

the best interest of their learners Nodding, (1998). The act of care has four elements; modelling, dialogue, practice and confirmation, Nodding, (1998). Modelling

gives teachers the opportunity to care through their individual association with their learners, they do not inform learners of their care, but rather demonstrate care by forming helpful relationships with them. The dialogue element of caring relates to the increase and preservation of affiliation between the helpful individual and the person being cared for. Dialogue is discussion and paying attention to the person receiving care .it provides the chance for sympathetic responses, approach and enables teachers and learners to talk about their problems and find solutions. In using dialogue caring teachers become facilitators and analysts, changing the focal point of the contact as learner's desires occur, Nodding, (1998).

Caring teachers show learners how to care for others. Nodding, (1998) suggests that when teachers give learners an opportunity to care for others, they will in turn become the ones who care other. Confirmation is an act of establishing and promoting the most excellent traits in teachers in order to increase helpful links with their learners. According to Nodding (1998), for one- caring, teachers, confirmation of learners starts when creating a relationship based on trust. Cared – for learners, openness and reaction of one –caring teachers will enable an increased belief in the ethic of care. Nodding (1998), argues that in complex conditions one – caring teachers have the ability to think of the best way to care for the learners. In this study, I explored how teachers manage learners' absenteeism using components of ethic of care namely; practice, modelling, confirmation and dialogue within a school context that is characterized by several factors such as high levels of poverty, lack of parental support, peer pressure, substance abuse and lack of interest. The figure below illustrates the theoretical framework used in the study;

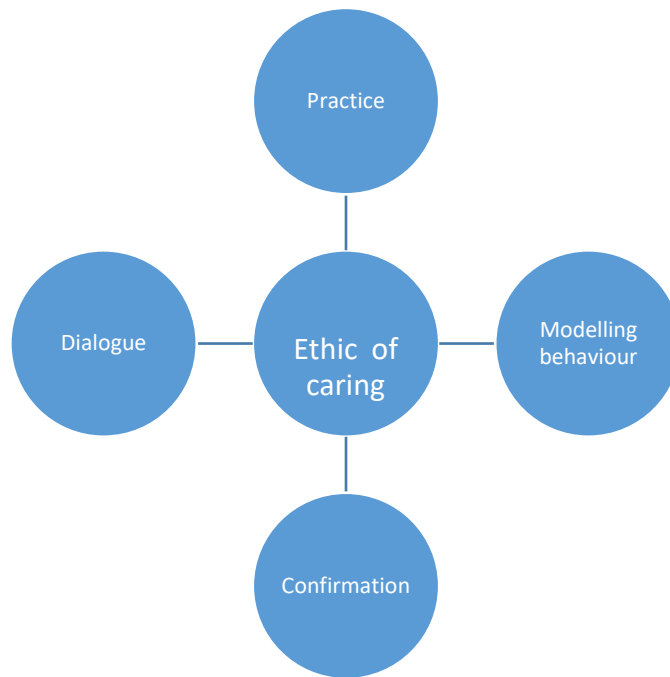


Figure 1: Four elements of the act of caring, Nodding, (1998)

The above elements of the ethic of care theory are interlinked with the causes of absenteeism as they will be discussed in the study such as; poverty, lack of interest, lack of parental support, peer pressure and substance abuse.

According to the literature review which was made on learner absenteeism, truancy of young children is connected with absenteeism in areas where poverty and aggression may cause family tensions and emotion disturbance that can lead to truancy- Zhang, (2003). Learners may be taken from school by their parents to improve the income of the family by engaging them in cheap labour at a tender age Teasley, (2004). As pointed out by Zhang, (2003) that learners' poor school attendance is associated with poverty and that learners tend to show warning signs in primary school stage of their education. Therefore, early interventions are called at primary level because if left unchecked it may become a routine pattern that increases over a period of time Zhang, (2003). Once absenteeism has become a normal habit it will be very difficult for learners to attend school regularly even if parents' poverty levels are improved by dealing with the factors that contribute to the state of poverty Zhang, (2003). Many studies have identified the factors that contribute to learner absenteeism and truancy and they have put them into the following components: personal, parental and family, school, community, neighborhood, economic, developmental and ethnic factors Kearney, (2008). The factors contributing to learner absenteeism from school are multiple and schools should find ways and means of dealing with

such problems Reid, (2003). Attending school regularly gives learners a chance to work with teachers and peers as this contributes greatly to learner achievement. He further adds that learners who are motivated or praised improve their performance and attendance which, in turn raises their self-esteem, self-confidence and school commitment. Parental involvement may be shown by attending meetings, checking homework and monitoring their children's school attendance.

This collaborative partnership between the home and the school puts pressure on the urgency for the necessary training of staff, especially those in leadership in schools to deal with and manage learner absenteeism in the classroom Reid, (2004). This cooperation among stakeholders is necessary to help reduce the problem of absenteeism which is common among primary schools in Kafue District.

The main problem is that children have the right to education, food and water. In most cases children forego their right to education, as education does not bring immediate fruits, so they would rather choose to do things which bring immediate results such as fishing, herding, hunting, gathering etc. African countries especially in rural areas, education does not fill the stomach and children need food to eat for them to be healthy enough to attend school. Developing countries also need to find ways that work best in an African context.

Only when this has been addressed can approaches for the Western world be introduced. The use of extrinsic motivation rewards contributes to the reduction of absenteeism which is a serious problem even in some developed parts of the world where well-functioning schooling systems are found. Countries such as the United Kingdom (UK) and United States (US), use an attendance document to control and monitor learner absenteeism.

Zambia uses the class attendance register as an official document for monitoring learner attendance and absenteeism. However, there are few studies on learner absenteeism in less developed countries, like Sanzila, (2011), compared to developed countries like UK and US. The researcher hopes to gain more understanding and great insight on the challenges faced by teachers as regard to absenteeism and strategies they use to reduce it.

CAUSES OF ABSENTEEISM

Lack of interest

According to this challenge Abadzi, (2006) states that pupils could not have interest in the content and may have resorted to staying away from school simply because they could not understand the content or they may just have perceived it to be too difficult. This makes them to be out of school. Teenagers learn what they want and in most instances it is when they want it. This simply means that they only choose what to like if they are wisely and nicely guided and counseled. This is because there are times when a child thinks and sees things as if the elders, parents and guardians do not see anything. It is at this level that if a child is not properly guided, they easily lose direction and slip away and go the wrong way.

Poor teacher approach

When talking about the teacher approach, the Ministry of General Education (MOGE) Curriculum Framework (2013) says “this means that everything that the teacher does must be focused on what learners want to know, understand and be able to do successfully.” It further highlights that “when teachers plan and teach, they should focus on helping learners acquire the required knowledge, skills and dispositions that will enable them achieve the needed results or outcomes.” Some methods and approaches used by the teachers may not be understood by the learners and this can easily make them start missing classes. This is so because there are times when teachers go to class so that they are seen to be present by those in administration but doing literally nothing in terms of teaching. Some teachers teach subjects which they do not like at all that is why they give no motivation to the learners. Others don’t even care whether the learners understand what they teach or not.

Contact time

This is the time that is spent between teachers and learners during learning and teaching. The document National Literacy Framework (NLF), (2013) “states that one of the constraints and threats to Literacy instruction is that the contact time between teachers and learners is not adequate.” This includes time on task and the amount of time teachers and learners are engaged in the teaching and learning process which is reduced due to poor lesson planning and absenteeism. It is therefore, imperative that enough time especially in initial grades be allocated the teaching of Literacy. This would make the learners busy and less playful.

Lack of mastery

The document (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization) UNESCO, (2010) points out that the teaching of pupils in their local language just for one or four years is not supportive because the learners during their primary school time might have acquired enough knowledge of their first language. This UNESCO report shows that the learners that switched off from Local language to English only knew about 800 words in English on an average.

Adult responsibilities

Adolescent children may experience a barrier of attendance if they are expected to take on adult responsibilities in contributing to the household. Some families expect adolescent children to take on care giver roles for their siblings or elder – care. Others may have to work in a family business to contribute to the income for household expenses Balfanz & Bymes, (2012).

When faced with these expectations, learners may not be able to attend school in order to fend for the family.

Substance abuse

Substance use such as alcohol, tobacco and other drugs are linked to absenteeism Humm Brundage et al. (2017). There is a two-way relationship with substance use as a predator of future truancy and low attendance and a predator of substance abuse Flaherty, Sulphen & Ely, (2012). The timing of substance is also important, as research found the effect of drugs on attendance to be more profound when the learner starts to use drugs. Learners should be monitored to avoid the use of drugs at all costs because this might result in truancy and eventually absenteeism from school so as to create more time for abusing drugs.

Effects of learner absenteeism

High learner absenteeism has a number of negative effects Balfanz and Bymes, (2018) Poor attendance is one of the best predators of drop – out. Recent studies have shown that chronic absenteeism is a better predator of drop – out than low grades on test scores Goldfried, (2014). The impacts or effects of high absenteeism start as early as the Pre –school or 1st grade. Absenteeism in pre –school has been linked to lower academic and social – emotional outcomes in the same year. Additionally, one study found out that only 17 % of children chronically absent in pre – school and 1st grade achieved reading proficiency by the end of the third grade Applied Survey Research, (2011). Studies on upper grades revealed that learners who were continually

absent through to the fourth grade were likely to perform well at the end of their primary school level. In addition, falling behind academically in early grades is another source of dropping out of high school.

When learners are absent from the classroom they are unable to finish and submit the tasks given to the others on specific days. This may lead to learner under achievement or poor performance in different subjects Reid, (2005). Furthermore, when learners are not at school their absence prevents them from getting the knowledge from the lessons which are taught. Desocio et al. (2007) maintains that many children may experience serious academic problems and fall back in their school work if they do not attend school regularly. When learners are not in the classroom they may end up with fewer friends and as a result, poor social skills Reid, (2005). Lifelong consequences have identified with frequent absenteeism linked to substance use, future unemployment and a variety of health related issues. High absenteeism is crucial because high rates of absenteeism, even when excused are associated with negative outcomes.

Effects of absenteeism on teachers

Absenteeism has also some effects on the teachers which include diverted attention from the whole class to attend to the absentees when they report back to school, loss of free time and frustration at having to attend to poor attenders, difficulty in keeping accurate records, demoralization and impaired ability to build teacher – pupil relationships.

Attention diverted from class

Teachers resent having their time diverted from the class to help truants catch up. This is stronger among upper grade teachers, teachers end up spending so much time with the absentees and not the whole class. It is frustrating when nothing seems to be working.

Loss of free time

Teachers become irritated and frustrated at giving up their breaks and lunch times to help the absentees catch up or monitor their movements, such learners are said to be more demanding than regular attenders because they expect to be looked after there and then.

Difficulty in keeping accurate records

A number of teachers especially those from primary sector maintained that keeping accurate records of what truants achieved when in school meant more work on the part of the teachers and limited the use of the time that could be meant for classroom assistance.

Frustration at the need to retrain poor attenders

When poor attenders return to class they have to be retrained in the procedures and expectations of the school daily routine. This is quite frustrating on the part of the teacher and it is time consuming.

Impaired ability to build teacher – pupil relationships

It is hard and practically impossible for teachers and pupils who are constantly absent to build a secure and trusting relationship. Teachers are not ready to include absentees in whole class activities such as drama, debate, poetry, quiz and so on. Teachers may want to give such pupils a part but fear that they won't come thus paralyzing the whole activity.

Teachers demoralized

The effects of increased pressures of this nature make teachers feel unskilled and demoralized as they believe that absentees contribute to low test scores and eventually to low examination results.

Effects of absenteeism on the school

Poor attendance of learners affects the school in the following ways; the ability to meet attendance and attainment targets is compromised, damage to school reputation and difficulty in maintaining high standards of discipline.

Reduced ability to meet targets

Absenteeism impacts so much on the school's ability to meet its attendance and attainment targets. When learners are constantly absent from school, it becomes very difficult for such a school to meet its intended or set targets.

Damaged school reputation

Most head teachers believe that absenteeism of the learners may affect their school's reputation in that the low results which come about due to this vice will discourage parents from bringing their children to such schools or fear that their children might not perform well.

The effects of absenteeism on learners

Absenteeism has adverse effects on the learners who constantly absent themselves from school namely; school and parental reaction, effects on truant's work, dropping out of school and early marriages.

School and parental reactions

Learners caught in the net of truancy were affected in that, parents put them 'on report', given detentions, having to do the work in isolation, meetings with staff or education counselors. At home, punishments included withdrawal of privileges such as the use of Television (TV) and computer.

Effects on truants' work

Absenteeism affects learners' work in so many ways such as missing tests, not understanding examination questions, not knowing where their classmates were up to in terms of class work and low performance.

Dropping out of school and Early marriages

In some serious cases, learners who are constantly absent from school end up dropping out of school, because there is nothing about school which motivates them, and they think that going to school is a sheer waste of time. Some learners would even resort to enter into marriage at a very tender age.

RESULTS OR FINDINGS

Factors leading to learner absenteeism

The respondents were asked to mention whether the causes of absenteeism which were outlined were the actual causes in the case of the learners at Kafue African Vision of Hope Primary school. When asked whether lack of interest, poverty, substance abuse, adult responsibilities, lack of mastery, contact time and poor teacher approach were the factors which led to absenteeism. The figure below shows how the responses were from the respondents.

Causes of absenteeism	Agree	Disagree	Undecided
Poverty	48	10	0
Substance abuse	55	5	0
Adult responsibilities	40	18	2
Lack of interest	45	10	5
Lack of mastery	50	8	2
Contact time	20	25	15
Poor teacher approach	15	35	15

Table 1: Responses of respondents on causes or factors leading to absenteeism

The first objective was to establish the causes of absenteeism.

On poverty as the cause of absenteeism the following were the responses from the respondents; 48 agreed that poverty was a cause of absenteeism representing 80 %, 10 disagreed that it was not a cause of absenteeism representing 17% and 2 were undecided representing 3%.

On substance abuse as a cause of absenteeism 55 respondents representing 92 % agreed that substance was one of the causes of absenteeism and 5 disagreed that it was not the cause representing 8 %.

On adult responsibilities being a cause of absenteeism the response from the respondents were as follows; 40 agreed representing 67 %, 18 disagreed representing 30 % and 2 were not decided representing 3 %.

When asked if lack of interest was one of the causes of absenteeism, 45 agreed representing 75 %, 10 disagreed representing 17% and 5 were not decided representing 8 %.

If lack of mastery was a cause of absenteeism 50 agreed that it was representing 83 %, 8 did not agree representing 13% and 2 were undecided representing 4 %.

On contact time the respondent's responses were as follows; 20 agreed that it was a cause representing 33%, 25 disagreed that it was not a cause representing 42% and 15 were not decided representing 25 %.

On poor teacher approach as a cause of absenteeism 15 respondents agreed that it was a cause representing 25%, 35 disagreed that it was not a cause representing 58 % and 15 were not decided representing 7 %.

Looking at the first objective which was to establish the causes of absenteeism it was discovered that the causes of absenteeism were poverty substance abuse, adult responsibilities, lack of interest and lack of mastery as this is where the high number of respondents had agreed to say these were the causes of absenteeism.

The second objective was to investigate the effects of absenteeism

To establish the effects of absenteeism interviews for different classes of people were conducted and the groups included teachers, parents, Parent and Teachers' Committee (PTC) members and some learners.

Six teachers were interviewed, that is the head teacher, the deputy head teacher, senior teacher and 3 other teachers out the teachers who were interviewed

Teacher 1; said that one of the effects of absenteeism on academic performance of the

learner was that when the absentees come to school the attention of the teacher is shifted from the whole class and teacher just concentrates on the truants and she remarked that one may end up spending too much with just them and not the whole class.

Teacher 2; pointed out that he feels irritated at the futility of back tracking with the same children.

In order to help the absentees, catch up with their work the teacher has to back track so as to help the learners who absent themselves from school regularly.

Teacher 3; said that it was difficulty to keep accurate records on the academic performance

of the learners as the learners who are constantly absent will also miss some of the assessment carried out by the teacher as there will be a lot of gaps in the truant's work. Additionally, teacher 4; pointed out that apart from keeping accurate records it was also difficulty to meet the set targets thus this hindered academic progression.

During the interview session asked whether absenteeism of the learners demoralized the teachers.

Teacher 4; mentioned that the teachers became demoralized by the constant absence of some learners and it made the teachers to lose interest in their work as these learners were not catching up easily.

The respondents were also asked what they felt on whether the academic performance of the truant children was in any way affected.

Teacher 5; confirmed that this had an adverse effect on the learners in that the learners did not perform well due to missing of some lessons, tests, this may prevent them to go to the next grade Reid, (2005).

Teacher 6; added that absenteeism had other serious effects such as ending up in early marriages or in some cases even drop out of school.

The third objective was to propose ways of mitigating absenteeism looking at the factors which led to absenteeism, the respondents came up with a number of ways which can be used to mitigate absenteeism and the following were pointed out.

The head teacher and 8 teachers gave the following ways of mitigating absenteeism at the school; the teachers or the school should motivate such learners to come to school. This can be done by sticking the attendance sheet on the notice board of the classroom so that it acts as a visual reminder of all the classes they have missed.

Another teacher said that giving of rewards was another way of trying to curb the vice, this where the teacher rewards the learners with maximum attendance and instead of giving them

punishment the truants can be given the duties to perform different class roles to enable them not to miss class.

Another thing which was pointed out was that the school should develop and plan for interactive class session where the learners will be able to interact with one another during lessons. This will motivate the learners to come to school as they will look at the socialization part that is involved in interacting with their friends or their peers.

One parent said that as most of the learners were coming from poverty stricken homes; there was need for the school to come up with feeding programme within the school as this may encourage the truants as they look forward to having a meal at school.

Another parent mentioned that the school intensify on the issue of calling parents whenever their children absent themselves from school. This will help the parents to be constantly checking in their children's books, as a way of monitoring what they do in school.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Factors leading to learner absenteeism

From the data collected from the respondents within the school, it indicates that there are a number of factors influencing learner absenteeism at Kafue African Vision of Hope Primary school such as poverty, peer pressure, substance abuse, adult responsibilities, lack of interest, contact time and lack of mastery. These factors relate to the ones reflected in the literature reviewed. From the findings, it has been noted that factors leading to absenteeism existed in the school. It takes teachers to identify them and highlight them so as to know the way in which they can be approached with the aim of identifying them and putting up measures to reduce or completely mitigate them.

Leading factors

According to the data collected a lot of factors have been brought to light concerning what the main problem is and how to handle it. It was indicated that poverty was the outstanding factor that ranked the highest according to the respondents' views. This is so because the homes where the learners come from are stricken with hunger due to poverty. According to the collected data, pupils resort to staying away from school because they cannot concentrate at school work when they have an empty stomach. They feel that it would a sheer waste of time attending lessons whilst your concentration is low due to hunger.

The other factors which followed were lack of interest, substance abuse and peer pressure which followed poverty. The respondents pointed out that most learners absented themselves from school due to lack of interest in school, substance abuse and peer pressure as these factors influenced them highly.

Challenges faced by the school and teachers

After examining the factors that led to absenteeism in the school, not only has absenteeism caused harm to the pupils but has also created challenges for the school and for teachers. The laid down points are the challenges that the school and teachers face as a result of pupils' absenteeism.

It reduces the morale of the teacher especially if the bright learners are involved. Teacher's morale will be lessened because the class will be boring to teach pupils who are slow learners hence the morale to teach is reduced. It is quite interesting and appealing to teach a class that has bright pupils who at least make the class live in terms of participating unlike if there are only slow learners.

One of the greatest challenges that teachers face is when it comes to preparation. This becomes an issue for it will be very hard for a teacher to figure out the performance of the entire class. Due to absentees, the class will be totally disorganized due to the draw backs that the truants cause thereby making it difficult for the teacher to prepare on where to start from. The other challenge is low performance which is realized as a result of absenteeism.

Measures on how to mitigate absenteeism

Having identified the factors leading to absenteeism, measures or solutions on how to curb the vice have been put the leading factors at hand. The following are the measures put in place by the school or teachers;

Coming up feeding activities within the school is one of the activities that should be put in place in order to reduce on the rate of absenteeism. This is so because when a child comes from a family where there is hunger, he/she would prefer going to school rather than staying at home where there is hunger. This activity is a deliberate move to bring the pupils who are fond of staying away from school due to poverty and hunger. As earlier alluded to, poverty is the factor which ranked the highest on the factors that led to absenteeism there by coming up with this intervention will be of great help.

The other measure that has been put in place by the school is motivation of the learners who have high attendance by giving them prizes as a way of encouraging them to come to school, and also by sticking the attendance sheet on the wall of the classroom so that it becomes a visual reminder of all the classes that they have missed.

Calling parents is another measure which help reduce the rate of absenteeism, when parents are called to school to explain why their children are constantly away from school, such parents will be hard on their children and give them the treatment which will make them come to school. When no change takes place even after involving the parents such children should be taken for counseling and be told the importance of school as regards to their future wellbeing.

CONCLUSIONS

The study revealed that there are countless effects of absenteeism in Zambian schools, in particular at Kafue African Vision of Hope Primary School. Some of the mentioned effects of absenteeism on academic performance include the effects on the teacher, the school and the pupils themselves. These include; demoralization of teachers, loss of free time, attention diverted from the class, difficulty to keep accurate records reduced ability to meet targets, damaged school reputation, missing tests or examinations, low performance, dropping out of school and early marriages.

The study has further revealed that absenteeism has become a big issue in the school performance of both the teacher and the learner at Kafue African Vision of Hope Primary School in Kafue District, therefore, there is need to address the problem at hand.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Following the findings and conclusions made, the following recommendations were made by the researcher, which if implemented, will reduce on high absenteeism rates among pupils at Kafue African Vision of Hope Primary School.

1. The Ministry of Education (MOE) to come up with a National wide education campaign in schools, through related activities, interactive methods of communication to educate parents on the value of education for their children.
2. The school to come up with clubs and other co-curricular activities which encourage the learners to participate in the activities taking place, by intensifying co – curricular activities as this helps to break the monotony of every day class routines.

3. The school to come up with a deliberate local policy of engaging classrooms, whereby the school plans for active, interactive and engaging class sessions to rule out the boredom and lack of interest. This can be done by use of role plays, debates, use of technology (computers and tablets), T.V s to motivate learners not to miss school.
4. A school feeding programme should be established in the school as it has a positive effect in encouraging school attendance, especially that most of the parents, are unable to provide adequate nourishment for their children.

FURTHER RESEARCH

This research study focused on the experiences of teachers, learners and parents concerning learner absenteeism and the factors which lead to absenteeism, the effects and strategies to reduce absenteeism. Future research could include other stakeholders to compare their experiences and their strategies for reducing learner absenteeism. Studies similar to this one could be undertaken in other schools in Kafue District and comparison of findings could be made across the different schools in the district.

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