find out the rate of teachers' absenteeism in public primary schools in Kilifi County. To analyze strategies that can be used to reduce rates of teacher absenteeism in schools. A sample size of 120 respondents including 90 teachers and 30 headteachers was drawn from 30 randomly selected schools in Kilifi North Constituency. Piloting was carried out in randomly selected schools which were not involved in the main study. Findings of the study indicate a 10.8% absenteeism rate each day. Over half the teachers' sample indicated that absenteeism in school affects the learning process of the pupils. Strategies identified that can reduce rate of teacher absenteeism include reducing classes to manageable levels, provision of teaching and learning resources. Provision of incentives

Key words: Teacher Absenteeism, Public Schools, rate of absenteeism

### Background

The world Banks service delivery indicators (SDI) report of 2013 also revealed that, on average 15.5 percent of teachers are out of school on a given day while 42.2 percent are absent from school. Despite the fact that TSC has proposed measures to enhance teachers presence which include school heads to submit a written request to justify their absence from school, Teachers absenteeism is still high (Ndurya, 2017). Effects of teacher absenteeism include poor performance and high rate of indiscipline..... Teachers are role model and influence students' perception about what is an acceptable behavior and what is not. Chronic teacher absenteeism sends an essential message that school attendance is not important and this affects the quality of education.

According to Bermingham (2013), absenteeism poses immense problems universally and that it affects all organizations in some way although the extent of effect significantly varies across different organizations. The uwezo report of 2016 revealed that teacher absenteeism rate in rural areas is at 13 percent compared to 11 percent in urban areas. For instance when 12 percent teachers miss school approximately 2,520 learning contact minutes are lost daily, (12 percent of absent teaches on a given day (an average of 6 lessons a day, 35 minutes per lesson). The world bank (2013) r e p o r t entitled, *Service Delivery Indicators Kenya*, 15.5% of teachers in primary schools nationally were absent from school. This constituted 16.4% of teachers from public primary schools and 13.7% from private primary schools. The world bank report also indicated that while [some teachers](#)

actually go to school, only a section of it actually goes to the class to teach as the report further notes that some 42.6% of teachers in primary schools nationally were absent from class.

Some 47.3% of the teachers were from public primary schools while 30.7% were from private primary schools. The results were based on observations from 2,960 teachers in 306 schools.

Among the leading causes of teacher absence in school participation in official functions authorized by the employer in and out of school, sickness and health complications and need to attend to family matters, distance and delay due to lack of transport. Parents think teachers miss school mainly because of lack of commitment, lack of motivation and operating personal business. Teachers are the most important school-based determinant of students academic success, their absence raises important issues about whether the curriculum is being delivered to meet the fundamental objectives and goals of education. Teacher absenteeism is also important in the sense that the nation commits billions of shillings into education. The billions which include payment of salaries which are tied up in a teacher who is not giving a good

account of the time he/she is expected to be in class - teaching, proving instruction to

students: billions which households are spending through fees, and other expenses incidental to education; and the billions which society has tied up in educational infrastructure such as classrooms, libraries, books, hostels etc. The spend on all these and other related things could be put to better use if the government had an alternative means of educating its children.

It is government appreciation of the negative effect teacher absenteeism has on academic achievement and the needless financial implications this have on resource utilization that teacher absenteeism is such an important policy problem that the we should recognize and address. Teachers absence is a problem globally. The table below gives the primary-teacher absence rates for the countries globally. From the survey, Ecuador has the second lowest rate in this sample of countries, trailing only Peru. India and Uganda has shown improvements in teachers absenteeism compared to other countries that were sampled. Cross-country analysis suggests that absence declines with per-capita income, however; given that Ecuador has the second-highest income level in the sample, its low absence rate is expected (Chaudhury et al. 2004).

Country	Teacher absence rate (%)
Bangladesh	16
Peru	11
Ecuador	14
Papua New Guinea	15
Bangladesh	16
Zambia	18
Indonesia	19
India	25
Uganda	27
Kenya	16

Source: Das, et al.(2007),for Zambia, World Bank (2004)for Papua New Guinea, Chaudhury, (2006),for all other countries

According to Chaudhury (2006), absenteeism in the world is averaged at about 19%. It emerged that majority of the countries that register the highest rates of absenteeism are those that are hard hit by poverty. Interestingly, it was noted that absenteeism in schools was most common among high ranking officers like the headmasters. On average, it was realised that globally, headmasters were more likely to be absent from school and this was estimated to be about 39% (Chaudhury, 2006). Nevertheless, this problem was found to be persistent in developing countries, while the developed countries recorded low levels of teachers absenteeism in primary schools.

According to Okurut (2012), absenteeism in Uganda was very widespread while at the same time very unpredictable as it does not follow any specific pattern and is estimated to be about 21% in public primary schools. It is however realised that this rate of absenteeism is not about to subside owing to the fact that the government is posing luxury in fighting teacher absenteeism. Teacher absenteeism in Kenya is of great concern given that the educational sector is likely to be crippled by the insufficiency of qualified staff employed. Glewwe and Kremer (2006) observed that there are regions in Kenya that recorded a teacher absentee rate of even 20%.

The education levels in Kilifi County are relatively poor, with a completion rate of about 83.7% in primary schools and the transition rate being below average at about 45% (Republic of Kenya, 2013). More surprisingly is the teacher-pupil ratio of 1:59 against the national recommended of 1:40. This inadequacy in staffs in the county is further aggravated by the frequent and in most cases, unexplained absence of teachers

from public schools. According to the Business Daily (2015), rampant teacher absenteeism in schools in the coastal region would to an extent explain poor performance of the pupils in the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) in Kilifi North Constituency that records a 13% rate of teacher absenteeism (Business Daily, 2015). It is against such background that the study aimed at assessing teacher absenteeism in Kilifi North Constituency so as to provide an in-depth understanding into the factors that dictate teacher absenteeism and the strategies that could be employed to curb this challenge.

### **Methodology**

This study employed a survey design where data collection process was executed through administration of questionnaires to the study sample.

The target population was composed of the trained teachers in public primary schools in Kilifi North Constituency. Kilifi North has a total of 117 public primary schools with a total of 5341 teachers. The study was specifically for teachers from public primary schools from Kilifi North constituency totalling to 5341, who formed the units that provide the information needed to achieve the objectives of the study. They included the headteacher, class teachers and teachers employed by the board of management.

### **Results and Discussion**

The first objective of the study was to determine rates of teacher absenteeism among primary school teachers in Kilifi North Constituency. Results of the study showed that teachers absente rates were 10.8 % daily. At least on average 10.8% of teachers miss school daily. The study also sought out to find if gender is related to teacher absenteeism. The table below shows the results.

**Table 2 Gender and rate of teacher absenteeism**

	Daily(%)	Weekly(%)	Monthly(%)	Every term(%)	Total
Female	5.4	29.7	13.5	0	48.6
Male	5.4	29.7	10.8	5.4	51.4
Total	10.8	59.5	24.3	5.4	100.0

Findings in Table 2. show that an average of 5.4% of the female teachers responded that absenteeism occurred daily, while 29.7% of the teachers responded that absenteeism occurs weekly. 13.5% said that it occurs monthly. The male teachers response was that 5.4% responded that absenteeism occurs daily, 29.7% said that it occurs

weekly while 10.8% responded that absenteeism occurs monthly. On average, about 5% of teachers were absent for the term. More females than males reported monthly teacher absences while more male than female teachers reported termly absenteeism. Table 3 shows the Chi square test of gender and teacher absenteeism

**Table 3 Chi square test of gender and absenteeism**

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig (2 sided)	Exact Sig. (2 sided)	Exact Sig. (1 sided)
Pearson Chi-square	0.08	1	0.78		
Continuity Correction	0.00	1	1.00		
Likelihood Ratio	0.08	1	0.78		
Fisher's Exact Test				1.00	0.58
Linear-by-Linear Association	0.08	1	0.78		

Findings in Table 4.8 revealed that gender was not significantly associated with teacher absence from the school ( $\chi = 0.079$ ,  $p = 0.78$ ). Thus teacher's absence from school could not be related to gender of the absent teacher. This shows that the study should be viewed in the sense that whether the teacher is a male or a female they can equally be absent from duty. This study differs with a study done by Coffman

(2015) which indicated that Male teachers had lower absenteeism rates compared to their females colleagues.

**Reasons for Teacher Absenteeism**

The second objective of the study sought to investigate reasons for teacher absenteeism. The findings were presented in Table 4.6.

**Table 2: Reasons for teacher absenteeism**

Reason for absenteeism	Rate of prevalence (%)
Attending to family matters	53.8
Illness	30.8
Compassionate leave	11.5
Attending Pride and Tusome seminars	11.5
Other social problems - funerals etc	10.5
Workload	
Poor supervision	

The study reveals teacher absenteeism in the area of study was due to sickness, compassionate leave, attending to family matters, seminars/workshop such as Tusome and Pride and attending to other social issues such as funerals. The study suggests that rampant absenteeism seems to be due to a contribution of different factors. Attending to family matters was the highest rated at 53.8%; sickness was rated to lead to teacher absenteeism at 30.8%; compassionate leave and attending to seminars at 11.5% respectively while other problems such as attending to funeral were rated at 10.5%. This is according to Pillay (2009), who confirms that family roles responsibilities and stress are accounts for not attending school. The above findings

also concurs with study findings by Atege (2015) he asserts that the social ties created over time among teachers in an institution can have overwhelming influence in the way a teacher sees and interprets issues and also the way they make decisions.

According to Ivatt (2010), poor motivation, lack of accountability, personal illness, family matters, training programmes and job dissatisfaction are some of the causes of the high level absenteeism of teachers in many African Countries although the evidence provided is weak. Further, the study sought to establish whether reasons for teacher absenteeism varied by gender. The findings were presented in Table 4.7.

**Table 4.9 Gender and reasons of Teacher Absenteeism**

	Sickness (%)	Funeral (%)	Meeting (%)	Total (%)
Female	37.5	12.5	0	50.0
Male	37.5	0	12.5	50.0
Total	75.0	12.5	12.5	100.0

**Table 3: Teachers' absenteeism management strategies**

Strategy	Median	Mode	Mean
Reducing classes to manageable levels	50	50	56.20
Provision of incentives	80	80	74.17
Development of infrastructure e.g. staff houses	60	50	65.48
Staff appraisal	65	80	66.09
Teacher self-policing	67	50	68.82

The study sought to investigate the level of absenteeism and identify strategies that can be used to mitigate the prevailing condition. The researcher identifies that several strategies can be used to curb teacher absenteeism. Provision of incentives to teachers, teachers self-policing, staff appraisal, development of organizational infrastructure that includes development of staff houses and reduction of classes to manageable sizes were the strategies that the studies identified towards reduction of teacher absenteeism in the public primary schools in Kilifi North constituency. The study reveals that

teachers working conditions were compromised and poorly managed thus leading to high rates of teacher absenteeism in the public primary schools. Table 4.12 indicates that 74.5% supported provision of incentive to teachers while 56.2% advocated for reduction of classes to manageable sizes. The study reveals that teacher expenses are too high such that accessing the schools from their respective homes would much cost them on transport thus building of staff houses as an improvement on organizational infrastructure would be a proper strategy for reducing teacher absenteeism. In line with costing expenses teachers would use the

motivation in monetary and gifts form to compensate for such costs and hence its adoption in by the study as a strategy of reducing teacher absenteeism. The study sought to find out strategies put

in place to manage teacher absenteeism. Teachers answered items in questionnaires indicating their preference for particular strategies. The findings were tabulated by gender and presented in Table 4.11.

**Table 4.20: mechanisms to reduce teacher Absenteeism**

<b>Mechanisms to reduce teacher Absenteeism</b>			
	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Reduce Class size	36.1	36.1	36.1
Provision of incentives	34.0	34.0	70.1
Development of infrastructure	21.6	21.6	91.8
Staff Appraisal	8.2	8.2	100.0
Total	100.0	100.0	

Table 4.20. The findings also indicate that 36.1% of the respondents felt that reducing class size would reduce cases of absenteeism. The analysis has further indicated that banning teachers from performing private activities such as business, farming and non-school activities and creating rehabilitation centers for teachers has negligible prevalence on teacher absenteeism rate 1.2

**Conclusions**

The study was set out to investigate the rate of teacher absenteeism and the factors associated with teacher absenteeism in Kilifi North constituency of Kilifi County. The sample consisted of 90 teachers and 30 head teachers. Questionnaires were used for data collection. The study revealed relatively high teacher absenteeism in the study area. According to the study results, teachers indicated several factors responsible for their absenteeism in schools. Social problems and sickness of the teachers affected them and mostly led to total absenteeism of the teachers from schools. The results also indicted that funerals affected the teachers though not as much as the cases observed by the previous case. However there was a partial absenteeism where teachers were available in schools but they could not make it to class

and hence a partial absenteeism where the cited reason for these was attendance to meetings by the teachers. To reduce the impact of these factors, mechanisms like giving students assignments and allocating another available teacher who had his/her classes were the most common alternatives in most of the schools affected as indicated by the study. The study concludes that indeed absenteeism is a challenge in Kilifi North constituency and to the education sector. However just as other challenges it can be reduced with measures put in place and hence an achievement of proper performance in the region.

**Recommendations**

Based on the findings of the study the following recommendations were made on how to curb the rate of teacher absenteeism in Kilifi North constituency.

- i. The study recommends the development and review of the existing teacher attendance and monitoring systems in the schools. A proper review to teachers' attendances and monitoring program was recommended by the researcher because the existing one shows evidence of loopholes that affect the teachers' attendance. The program should indicate time in and time out

- and hence allow for proper supervision from head teachers.
- ii. Teachers submit their attendance records to the employers electronically. This aspect comes in handy with the fact that monitoring is the only way out to seal the loopholes in any organization that is focused on improvement of productivity with this case of the study revealed that it was low performance of the pupils in the schools.
  - iii. Development of attendance and performance prize giving days for teachers in Kilifi North Constituency. The study recommends that through the schools management a prize giving day be planned for in the constituency to applaud the teachers who will be performing and keeping the best records in terms of attendance in the region so as to curb issues of absenteeism and hence poor performance.
  - iv. Teacher motivation development programs to be initiated in schools in the constituency. The study revealed that the rate of productivity of the teachers is relatively high due to the existing poor performance of the pupils. Motivation programs should be developed specifically to encourage teachers at school level to participate in achievement of their pupils in the many ways that includes availing themselves to work all the time. The researcher suggest that each school develop its strategy of motivating its teachers.
  - v. Involvement of pupils on teacher's class attendance. The researcher recommends that teachers' attendance be checked by the pupils through checklists which can be presented to the head teachers for review and advice in case of poor attendance of a particular teacher. The research notes that introduction of this aspect will provide a best strategy to dealing with absenteeism.

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