

**HOW FARMING, CATTLE HERDING AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC FACTORS
LEAD TO ABSENTEEISM AMONG PUPILS IN SELECTED SCHOOLS IN
KALOMO DISTRICT OF SOUTHERN PROVINCE IN ZAMBIA**

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I, **Webster Simuzya**, declare that this dissertation represents my own work. It has not previously been submitted for a degree or any award at the University of Zambia or any other institution. All published work or materials from other sources incorporated in this dissertation have been specifically acknowledged and references thereby given.

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

This dissertation prepared by **Webster Simuzya** is approved as fulfilling part of the requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Education (M.Ed.)

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated how farming, cattle herding and social economic factors lead to absenteeism among pupils in selected schools in Kalomo district of southern province in Zambia. The study was built on the conceptual framework of learner absenteeism measured by socio-economic status, farming and cattle herding. The study was informed by Bandura's Social Learning Theory. A descriptive research design which was supported by qualitative methods of data collection was used in the study. Interview Guides and four Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were used to collect data from a purposively sampled population of twenty eight (28) study participants comprising of four (4) guidance and counselling teachers, twenty (20) parents and four (4) FGDs. The study used thematic analysis to analyse data, where common themes were identified, grouped for easy interpretation and presented using verbatim based on the research objectives.

The study established that absenteeism exist in primary schools of Kalomo District in Zambia. The study established that major drivers behind absenteeism are economic factors of cattle herding and farming in which learners are involved to supplement family income due to high levels of poverty.

Other factors that contributed to learner absenteeism included; physical factors such as long distance to school; health factors such as prolonged sickness and death in the family. Other related issues included household factors which borders on parents and guardians lack of financial capability to provide for school demands for their children, as well as cultural and social factors such as initiation ceremonies. Therefore, the study confirms that cattle herding, farming and poor economic status of parents are the major home factors contributing significantly to high levels of pupil absenteeism in Kalomo district.

Therefore, the study recommends that parents should form pressure groups to sensitize each other on the importance of education, parents should practice traditional ceremonies during the holidays and that the Government and school administrators should engage in constructive sensitization of parents on the importance of education especially for their children. Furthermore, it is recommended that parents should be empowered for them to stop over depending on their children's labour for survival.

DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my family and friends, particularly my late parents Mr. Daniel and Sarah Simuzya who encouraged me throughout my life to pursue the highest level of academic performance. May their souls rest in eternal peace. I am also indebted to my family, my wife Pharice, for the moral support which enabled me to live comfortably till the completion of the course. To my children, Maambo and Mudenda for enduring my absence during the period of undertaking my research.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
APA	American Psychology Association
CASE	Community Agency for Social Enquiry
CREATE	Consortium for Research on Educational Access, Transitions and Equity
DEBS	District Education Board Secretary
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GCT	Guidance and Counselling Teacher
HIV	Human Immune Virus
ILO	International Labour Organization
SMT	School Management Teams
SNP	School Nutrition Programme
UK	United Kingdom
UNESCO	United Nations Educational Scientific Cultural Organisation
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UNZA	University of Zambia

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Overview

This chapter contains introductory concepts that show the importance of carrying out a study on how farming, cattle herding and socio-economic factors contribute to absenteeism among pupils in selected schools of Kalomo district of Southern Province. The following are the subtitles contained in this chapter: background of the study; statement of the problem; purpose of the study; research questions; significance of the study; theoretical framework, conceptual frame work, limitations of the study and conclusively the definitions of key terms vital for this study.

1.2. Background of the Study

Regular attendance to school has been described as the pre-requisite for acquiring skills and knowledge required for academic success. It enables a child to learn new information that will help him develop the desired skills and potentials. But it may be difficult for a child to achieve these if he is continuously absent from school. School absenteeism is defined as excused or unexcused absences from school by a child (Reid, 2015). Kearny (2018) puts it to be the persistent, habitual, unexpected and unexplained absences from school of a child of compulsory school age. It then implies that absenteeism occurs when a child absents himself from school for whatever reason or when constant learning is interrupted.

Education is purported to be a commodity to society, a core of human progress. It is a critical factor in the development of any country. Education influences the life of humanity the world over in all spheres of development such as political, social, cultural, religious and economic development (Epstein and Sheldon 2012). Further, when pupils are not in attendance they miss essential instruction which often times cannot be replicated. Non-attendance is among key problems faced by schools. The Community Agency for Social Enquiry (CASE) (2017) defines learner absenteeism as when a learner is not at school for an entire day. It is school nonattendance, that is, a period of time when a learner does not attend school. The problem of absenteeism is regardless of gender, race and religion. Hocking (2018) asserts that school absenteeism involves all ages, affecting kindergarten, elementary, middle and high school.

According to The Campaign for Fiscal Equity (2011) and Moseki (2014), a common finding in the literature is that students with greater attendance than their classmates perform better on achievement tests. Also schools with higher rates of daily attendance tend to have students who perform better on achievement tests than do schools with lower daily attendance rates. The Campaign for Fiscal Equity (2011) carried out a rigorous study of fourth grade students in Ghana schools which focused on the connection between students' attendance and their performance. The study confirmed that for individual students, higher attendance predicts higher performance and that poor attendance puts low-performing students at greater risk of educational failure.

Available information suggests that absenteeism rates in most African countries are much higher. Voigts cited in (The Community Agency for Social Enquiry, 2017) conducted a study to determine the quality of education in Namibia, for example, which revealed that only 50% of grade 6 learners were in schools where learner absenteeism was described as a huge problem. Similarly, according to research carried out in Nigeria, 10% of the total school pupils per day absent themselves from school. This situation appears to cut across most African countries (Oluremi, 2013). In Uganda for instance student absenteeism rate increased from 19.3% and 21.3% in 2014 (Komakech & Osuu, 2014). Limited school participation is associated with a greater chance of dropping out of school, disruptive and delinquent behaviours and these outcomes have latter implications for health, employment, risk behaviours, poverty and homelessness (Epstein and Sheldon, 2002). In Zambia school absenteeism is escalating at a high rate and schools are faced with problems of child absenteeism as a result of financial related factors.

The causes of student absenteeism are complex and multi-faceted. The factors associated with absenteeism are classified in the literature into three fundamental areas: individual, family and schools (Robinson, 2019). Students' individual factors may negatively affect school attendance. Research indicates that absenteeism increases by seniority in high school and most frequently happens at age 15. Absentee students usually do not feel safe at school. They feel academically or socially inadequate. They find classes boring and their positive experiences related to school are less than those who attend school regularly (Clarke, 2018). Thus, self-esteem, confidence, concentration, self-management and social skills of these

students are low. They feel powerless in the school and think other students do not respect them (Wall, 2013).

Another major reason for absenteeism is "family factors". A student's parent has a significant impact on his attendance in school (Clark, 2018). Research indicates the following reasons for student absenteeism arising from the family: family's socio-economic level; family's need for student to work, for example farming, cattle and herding; parenting skills; psychological problems; support or neglect; alcohol or drug problems; criminal behaviour (Clark, 2018); the lack of consistency; divorce; inter-parent conflicts; family structure, such as a single parent; interest or control level for the student's behaviour; parents have low education level; negative past school experiences; lack of participation in school or not understanding procedures; and not providing environment for the student to do homework (Corley, 2012). The level of respect the family has for education is seen as a role model for students.

School-related factors influence students' decisions toward school attendance. A school's attitude and rules against absenteeism are factors that contribute to the absenteeism problem (Eastman et al., 2017). According to Robinson (2019), schools' procedures are inconsistent and do not produce meaningful results in reducing absenteeism. Students are not receiving clear messages from the school about the importance of attendance. Tolerant policies or lack of firm implementation for existing policies gives the wrong message to students and parents about the importance of attendance (Clarke, 2018). Wall (2016) also indicated that inconsistency of policies, lack of meaningful results and poor school record keeping have a negative effect on students. Although there are various reasons for absenteeism, one of the most important of these reasons is "not liking the school" (Pehlivan, 2016). Given the extent of the absenteeism problem and its negative consequences, it is important to understand how farming, cattle herding and socio-economic factors leads to absenteeism among pupils in Kalomo district of Southern Province in Zambia.

1.3. Statement of the Problem

The incidence of school absenteeism among primary school pupils has not been widely reported in Zambia but it exists in public schools especially those in the rural areas. All forms of absenteeism have a long term consequence on individuals and society at large. Despite all attempts by government and schools to minimize the

situation, the problem still exists. Many schools both rural and urban in Zambia are facing problems of learner absenteeism. This is giving rise to various moral, educational and social problems to both the students and schools. School absenteeism is a phenomenon with far reaching consequences impacting on a variety of social actors ranging from the children who are absenting, to their families, their schools and communities, the criminal justice system, social work agencies, social service, organizations and the economy (Callega, Chircop & Portelli, 2015). It is the focus of this study to attempt to understand how farming, cattle herding and socio-economic factors lead to absenteeism among the pupils so as to assist school administrators to come up with policies for managing non- attendance so that effective learning of all learners take place in Kalomo District which has one of the highest absenteeism rate at 16.3% (UNICEF Zambia, 2018).

The magnitude of this problem is quite serious, mainly from a perspective whereby the students habitually absent themselves without proper approval of appropriate school authorities. In Zambian Public Schools attendance is compulsory but students rebel against the set rules nevertheless. Absenteeism is one of the serious issues that prevail in the country nowadays since this problem does not isolate gender; both boys and girls do it. It is also rampant across the streams, that is, it affects all grades. Since these students are of different ages, it means absenteeism covers all age groups at different school levels.

1.4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to investigate how farming, cattle herding and socio-economic factors lead to absenteeism among pupils in selected schools in Kalomo district of southern province.

1.5. Objectives of the Study

1.5.1. General Objective

To investigate how farming, cattle herding and socio-economic factors lead to absenteeism among pupils in selected schools in Kalomo district of southern province.

1.5.2. Specific Objectives

- i. To assess if cattle herding contributes to pupil absenteeism in selected schools in Kalomo district of southern province.
- ii. To ascertain in which ways farming contributes to pupil absenteeism in selected schools in Kalomo district of southern province.
- iii. To determine the relationship between parental social-economic status and pupil absenteeism in selected schools in Kalomo district of southern province.

1.6. Research Questions

The study addressed the following major questions:

- i. How does participation in cattle herding lead to pupil absenteeism in selected schools in Kalomo district of southern province?
- ii. How does participation in farming lead to pupil absenteeism in selected schools in Kalomo district of southern province?
- iii. What is the relationship between parental Socio-economic status and pupil absenteeism in selected schools in Kalomo district of southern province?

1.7. Significance of the Study

Regular attendance at school and consequent interaction with peers and teachers is an important determinant of learner achievement. Effects of absenteeism are negative for both individuals and the community they live in. The findings of this study are of importance to school heads, teachers, the community and students themselves since when root causes of school non- attendance are identified this will go a long way in ensuring that these causes are attended to so as to prevent learner absenteeism. This study might also be useful to the government and non-governmental organizations in sensitizing the communities on farming and cattle herding as forms of child labour, its implications on pupil school attendance and hence the need to stop the problem and the policy makers may use the findings to formulate policies that discourage participation of pupils in farming and cattle herding activity.

Furthermore, the findings from the study might be useful in enlightening parents and the community on the effects of farming and cattle herding on pupil school attendance

so as to make better plans for their children's future. Moreover, there are few theses and articles on the topic of child labour in Zambia. Therefore, this study is an additional material for those who are interested in the topic of child labour.

1.8. Theoretical Framework

The study was aligned with the social learning theory. Albert Bandura presented the social learning theory as suggesting that social behaviour is learnt through observation and imitation of others. While behavioural psychology focuses on how the environment and reinforcement affect behaviour, Bandura put forth that individuals can learn behaviour through observation. Bandura developed the theory between 1961 and 1963 through a series of experiments about social behaviour within the framework of observation and imitation. The theory was confirmed in 1977 and evolved into the social cognitive theory in 1986. The enduring postulation is that learning occurs in a social framework with an ever-changing and shared interaction between the person, environment and behaviour (Steers & Porter, 1991).

People learn through observation. Learners can acquire new behaviour and knowledge by merely observing a model. Reinforcement and punishment have indirect effects on behaviour and learning. People form expectations about the potential consequences of future responses based on how current responses are reinforced or punished. Mediational processes influence human behaviour. Cognitive factors that contribute to whether a behaviour is acquired or not. Learning does not necessarily lead to change. Just because a person learns something does not mean they will have a change in behaviour (McCutcheon, 1989).

According to Steers and Porter, (1991) there are four processes by which a person acquires behaviour. These are outlined in turn.

- i. **Attention** is that the individual gets attracted to a behaviour they notice in others before they can imitate. Attention is crucial since not all observed behaviours are eventually imitated.
- ii. **Retention:** is the process by which observed behaviour can be stored and remembered. This involves forming a memory of the behaviour since the behaviour may not be practiced just once but would become habitual.

- iii. **Reproduction:** This involves performing the copied behaviour in a manner that represents its primary characteristics. Reproductive performance of a behaviour is limited by one's abilities.
- iv. **Motivation:** This is the inspiration and willingness to emulate a particular behaviour. There must be adequate internal desire and availability of circumstances to perform the behaviour. This mediational process is referred to as vicarious reinforcement. It involves learning through observing the consequences of actions for other people, rather than through direct experience.

Social learning theory further indicates that there are rewards and punishment arising with the performance of a behaviour. If the observer perceives the rewards to be greater than the costs (punishment) then they will most likely imitate the behaviour. If, however, the vicarious reinforcement is not valued enough by the observer, they will not model the behaviour.

1.9. Conceptual Framework

Figure 1.1 below shows the conceptual framework of the study. The independent variables are cattle herding, farming and socio-economic status of parents. It also shows the dependent variable of learner absenteeism from school. In addition it shows the relationship between the independent variables and dependent variable and was useful to establish how school absenteeism is affected by the independent variables. The postulation was that learners were most likely to be absent from school if they were involved in cattle herding or farming and if their parents' socio-economic statuses were low.

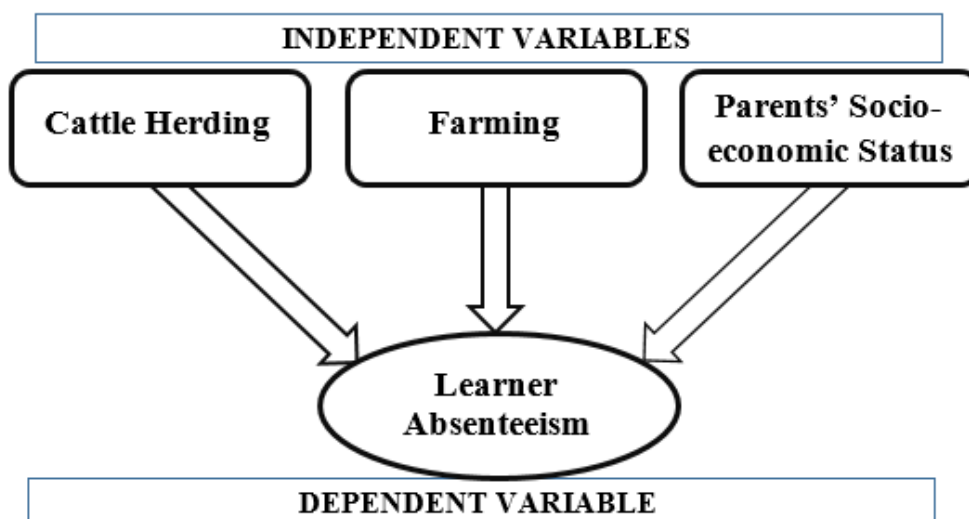


Figure 1. 1. Conceptual Framework

1.10. Limitations of the Study

Any research undertaking has got its own limitations. The major challenge that the researcher faced during the course of this research was locating the learners who are prone to absenteeism. There was no guarantee that when the researcher arrived at their institution, they would be present.

1.11. Operational Definition of Terms

Academic Performance - refers to individual's achievement as measured by the mean score in end of term exams

Cattle herding: Looking after cattle mostly as an economic activity.

Child – is a person who has not attained the age of 18 years.

Child Labour- This refers to children working in contravention of the above standards. This means all children below age of 12 years working in any economic activities, those aged 12 to 15 years engaged in hazardous work and child labour.

Child Work – UNICEF (2004) defined child work as economic activity-that does not negatively interfere with health and development or interfere with education; can be positive work that does not interfere with education (light work) is permitted from the age of 12 years under international labour organization (ILO) convention 138.

Farming- is growing crops or keeping animals by people for food and raw materials

Gender - refers to biological sex whether male or female

Pupil absenteeism-refers as a situation where a learner is not at school for an entire day.

Socio-economic status -the terms refer to an index of social and economic standards of an individual as defined by various criteria. In this study parental level of education, income and employment status are used

1.12. Summary

The above chapter gave background of the study. The chapter also presented the statement of problem, purpose of the study, research objectives and questions, significance of study, limitation of the study, conceptual framework and definitions of terms used in this study. Therefore, the next chapter attempts to review various literature deemed relevant to the study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Overview

This chapter focuses on the review of related literature on learner absenteeism. For the purpose of the study, the review of the literature has been treated and discussed under the sub-headings; the concept of learner absenteeism, causes of learner absenteeism, and impact of learner absenteeism on academic performance. Finally, the chapter gives the research gap and the summary.

2.2. The Concept of Absenteeism

According to Gabb (2009), a number of terms are related and used interchangeably with learner absenteeism. These concepts are familiar in meaning and similar to absenteeism. The concepts include truancy and school phobia. Absenteeism can be authorized by parents and schools and it can also be unauthorized; absenteeism can be legitimate for example due to illness or illegitimate due to parents and learners under estimating the value of education (Atkinson et al., 2000).

According to Baker, et al, (2001) absenteeism has long been an issue for school authorities. Students are absent from their educational institutes every day without a genuine excuse. Going to school regularly is crucially important for a student's education and social skills. Chronically absent students are at a disadvantage both socially and academically. They miss out on critical stages of social interaction and development with their peers, while simultaneously limiting their academic progress. This can result in low self-esteem, social isolation, and dissatisfaction that could well have precipitated non-attendance in the first place.

Learner absenteeism is a serious hindrance to effective professional practice (teaching and learning) and thus a clear definition of learner absenteeism in school context is called for. Learner absenteeism as a habitual pattern of absence from obligation or school can be viewed as an indicator of poor academic performance, which is rooted in the socio-economic circumstances of a learner (Malcolm et al., 2003).

Another factor closely related to learner absenteeism is the distinction between authorized and unauthorized absence of learners from school. Unauthorized absence or illegitimate authorized absenteeism is referred to as post registration truancy (Atkinson et al., 2000). Unauthorized absence is the type of absence which is not authorized by the schools and parents have no valid reason for granting such absence (Whitney, 1994).

The terms absenteeism and truancy will be used interchangeably for the purpose of this study because they are similar in meaning although they differ slightly in their contextual application. Truancy is the direct result of absenteeism and absenteeism may be the direct result of truancy (Wittenberg, 2005). Truancy can be defined as unauthorized absence from school: the learner reports for school for a brief moment and later on disappears (Railsback, 2004). Truancy is closely linked to partial absence as the learner leaves school before closing time (Moseki M, 2004). Truancy can also be explained as the act or condition of being absent without permission (Edward & Malcon 2002)

Another concept closely related to learner absenteeism is school phobia. School phobia refers to unwillingness to attend school and staying at home with the knowledge of the learner's parents. School phobia includes fear of failure and concern about the health and welfare of learners by parents (Moseki, 2004). An example of school phobia is a child's sudden fear of attending because the learner is subjected to criticism by other learners and teachers (Finlay, 2005).

Apart from the terms above, there is what is called condoned absence: when parents fail to uphold their responsibilities as parents and shift that responsibility to their children (Railsback, 2004). Learners are made to run family business or look after sick siblings on behalf of the parents; however, condoned absence happens when parents are just not interested in the education of their children (Whitney, 1994). Condoned absence or justified absence can be caused by factors such as illness, accident, family bereavement, attending to family business, cultural activities or religious observance (Parker, 2005). This discussion illustrates how absenteeism and its related terms have been given different meanings by different scholars. The clarification of the above concepts has been done to justify the study by showing the lack of consensus among scholars with regard to this issue.

In the literature, there are many definitions within the scope of absenteeism. For example, Lannegrand-Willems et al. (2012) defined absenteeism as, "a student being absent in school with or without an excuse". Robinson (2009) considered absenteeism by describing behaviour and defined it as "not attending the school with or without an excuse, miss some classes or being late for class". Regardless of the reason for absence, the fact is that the student is missing a portion of the academic process. Additionally, students who were absent with excuse, such as students staying away from school for a long time due to health problems, have difficulty in adapting when they return to school and may develop a habit of absenteeism without excuse. In other words, when "absenteeism without a legitimate reason" is removed from the scope of the problem, the disruption in children's learning process and other problems that may be experienced in the future should not be ignored.

Focusing on absenteeism as a problem, the duration is as important as the type of absenteeism. As Lannegrand-Willems et al. (2012) indicated, when absenteeism is rare, it is not considered to indicate a problematic situation. However, increased absenteeism is considered to be an indicator of various risk factors. Generally, 10-40% absenteeism during an educational calendar year is considered to indicate a problem. Examining the absenteeism within a school day is also important. Some students may miss an entire day of school while others may only miss one or two courses. The duration of and classification of absenteeism (with or without excuse) varies from country to country. However, the common point of view is that as the student's absenteeism increases, exposure to risk factors also rises.

2.3. Causes for Learner Absenteeism

The causes of student absenteeism are complex and multi-faceted. Researchers Cooperkline, (2009) suggests six main predictors for chronically absent and disruptive students: 1.) unfavourable perceptions of school; 2.) inconsistent parental discipline; 3.) parents who are controlling have negative child rearing patterns, 4.) perceptions of academic inferiority; 5.) family conflict; and 6.) social incompetence in class. Further, Brookins and Hirsh (2002) also reported that absent students experienced low cohesion in the family, lack of parental acceptance, and lack of discipline. Likewise, disruptive students had low cohesions in the family, lack of parental acceptance, and lack of proper discipline. Hence, because both chronic school

absenteeism and disruptive behaviour in the classroom are associated with negative family factors, it is plausible to hypothesize that the three factors in fact “spill over” on each other.

Wilkins (2008) has reported four themes, which play important role to motivate students to attend school such as school climate, academic environment, discipline, and relationships with teachers. Obtaining poor grades was another reason for frequent absenteeism. If the school becomes a place where students feel unsuccessful, then they want to avoid it. Therefore, special tutorial programs should be initiated to equip students with adequate academic skills.

Peer influence also has a significant bearing on student attendance. Student absenteeism is also associated with social problems. Smink and Reimer (2005) stated that “Student with absenteeism often engage in high-risk behaviours that lead to referral to the juvenile justice system”. Students often miss class to be in the company of friends. Students who associate with delinquent peer groups are at risk. Student absenteeism may also be a red flag for a more serious problem such as anxiety, loneliness and stress. These students should be sent for counselling sessions. In addition, after school sports and other programs will enable students to make new friends and experience a positive environment. Results of the survey show that lack of parental supervision may also lead to absenteeism among students. As parental involvement relates closely to student attendance and academic progress, parents should be reminded of their responsibilities. School authorities should cooperate with police and the local community to patrol neighbourhoods where truant students are likely to spend school hours.

Absenteeism disturbs the dynamic teaching- learning environment and adversely affects the overall well-being of classes (Segal, 2008). In quality terms, absenteeism is a waste of educational resources, time and human potential. Student absenteeism also causes rework and wasted time for lecturers (Lalek, 1995 and Rumburger 1997). According to (Park and Kerr 1990) this problem is widely recognized that absenteeism can negatively impact grades in economics courses and that high attendance rates can improve student performance in variety of classroom settings.

One common correction problem found internationally is absenteeism. Davies and Lee (2006) found that school children in the United Kingdom (UK) are motivated not to go to school or choose not to attend certain classes during the school hours. This problem of absenteeism is anyway of gender, race and religion. 'The problem is students who stay away from school without approval will not only be left behind in the learning process, but worse immobile they will possibly end up in drug abuse, gangsters, alcohol consumption, gambling and loitering. Certainly, playing truant is a discipline problem, and where do these absentees go to and what they do during the time of their absence from school are associated concerns.

There are many reasons why children stay away from school illegally. According to Suseladevy, (2004), they include effect of peers' fear of being bullied, fear of teachers, displeasure of certain subjects, thinking that they will fail. All of these issues have occasioned in students having no inspiration to learn, therefore they turn their responsiveness to suspend around at other places or waiting. Research findings have also shown that students who do not livelihood and participate in any school databases or actions are those who are not attracted to be in school. She, (2002) found that school absenteeism associated with internalizing and externalizing behaviour, family work and health, and school environment. Student performance is inversely correlated with absenteeism. The author investigates the impact of enforcing an attendance policy on absenteeism and student performance. Occasional absenteeism among students can be excused. However, frequent absenteeism is a cause for concern as it has often been linked to serious problems such as violence and substance abuse. Absenteeism can have significant negative effects on students, the school and on society. Therefore, it is critical to determine the reasons from absenteeism and identify strategies to tackle the problem.

- i. **Health Issues:** Issues related to the student's physical and mental health appears directly related to student attendance. Chronic health conditions are among the most significant predictors of student absenteeism. Taras and Potts-Datema (2005) reviewed literature related to chronic health conditions in children and disclosed that the literature associates student attendance with diabetes, sickle cell anaemia, epilepsy, among other chronic illnesses. This research builds on related work suggesting that other chronic conditions have also been

attributed to increased student absenteeism, including migraines, abdominal pain, musculoskeletal pain, and juvenile rheumatoid arthritis

- ii. **Student perceptions of the school:** Student perceptions of the school have also been associated with student attendance. Research strongly associates the student perceptions of the school culture and rigor of the academic program with student attendance. Researchers find that students are less likely to attend school when they perceived their classes are boring or irrelevant; feel unsupported or disrespected by teachers and other school staff; feel uncomfortable or bullied by other students; or feel targeted for discipline and behavioural issues (Balfanz and Mac-Iver, 2007)
- iii. **Parent and Family Predictors of Student Attendance:** Parent and family factors (i.e., whether the student resides in a single-parent household, family socioeconomic status, parental unemployment, homeownership, etc.) have also been shown to predict school attendance. Gottfried (2011) noted that it has traditionally been difficult for researchers to disassociate student and family characteristics in analyses that examine school attendance.
- iv. **Family socioeconomic status and place of residence:** Research suggests that the family's socioeconomic status wield a significant influence on the likelihood that students will attend school regularly. Students who reside in urban neighbourhoods are more likely to miss school and/or become chronically absent due to the myriad of factors that distract students from school (Balfanz and Mac-Iver, 2007).
- v. **School culture, climate, and safety:** The culture and climate of the school, particularly as it relates to teacher-student relationships and more broadly to issues of student safety, has been moderately associated with student absenteeism. The likelihood that a student will not attend school increases when students feel unsafe. Similarly, Rumberger and Palardy (2005) reported that students who perceived that their school was unsafe had higher rates of attribution. In particular, students who experience bullying and victimization by peers or their teachers tend to miss more school than peers who do not experience these conditions or threatened by the school community.

- vi. **Condition of the school facility:** Researchers have also associated the conditions of the school facility, particularly the school's ventilation system, with student attendance. Poor ventilation systems introduce students – particularly those with respiratory health challenges including asthma – to conditions that promote chronic illness (Shendell, et al., 2004).

The factors associated with absenteeism are further classified in the literature into three fundamental areas: individual, family and schools (Eastman et al., 2017).

2.3.1. Individual Factors for Learner Absenteeism

Students' individual factors may negatively affect school attendance. Research indicates that absenteeism increases by seniority in high school (Rood, 1989) and most frequently happens at age 15. Absentee students usually do not feel safe at school. They feel academically or socially inadequate. They find classes boring and their positive experiences related to school are less than those who attend school regularly (Clarke, 2018; and Williams, 2011). Thus, self-esteem, confidence, concentration, self-management and social skills of these students are low. They feel powerless in the school and think other students do not respect them (Wall, 2003; Eastman et al., 2017). According to Reid (2013) and Gentle-Genitty (2018), other results include not wanting to get up in the morning, receiving strict punishment, sleeping late, not completing homework, being in a grade that is one above or one below the regular grade level, switching to another school in the middle or the beginning of the school year, feeling extreme test pressure, feeling constantly ill, and having siblings who are regularly absent. Participating in fun activities and socializing with their peers outside of school are also among the reasons (Williams, 2011). Interestingly, as Clark (2018) indicated, some students are absent since they find courses difficult and some others are absent because they find the courses monotonous and boring.

2.3.2. Family factors for Learner Absenteeism.

Another major reason for absenteeism is "family factors". A student's parent has a significant impact on his attendance in school (Clark, 2018). Research indicates the following reasons for student absenteeism arising from the family: family's socio-economic level; family's need for student to work; parenting skills; psychological

problems; support or neglect; alcohol or drug problems; criminal behaviour (McCluskey et al., 2014; Clark, 2018); the lack of consistency; divorce; inter-parent conflicts; family structure, such as a single parent; interest or control level for the student's behaviour; parents have low education level; negative past school experiences; lack of participation in school or not understanding procedures; and not providing environment for the student to do homework (Corley, 2012). The level of respect the family has for education is seen as a role model for students.

The primary responsibility of parents is to ensure their children regularly attend school. Conditions at home have a significant impact on children's attendance and on their promptness. Poor family control and lack of persistence is perhaps one of the most important factors behind school absenteeism (Pehlivan, 2016). Family control can be defined as parents' knowledge about their child's activities, friends and the information regarding his whereabouts (Cetin and Cok, 2011).

Disinterested families are often seldom concerned with their children's success or failure. They do not help in solving the problems at school and they rarely attend parent-school meetings. These families are unlikely to create a disciplined environment for children at home (Hallam and Rogers, 2018). According to Williams (2011), today's high school students are controlled less than their parents were in the past. As well as lack of control and lack of monitoring, some parents ignore the excuses with less than a valid reason. In so doing, they are supporting and justifying the absenteeism.

2.3.3. School Factors for Learner Absenteeism

School-related factors influence students' decisions toward school attendance. A school's attitude and rules against absenteeism are factors that contribute to the absenteeism problem (Eastman et al., 2017). According to Robinson (2019), schools' procedures are inconsistent and do not produce meaningful results in reducing absenteeism. Students are not receiving clear messages from the school about the importance of attendance. Tolerant policies or lack of firm implementation for existing policies gives the wrong message to students and parents about the importance of attendance (Clarke, 2018). Wall (2000) also indicated that inconsistency of policies, lack of meaningful results and poor school record keeping have a negative effect on students.

Although there are various reasons for absenteeism, one of the most important of these reasons is "not liking the school" (Pehlivan, 2016). If the school is cold, not secure, or if there is a climate of tolerance for bullying, students will prefer not to be in school (Clark, 2008; Corley, 2012). In particular, conflicts with peers and teachers, exposure to bullying, and dislike of teachers are important causes of absenteeism (Eastman et al., 2007; Reid, 2000; Gentle-Genitty, 2018). In a school environment where students do not feel a commitment to school, they would not want to attend, resulting in increased feelings of alienation. As Hamm and Faircloth (2015) stated, commitment to the school is formed by the student's perceptions about respect, love and values they receive in the school. In the school environment where there is a perceived value and an emotional commitment, there will be a sense of security. Therefore, in such a school environment, students' attendance and participation increases.

2.4. Farming and Pastoralism on Pupils' School Absenteeism

Research has demonstrated that involving school-going children in farming activities contributes to absenteeism. According to a study done in Indonesia by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in 2014, most children attended school and worked in tobacco farms only outside school hours, before and after school, and on weekends and during school holidays. However, the Human Rights Watch found that work in tobacco farming interfered with schooling for some children. These children often said that their families could not afford to put them through school, or relied on them to work. Most communities did not have to pay school fees to attend public schools but the cost of books, uniforms, and transportation to and from school. Some of these children decided to work so as to make money for the family and for food.

Farming settlements are significantly different from high density areas where learners' access to school is easier due to proximity. Farming households are spaced far apart and schools located far. Younger learners face various challenges. A study by Mafa, (2018) found that child labour alone was not the cause of learner absenteeism in rural farming areas. A number of factors have been identified as being the prime cause of absenteeism among these learners. These factors include their social and economic setup, geographical location and distance to school, and the unavailability of parental guidance and support. It was noted that learners would sneak out of school without

being noticed. This has been attributed to a failure of the school management system and school management teams. School management team members did not seem to be proactive in dealing with issues of learner attendance and principals were regarded as the only persons who should deal with learners who transgressed national learner attendance policy. School Management Teams (SMTs) seemed to also be relying on the School Nutrition Programme (SNP) as a way of combating absenteeism in schools.

In Zambia, Kabanga and Mulauzi, (2020) assessed factors that perpetuate pupil absenteeism in rural primary schools in Nyimba district. The study found households which depended on domestic labour largely involved children and therefore deprived them of continued school presence. The study identified ways in which absenteeism affected the teaching and learning processes including poor performance, fostering indiscipline, insufficient comprehension of concepts and the difficulties experienced by teachers. Interventions to curb pupil absenteeism were ascertained calling for parents, teachers and all stakeholders in education to make firm decisions to stop absenteeism among the learners by avoiding early marriages, fostering collaboration and being flexible in time management.

Pastoral communities experience a level of learner absenteeism from school. In a study by Mburu, (2017) it was found that herd migration has a significantly negative effect on school attendance – about a 26% probability of failure to attend among the children of livestock migrating households. The child's age and mother's literacy have a positive impact on child school attendance, but with girls more likely to attend than boys, probably because of higher opportunity costs. That is, attending school takes boys away from activities like herding, which have greater economic value than the non-monetisable household duties performed by girls.

2.5. Parents' Socio-economic Status and Pupils' School Absenteeism

One of the most dramatic changes in education over the last decade has been the "massification" of primary education. However, there is still poor school attendance and performance among the poor. According to Kasente (2003), poor parents' decisions still get taken that deny some boys and girls of school going age from getting access to primary school education. At higher levels most girls that access secondary education tend to come from middle and above wealth quintile families. The children

themselves hardly make these decisions but rather it is their parents, guardians and relatives. For the children who are not enrolled in school, there are explanations for what drives the decision taken by their parents and guardians. For example, some studies found investment in children to be related to household income. Bjorkman M (2005), depicted the correlation between family income and girls' and boys' enrolment as follows: For low levels of income very few girls attended education and there is a large gap between boys' and girls' enrolment. The differential treatment of children's education was explained by the returns to education, and the share of the children's income transferred to his or her parents. On the other hand, the differential treatment of girls' verses boys is related to the fact that parents' values of child labour where girls bear the bulk of the additional work required at home.

Income shocks do not only affect investment in children's education but also children's school attendance and performance. When families are constrained by fewer resources and there are differences in boys and girls access to resources, children's learning is consequently affected. According to Bjorkman M (2005), a negative income shock has two effects on the female student's performance: marginal girls will be withdrawn from school than boys and the resources (food) provided will fall more for girls than for boys. As such only brighter girls reach grade seven. On the other hand, as girls are provided with less resources within the household, or alternatively, have to spend more time on domestic work as compared to boys and this effect causes girls to abscond from school and perform worse on the test as compared to boys.

According to Alissa (2010), Children's test scores are lowest when poverty persist across the generations, and highest when material advantage is long-lasting. On the other hand, while good social skills also appear to be linked across generations, these do not make a significant direct contribution to the current gap in cognitive test scores between rich and poor children. Alisa (2010) found that the gap in attainment between children from the poorest and richest backgrounds grew particularly fast during the primary school years. By age eleven, only around three-quarters of children from the poorest fifth of families reached the expected level, compared with 97 per cent of children from the richest fifth. according to Alisa (2010), poorer children who performed well in tests at age seven were more likely than better-off children to fall behind by age eleven, and poorer children who performed badly at seven were less

likely to improve their ranking compared with children from better-off backgrounds an important factor behind the widening gap is pupil absenteeism as it was found that pupils from poor background did not attend classes continuously.

Akanle (2007) identified Parental income in this work to be a cogent factor upon which the academic or vocational successes of secondary school students lie. He found Parental income not to be sufficient to sustain the academic and personal social life of the student in sub rural school areas. This to a large extent affects the psychological balance or homeostatic balance in the class room, which causes low concentration, low perception, frustration, sickness and emotional disability in academic performance of the students. Therefore, when a child is deprived of the essential needs he may be found to be missing classes and perform poorly in his school work. This is consistent with Bugembe et al (2005) finding that child welfare at school is a determinant of child retention and also incorporates the rights of children to adequate living standards (shelter, nutrition and healthcare, water, and sanitation services) that are vital for child growth and development. Bugembe (2005) explained that in urban areas, most poor families can hardly afford the cost of water, resulting in children from poor families being sent on long treks in search of water, often having to stand in long queues and consequently being late or absent from school.

Katanga, (2016) found that the socio-economic status of parents was one of the major contributing factors to learner absenteeism in primary schools. Due to the low economic status of parents, hunger was seen to be a contributing factor to absenteeism because some learners did not have food to eat at home hence making it difficult for them to attend school on an empty stomach.

2.6. Impact of Absenteeism on Learners

School absenteeism as early as kindergarten, is predictive of chronic absences in later grades. When students are not in school they miss critical academic learning opportunities. Numerous studies have concluded that school non -attendance leads to lower levels of academic achievement (Komakech, 2015). Gottfried (2011) carried out a study with third and fourth grade students in elementary schools. His study found out that attendance predicted both grade point averages and reading and mathematics performance on the Stanford Achievement test.

Gottfried concluded that there was a significant relationship between attendance and achievement.

When absenteeism is widespread it impacts students who are not absent (Chang and Jordan, 2015). Teachers will slow down the pace of instruction for entire class to help absent students catch up when they return. It causes re-work and wasted time for teachers. School absenteeism is a waste of educational resources, time and human potential.

Poor attendance is predictive of high school dropout. Students who are always absent will eventually drop out of school. When students experience school failure, they become frustrated and end up alienated and experience exclusion leading to eventual dropout (Komakech, 2015). Studies have also found that excessive absences are correlated with risk taking behaviours such as drug abuse, truancy, bullying, and prostitution (Gottfried, 2010).

2.7. Empirical Literature

There has been considerable research at global, regional and local levels of absenteeism with a bearing on child labour in agriculture and economic status of the households.

Various studies aiming to identify the causes of absenteeism have been conducted. These include reasons for elementary school level absenteeism (Kadi 2000; Ozbas, 2010; Yildiz ve Sanli Kula, 2012). Several studies examining the reasons for secondary school absenteeism (Pehlivan, 2016; Gokyer, 2018) are also available. These studies are limited, given the importance and magnitude of the problem. These studies describe and explain the reasons of absenteeism in elementary and secondary level education through the evaluation of the participants' responses in different locations. In the literature, as highlighted by researchers, reasons for absenteeism are various and versatile (Eastman et al., 2017). They include many factors, such as student's perception of the school environment, student's commitment to school, student's family structure and student-family communication. Therefore, absenteeism and its causes should be examined against individual characteristics, such as gender of the student, and the level of maturity in interaction with the school and family system in order to solve the problems.

At global level, learner absenteeism has been studied widely. Consideration is given to the impact of farming activities involving learners. Weiss and García (2018) revealed that poor health, residential mobility, extensive family responsibilities (e.g. children looking after siblings) along with inadequate supports for students within the educational system (e.g. lack of adequate transportation, unsafe conditions, lack of medical services, harsh disciplinary measures, etc.) were all associated with a greater likelihood of being absent, and particularly with being persistently absent.

In a study done in Australia by Moseki (2004), it was found that age is a cause of pupil absenteeism from schools. Older learners are more likely to absent schools than younger ones because of many reasons such as peer pressure and joining of gang groups which do various devious activities during school hours. For example, in most rural areas of Zambia parents use their children to do most home activities for them. The older the children the more home obligations they are expected to have hence making it difficult for them to attend school regularly. Apart from the learners' age, Moseki' study also found that personality factors such as lack of recognition of regular attendants can promote learner absenteeism. Learners need some acknowledgement for regular school attendance and when this is not done they down play the importance of school attendance. The age differences between secondary school going learners and primary school going pupils may have some implications on the findings.

Davies and Lee (2006) carried out a research to investigate the extent of student absenteeism in the classroom and explore the reasons why student absent themselves from classes and examine the implications of student absenteeism. The study revealed that student absenteeism is rampant due to reasons such as: lack of subject interest, poor teaching strategies, unfavourable learning environment, too much socialization, part-time jobs and poor relations with the teachers. The study also found an inverse relationship between student absenteeism and course performance.

Pehlivan (2006) found that the major reason given by students for non-attendance at lecture or school were bored at school, dislike of school and lessons, encouragement of friends, and lack of expectations about education.

Within Africa, pupil absenteeism is an emerging research area. In Kenya, Awuor, (2012) investigated effects of economic activities on pupils' academic performance of pupils at Kenya Certificate of Primary Education in Lari division. The study findings revealed that academic performance of pupils in Lari division was adversely affected by contextual factors such as inadequate support by parents, low income, attitude of parents towards schooling, level of education of parents, initiation practices for boys before completing primary education and religious affiliation of parents. Pupils in Lari also participated in child labour, as well as working in their parents' farms and domestic related chores. These activities are deemed to contribute to poor academic performance. Learner characteristics such as truancy, absenteeism and indiscipline also cause poor academic performance among pupils. Besides, school-related factors such as insufficient learning resources, irregular disbursement of FPE funds, the impact of leadership offered by head teachers, school levies for study tours, examination charges and support staff and tuition fees were found to contribute towards poor academic performance.

In Namibia, a study done by Katanga, (2016) on the management of learners' absenteeism in rural primary schools, found that the causes of learner absenteeism from schools were categorized as; family, individual, school environment and socio-economic. Most respondents stated that, learners basically absent themselves from schools because of their involvement in performing domestic chores at home and in the fields. The study also cited various personal reasons such as absenteeism of female learners during their menstrual periods, lack of motivation to attend school and early marriages.

According to a research done by the United Nations Educational Scientific Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) (2009), learner absenteeism in African rural areas was seen to be caused by lack of proper modes of transport from homes to schools and limited hostel facilities which expose learners to difficulties in times of bad weather such as when it is too rainy, very cold or hot. The research further cited incidents of intimidation of girls by boys and outsiders as a contributing factor to learner absenteeism.

In Zimbabwe, Chinyoka, (2014) examined the causes of school drop-out among Ordinary level learners at a resettlement secondary school in Zimbabwe, with the aim of suggesting sound measures and solutions thus promoting learner retention in

schools. Findings revealed that poverty in households, child labour/household chores, broken families, poor supervision by parents, involvement in bad company/peer pressure, drug abuse, malnutrition and health related issues, low self-motivation and lack of interest in education among ordinary level learners were identified by teachers and learners as being the major factors influencing school dropouts.

In Zambia, a study by Jensen and Nielsen, (2007) suggests that both economic and sociological variables are important determinants for the choice between school attendance and child labour. In particular, there is support for the hypothesis that poverty forces households to keep their children away from school.

Nyumbu, (2022) studied the link between tobacco farming and the factors which contribute to learner absenteeism in selected primary schools of Nkeyema District. The findings of the study revealed that the major factors which contributed to absenteeism among learners from both tobacco and non-tobacco farming homes were; working in tobacco activities, doing of house chores, long distances from homes to schools and lack of encouragement by parents. The study also found out that tobacco farming had a negative effect on learner absenteeism in Nkeyema District in that it exacerbated the problem of long distances from homes to school through the camp farming system, tobacco farming promoted the over dependence on children to do house chores when parents were busy with farm works. Tobacco farming also promoted child labour.

Kabungo, (2018) conducted a study on learner absenteeism in primary schools in Itezhi -tezhi District using a mixed method approach. The findings of his study were that poverty led to learners' absenteeism due to the hunger that stroke their homes. His study findings revealed that learners resorted to staying home than going to school on an empty stomach because it will be of no use attending lessons while the concentration is low. It was put that concentration when one is hungry is threatened as it requires energy to pay attention to what is happening around especially in a classroom situation.

Kabanga and Mulauzi (2020) in their study of understanding pupil absenteeism and its factors in rural primary schools of Nyimba District of Zambia found out that causes of absenteeism were in five categories: physical factors (e.g. rivers, long distances),

health factors (e.g. sickness), personal factors (peer pressure, lack of interest, early marriages), home related factors (poverty, farming, household chores, family business), cultural factors (puberty rites), and school related factors (lack of motivation, teacher punishment).

2.8. Research Gap

The literature reviewed in this study is insightful and significant for the understanding of pupil absenteeism. Likewise, the reviewed literature have all justified and acknowledged the existence and rapid increase in learner absenteeism in most countries and Zambia is not exceptional. However, it would seem that there is scanty or limited information on how farming, cattle herding and socio-economic factors lead to absenteeism among pupils in the Zambian context. Hence, it is worthwhile conducting this study.

2.9. Summary

The researcher has reviewed various literature related to this study. The review relies mostly on articles and some few dissertations and high-profile reports. The chapter has reviewed literature based on the key objectives of the study. In view of the studies conducted in both developed and developing nations, the researcher gained massive insight to the information surrounding school absenteeism. The chapter has also shown the research gap which has prompted the researcher to conduct this study. The next chapter presents the research methodology.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Overview

The purpose of the study was to establish how farming, cattle herding and socio-economic factors lead to absenteeism among pupils in selected schools in Kalomo district of southern province in Zambia. This chapter is devoted to the description of research design, target population, sample size, sampling procedures and research instruments. It also describes the data collection procedures and how this data was analysed in order to answer the research questions.

3.2. Research Paradigm

The study was motivated by the views of interpretivism. According to this worldview, individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work, thus they develop subjective meaning of their experiences towards certain objects, events or things (Creswell, 2009). In this philosophical design, researchers rely on participants views over a given phenomenon to construct meaning through discussion and interaction. Open ended questions were used in order to give chance to the participant to explain the problem at hand in line with social, cultural and historical context. In supporting this worldview, Dilthey (1976:35) says “the study of social phenomena requires an understanding of the social worlds that people inhabit, which they have already interpreted by the meanings they produce and reproduce as a necessary part of their everyday activities together.” Further, this worldview considers human beings as part of the social world, which exists due to the interaction and actions.

Interpretivism emphasizes a search for meaning, understanding and social interaction as the basis for knowledge creation and this view was supported by Nkhata et al (2019) who observed that meaning and knowledge are socially constructed through social interaction. Crotty (2005:84) also says interpretivism aims to understand phenomena, to interpret meaning within particular social and cultural contexts, and to uncover beliefs and elicit meaning from action and intention through dialogical interaction between researchers and participants. According to this worldview, the social world is open and changing by ways people go about their lives.

Research methods therefore, must be capable of capturing the quality of people's interpretations and understanding the meaning to people's course of actions. The basic assumption is that there are multiple truths. According to Crotty (2005:85), "truth, or meaning, comes into existence in and out of our engagement with the realities in our world. In this understanding of knowledge, it is clear that different people may construct meaning in different ways, even in relation to the same phenomenon.

It is from this standpoint that the current study lays its pillars to guide the researcher to interact with the participants who were directly involved in handling primary school going pupils and helped construct and interpret meaning from their views in that society in line with their daily experiences to pupil absenteeism.

As already noted, different people may construct meaning in different ways, even in relation to the same phenomenon. Therefore, establishing how farming, cattle herding and socio-economic factors lead to absenteeism among pupils in selected schools in Kalomo district using this worldview may help to obtain unique and peculiar information that government and stakeholders may need to help formulate policy in curbing pupil absenteeism. Further, the current study used interpretivism as a philosophical foundation because it is assumed that teachers and pupils play different roles and face different challenges that cannot be quantified. Interpretivists intend to grasp the subjective meaning of social action in order to conduct research methodology (Saunders, et al, 2009). An in-depth study was therefore, preferred to help obtain the views of the study participants on persisting factors of pupil absenteeism in rural primary schools in Kalomo district.

3.3. Research Design

A descriptive research design was employed in order to obtain extensive results on how farming, cattle herding and socio-economic factors lead to absenteeism among pupils in selected schools in Kalomo district. In line with Creswell (2012) descriptive research design is recommended as a non-experimental approach that can be used in studies that aim at collecting raw data from human subjects in a direct manner. It is appropriate for data based on respondents' behaviours and attitudes. The design was ideal for the researcher in the current study to bring out the participant's views and opinions on the subject in a more elaborate manner in order to establish the findings

of the study. Further, this method was appropriate for the current study as it was economical, requiring fewer resources of time, finances and personnel while covering a large population.

The study adopted qualitative research methods as a way of exploring attitudes, behaviour and experiences through interviews in order to get an in-depth opinion from participants. According to Creswell, (2014) the qualitative method brings about data concerning the perceptions, experiences, behaviours, opinions and observations of the respondents. The method was appropriate to assure the efficacy of the research by applying a range of data collection approaches on the same subject, with varied occurrences and data collection procedures.

In other words, the qualitative approach allowed the researcher to gather in-depth views, ideas and knowledge from the participant's own perception and not researcher's fixed responses on pupil absenteeism. The variables of how farming, cattle herding and socio-economic status could best be assessed by obtaining the actual experiences, perceptions, behaviours and opinions of the respondents within their settings.

3.4. The Study Area

The research was carried out in Kalomo district of southern province in Zambia. The major occupation of the people in the area is farming. Livestock keeping is a dominant activity, sheep and goats are jointly grazed with the cattle. Thus, cattle herding is the readily available job. Maize is grown for food and surplus is sold to earn some income. Other crops include beans, potatoes and vegetables. Most primary schools in the division are public.

The area of study was chosen based on the following reasons: The children tend to perform poorly academically in primary schools in the district; the district quality, assurance and standards officer of the area blames the parents of the area on how they support their children while at home; and the school administration and teacher's claims that there is consistence in absenteeism of pupils due to cattle herding.

3.5. Target Population

The research was focused on the population of households with school-going children within Kalomo district who are also engaged in cattle herding and farming. The study

drew from rural four primary schools within Kalomo District where learners, teachers and parents could be accessed for data collection. The schools where the study was conducted are Namwinga, Bbelo, Mutala and Kalomo Primary Schools. By numbers, the target population comprised a pupil population of 2,571 across the four schools.

3.6. Sample Size

A sample is a set of individuals selected from a population and is usually intended to represent the population in a research study (Neuman, 2007). While the sample size is the total number of actual individuals selected to participate in the study. Pupils were categorized into lower (class 1, 2 and 3), mid upper (class 4 and 5) and upper (class 7, and 8). Then a choice was made to include class 3, 5 and 8 to represent lower, mid-upper and upper respectively. The class at top most in each category except class 7 which is a candidate class was used because pupils are able to read, understand and make responses to the phenomena under study better than those colleagues in other categories. There were 20 parents (5 per school) and 4 FGD with the pupils (1 FGD per school) each with 5 learners, forming a sample size of 28. There were 4 Guidance and Counselling teachers (1 per school).

3.7. Sampling Technique

Sampling procedures refers to the techniques for sampling that the researcher use to select members or items from the target population that is included in the sample (Kothari, 2003). The study used purposive sampling to select all the four (4) primary schools in Kalomo district that included Namwinga, Bbelo, Mutala and Kalomo Primary Schools. The rationale for selecting the four schools were the reported high levels of absenteeism (Kalomo DEBS Office 2020 yearly report) and that they are located in the rural of Kalomo District.

Purposive sampling was used to select 4 guidance and counselling teachers by virtue of their position (1 from each school) and random sampling for learners from classes 3, 5 and 8.

These study participants were perceived to be reliable with the information pertaining to pupil absenteeism. Commenting on the use of this technique, Komb and Tromp (2006:82) stated that "Purposive sampling is when the researcher purposely targets a group of people believed to be reliable for the study." Thus the study carefully

selected the teachers in charge of guidance and counselling services teaching at primary school because these teachers were the ones who took record of pupil absenteeism and offered guidance and counselling services.

In terms of pupils, perpetual absentees at the school were sampled at the school authority's discretion as it was perceived that such pupils could help greatly in bringing out information that perpetuates pupil absenteeism. Parents of perpetual absentees were also purposefully sampled.

The pupils were requested to state the employment status of their parents. Figure 4.2 summarizes the results.

3.8. Data Collection Instruments and Procedures

In-depth interviews and FGDs were used to collect data. In-depth interviews were used to solicit information from teachers, pupils and parents. In-depth interviews i.e. open-ended conversations with key participants (teachers, pupils and parents) were conducted with the aid of a structured topic guide and interview meetings were held in a quiet place that were most convenient to participants. The interviews were carried out in English and local language (Tonga) to allow maximum participation depending on the participant's choice.

Four FGDs, one in each school were conducted to collect information from pupils on their experiences in as far as absenteeism was concerned especially as regards to what made them absent from school regularly. FGDs were also done in Tonga with a bit of English because the pupils hardly expressed themselves in English.

To successfully conduct the study, the researcher obtained permit from the office of District Education Board Secretary (DEBS) to conduct research study in Kalomo district. The permission allowed the researcher to visit schools and collect data. The researcher introduced himself to the school administration and requested for permission to conduct research study.

3.9. Data Analysis

The study used thematic analysis to analyse data. Kombo and Tromp (2006), argue that thematic method of data analysis classifies or categorizes topics or major subjects which emerge in the interview discussions. In this form of data analysis, the researcher perused through the collected data and identified information that was

relevant to the research questions and objectives. After the summary of the findings from the interview questions, main emerging themes were synthesized and interpreted. After obtaining the final overall portraits of the crude data from different areas, the data were qualitatively interpreted and discussed in chapter five. Thereafter, conclusions were drawn as shown in chapter six. Thematic analysis was the best analytical technique because of the qualitative nature of the data obtained through interviews. The data was presented using verbatim.

3.10. Trustworthiness of the Data

The researcher put in place measures to ensure trustworthiness of the data. The aspects of credibility, transferability, confirmability and dependability.

- i. **Credibility:** To achieve credibility of the qualitative data, the researcher focused on ensuring the focus on multiple perspectives in the process of data collection. By employing triangulation, the researcher employed interviews, observations and FGDs. Validation of participants was done by checking their demographic characteristics to ensure they belonged to the category of respondents they professed and were appropriately sampled. The data collection process was undertaken under strict control and moderation by the researcher. This gave confidence that the findings would be truthful and representative of the phenomena regarding learner absenteeism in terms of farming, cattle herding and socio-economic status of parents.
- ii. **Transferability:** This aspect was affirmed by the understanding that absenteeism is a topical issue and affects learners across all levels of education. The situation of Kalomo district is significantly similar with other districts in Zambia and other developing countries. The practices of farming and cattle herding are common across rural populations. Therefore, the findings of the current study are applicable to other contexts, circumstances and situations.
- iii. **Confirmability:** This was achieved by the researcher ensuring that no biases affected the findings of the study. The findings were based purely of the responses obtained from the participants and not any of the researcher's motivations. The interpretation of results is aligned with the data collected from the study. The steps taken to analyse and report the data are outlined in the

data analysis section. Therefore, the research findings accurately portray participants' responses.

- iv. **Dependability:** This explains the extent to which the study can be replicated by other researchers. The study is novel and has not been previously conducted. The variables of cattle herding, farming and socio-economic status have not previously been studied in one research to measure absenteeism at primary school level. The study was undertaken with supervision of the University of Zambia (UNZA) which is a credible institution with particular support and supervision to ensure the study met the set standards. This involved the review of the study and examination of the research process and data analysis under a qualified research supervisor.

3.11. Ethical Considerations

The study embraced a range of ethical considerations. As stressed by Chakraborty (2012), during research, respondents should not be put in situations that might expose them to the risk of physical or psychological harm. The following were the ethical considerations during data collection in Kalomo district:

- i. The respondents were included purely on voluntary basis and had the right to withdraw from the study at any stage if they wished to do so. The respondents were requested not to disclose their names in order to uphold anonymity which guaranteed the respondents' privacy. None of the respondents participated in the research without their consent. As such they were requested to append their signature to the consent letter (see Appendix 1). Therefore, voluntary participation by the respondents was the basis of the study. In most cases appointments between the researcher and the respondents also played a role.
- ii. The respondents participated on informed consent basis. In this regard, the researcher provided sufficient information and assurances about taking part to allow individuals to understand the implications of participation and to reach a fully informed, considered and freely given decision about whether or not to do so, without the exercise of any pressure or coercion.

- iii. The researcher and all written information did not include any offensive, discriminatory, or other unacceptable language, directly or indirectly, considering the sensitive nature of the study which involved foreign nationals.
- iv. The researcher ensured total privacy and anonymity of respondents during and after the study. Thus no names, pictures or marks of identity were kept or shared.
- v. The writing of the research was with adherence to the accepted standards and rules. Other works cited in the report have been acknowledged as works of other authors and referenced using the American Psychology Association (APA) referencing style with in-text citations. The paper does not fall under plagiarism.
- vi. The researcher maintained the highest level of objectivity in the discussions and analyses throughout the research to avoid biases and personal opinions overriding the findings.
- vii. In the process of data collection, the researcher did personal introduction and afterwards produced a letter of introduction from the University of Zambia.
- viii. Ethical clearance from the University of Zambia was obtained.
- ix. Respondents were encouraged to communicate in the language they were comfortable with and could make communication with the researcher easier.

3.12. Summary

The chapter considered various aspects of the methodology employed during the study. Specific reference was made to research design, study target population, sampling design, sample size, sampling techniques, tools and process of data collection, analysis and processing of collected data of the study after which ethical considerations were outlined.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

4.1. Overview

This chapter presents the findings of the study which sought to investigate how farming, cattle herding and socio-economic factors lead to absenteeism among pupils in selected schools in Kalomo district of southern province.

The basis of the study was on the various categories of respondents and according to the objectives of the study which were to find out if cattle herding contributes to pupil absenteeism; find out if farming contributes to pupil absenteeism in selected schools; to determine the relationship between parental social-economic status and pupil absenteeism in selected schools and to establish whether there is a difference in school attendance between boys and girls involved in farming and cattle herding in primary schools in Kalomo district.

In presenting the findings, the study employed tables, charts and graphs. The data were presented according to objectives.

4.2. Respondents by Gender, Age and Grade

Table 4.1. shows the distribution of the parents and Guidance and Counselling Teachers according to gender.

Table 4. 1. Frequency distribution of participants according to gender and position

Position	Gender		Total
	Male	Female	
Guidance Teachers	2	2	4
Parents	13	7	20
Total	15	9	24
Percent	63	38	100

From table 4.1 above, the findings revealed that 15 (63%) of the respondents were male, while 9 (38%) were female. This implies that majority of the adult participants in the study were mainly males. The FGDs among the schools were largely composed of boys. Culturally boys are known to be involved in cattle herding as compared with

girls. Thus, their large number in the study might have provided the necessary information on the phenomena.

4.3. Pupil Absenteeism Statistics

The study assessed the occurrence of absenteeism among learners according to school. Table 4.2. shows the total number of learners enrolled in four (4) rural primary schools of Kalomo district during the research visit. A total of 2,571 pupils were enrolled in the four schools targeted by the researcher. However, a total of 476 pupils were absent during the research visit of which 199 were boys and 277 were girls representing 18.3% absence during a school day. Table 4: Pupil absenteeism statistics

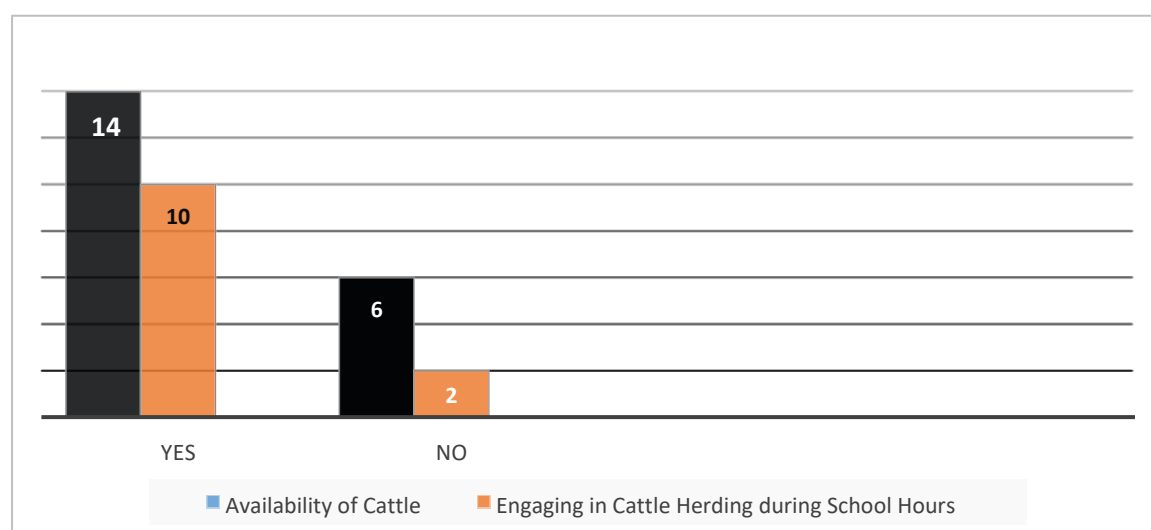
Table 4. 2. Pupil Enrolment and Absenteeism

Number of Schools	Enrolment			Pupils Absent		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
4	1,229	1, 342	2571	199	277	476

4.4. Findings on Learner Absenteeism and Cattle Herding

The first research objective was to assess if cattle herding contributes to pupil absenteeism in selected schools in Kalomo district of southern province. The pupils discussed whether their parents had cattle and whether they involved in cattle herding during school hours. The summary data from the parents is provided in figure 4.1.

Figure 4. 1.Availability of cattle and pupils involvement in cattle herding



Majority of the parents, 14 (70%) had cattle with 12 (60%) stating that they engaged the children in herding during school hours. The results were interpreted to mean that residents of the region practiced cattle farming and sometimes it leads to pupils not attending classes since they have to look after the cattle.

The FGDs with the pupils established that cattle herding was a major activity affecting their attendance of school.

For instance, one male pupil from school A narrated that:

“I don’t usually come to school after I lost my mother... my uncle tells me to herd cattle. If I refuse ... they beat me and stingy me food. My teacher is good but I don’t like what my uncle does to me. I can’t be given food if I don’t herd cattle and goats...”

Interviews were conducted with the GCTs at each school to ascertain the extent to which cattle herding contributed to absenteeism. At school D, the GCT mentioned that:

“The economic activities of this place is farming and cattle herding, you find that some parents send their children to care for the animals at the expense of school. This affects school attendance. Sometimes even after knocking off most children would go to either crush stones to sell or sell farm produce, they rarely have time for school work. This situation also creates pressure (peer pressure) on those children who attend school. Because of admiration of money and end up joining those who do business of selling to make money.”

The parents contributed to affirm that their school-going children missed school because they had to herd animals. A parent from school C indicated that:

“Our only source of income is farming....so we need everyone to participate in preparing the land, planting and harvesting so that we can have enough food to eat as a family and sell some to buy other things like clothes...”

One male parent from school A argued that:

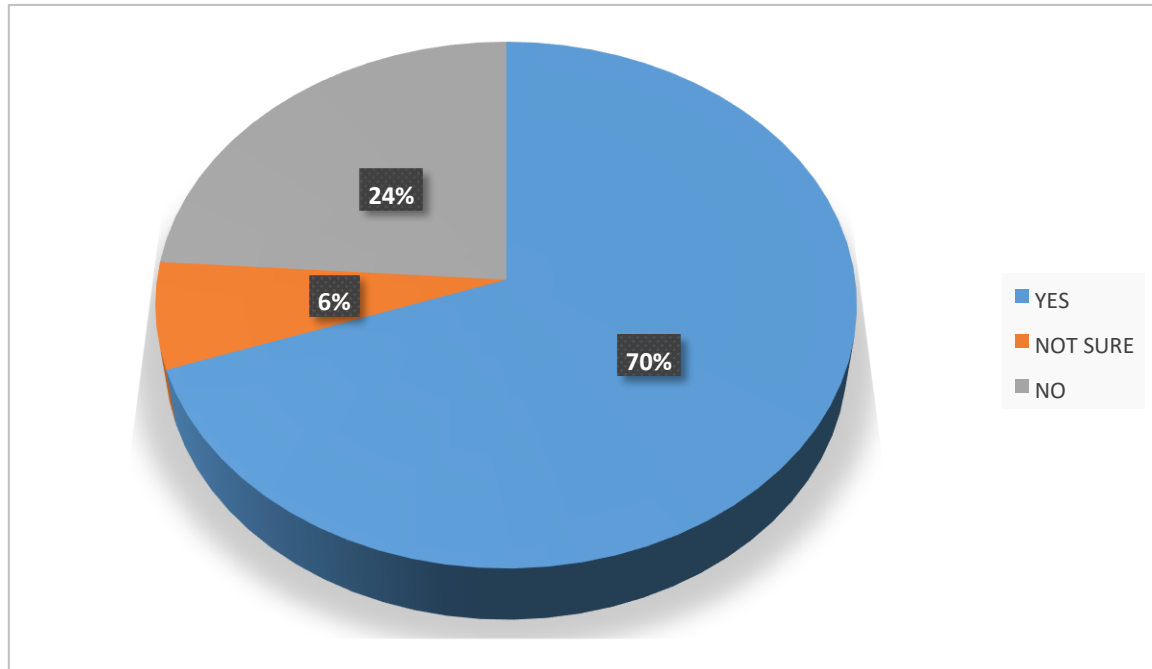
“If I let my only boy child to go to school then who in this village will help me looking after cattle and goats??.....my child will inherit my farm and will not suffer even without education....”

An aggregation of the responses from the participant categories shows that they were in agreement that cattle herding was a major activity in the area and contributed to learner absenteeism among households that had school-going children.

4.5. Findings on Learner Absenteeism and Farming

The second research objective was to ascertain in which ways farming contributes to pupil absenteeism in selected schools in Kalomo district of southern province. Respondents were asked to state whether pupils had engaged in farming activities during school day. Figure 4.2 below shows that the majority of respondents (70%) indicated that learners were engaged in farming activities during school days which resulted into absenteeism from school classes.

Figure 4. 2. Pupils’ Engagement in Farming



The findings from the parents and GCTs were affirmed by the learners during the FGDs. The FGDs with the pupils revealed that they were actively involved in working at their household fields during school time.

One pupil from school A also narrated that:

"I abscond from school because teachers punish a lot for missing school. In the morning my grandparents want me to first work in the fields. Now the teachers...instead of just talking to you they like giving harsh punishment. I sometimes avoid to reach school if am late to avoid teacher punishments. I am already tired and late....That is why I end up following my parents into the fields..."

A pupil from school D explained that:

"I have learnt how to do farm work from my parents. I want to be a farmer. Here at school they do not give us a lot of work to know farming. So I stay at the farm during the rainy season to learn."

Another pupil from school A submitted that:

"Our mother is a widow. So we have to assist her at the farm. We grow crops with my big brothers and sisters which we must sell and eat. My mother says we should sell the crops so that we can buy new uniforms. That is why sometimes I go to the main road to sell maize and raise money for school."

The interviews with the GCTs revealed that farming activities were a major concern regarding pupil absenteeism. The GCT from school A categorically said that:

"Attendance in all schools is very low during the tilling, planting, weeding and harvest periods. Parents involve their children in so much labour that we have to ask the Headmen to intervene. Sometimes we even send announcements to the local churches asking for parents to send their children to school."

Another GCT from school B indicated that:

"It has been a challenge to even conduct grade 7 and 9 examinations as some candidates miss out while working at their parents' farms."

From the parents' perspective, it was learnt that farming was the main economic activity in the area and households relied on farming income for their livelihood. To

achieve significant harvest, children provided easy and cheap labour. This was mentioned by a parent from school D:

“Consider that I am keeping a number of orphans and I do not have any source of income and support for their education. I feel bad to keep these children at home and doing farm work. But what can I do? I don’t have money for their school requirements. So they work hoping that things will get better....the school is also too far for the young ones....That is why even Chipego started grade 1 late.”

A parent from school A said that:

“I have no problem with the young children. They really want to go to school. The problem is with the older ones who have found that they can make some money from farming. So most of them abscond.....saying they have gone to school; just to hear that they were selling farm produce at the roadside. They love money too much.....not school. None of them has even gone up to grade 8.”

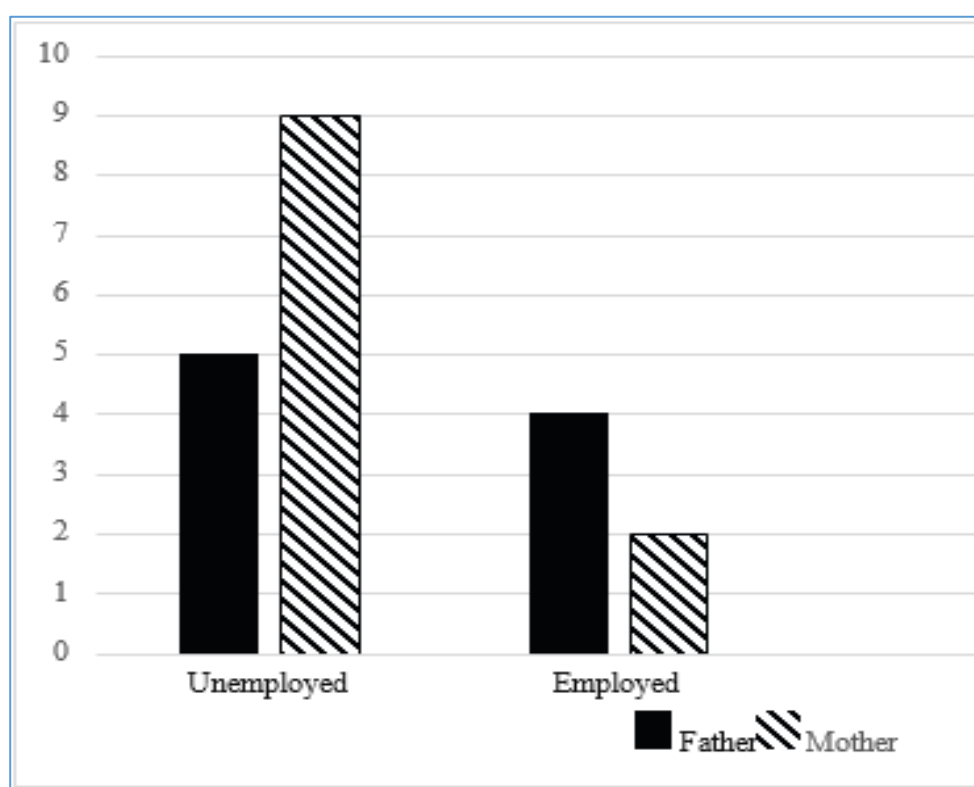
The responses of the parents, learners and GCTs reveal that pupils were largely involved in farming activities as easy and cheap labour at the expense of attending school. Often they had to work to raise money for feeding and for school requirements.

4.6. Findings on Learner Absenteeism and Parent’s Socio-Economic Status

The third research objective was to determine the relationship between parental social-economic status and pupil absenteeism in selected schools in Kalomo district of southern province. During the FGDs, the learners were requested to state the employment status of their parents. Figure 4.1 also summarizes the results as obtained from the 20 parents.

On the findings, figure 4.3. shows that 14(70%) of the parents were not in any formal employment to generate adequate resources and provide for the family. The findings implied that most of the parents within the district are not employed and therefore they have to find other sources for example self -employment in order for them to gain income, this also encourages pupil absenteeism from school in order to supplement the family income.

Figure 4. 3. Employment of Parents



The FGDs with the learners revealed that socio-economic status of the parents was a significant factor for their absenteeism. One pupil from school C also explained that:

“I don’t usually come to school if am hungry, we do not have enough food at home ... my father just came back from jail... so we eat once a day when Dad finds food ... now you know when you are hungry you remember school (laughs.....!).”

One pupil from school A also narrated that:

“I feel shy to come to school without books and uniform. I told my aunt that my uniform was torn and that the books were finished but she said she will buy... So I have nowhere to write...”

Another pupil from the same school commented that:

“My friends incite me to go with them to sell bananas and mangoes to the travellers at the roadside ... them come to school with money ... so we went last week and made K22 ... we used the money during break time to buy flitters.”

Interviews with the GCTs revealed that the majority of households fell in the poor category and therefore faced challenges sending their children to school on a regular basis.

At school C, the GCT pointed out that:

“Poverty in this community is extremely high, I have discovered that people are lazy here, they just love to marry and remarry thereby marrying school girls. It does affect class attendance... most of the girls I have known at this school started with absenteeism then pregnancy... to early marriages. Girls are forced to marry at a tender age to seek material support as I have already said that poverty here is something else ...”

The school D GCT also said that:

“Poverty here is everywhere. The parents earn no regular income. Thus they fail to continuously provide school basic requirements for the children such as shoes, uniforms, books, food and transportation. Despite the free education grant, I can say it has never been adequate to cater for all the learners. If it were in the city, more than 70% of the learners at all levels would be considered vulnerable (chuckles).”

One GCT from school A revealed that:

“One problem we have is child headed households, for example we have a case of some children who do not regularly attend school because of the death of their parents. These children suffer to find ends meet. As a school we have identified them and support them in any way we try. It looks the other family members in the community are nowhere to be seen to support these children... I only pray they should finish school that will be good news and a blessing. The other one is in grade 7 and the younger one in grade 5. They are doing well in class despite perpetual absence.”

Parents were asked to explain their socio-economic status perpetuated pupil absenteeism from school. Poverty was one of the problems that perpetuated pupil absenteeism as reported by the mother of a grade seven pupil of school D that:

“Poverty is the main reason why my daughter is not going to school anymore....her father left has and now I have no means to afford buying

school uniforms to send her to school...so I have asked her to get married so that I can take care of her and her siblings..."

When asked about parental involvement in ensuring that their children were in school, one parent of School B argued that:

"I was not aware that my child was not making it to school. I thought it is the responsibility of the teachers to ensure that he makes it to school."

Another parent from school B lamented that:

"I work and live in the farm. I only manage to come home once a month. My children do not have an adult person to monitor their school work. I think they do as they please. However, my eldest daughter who is 14 years assured me that they go to school every day. I am surprised to learn it has been a week since my son stopped going to school."

From the level of discussions conducted with the participants, socio-economic status was the primary reason for learner absenteeism in the study area. The rationale was that if parents did not earn enough to hire farm labourers, they resorted to using the children within their household. In extreme cases, the children themselves resorted to fending for their families in order to meet the family economic needs. This had a toll on their school attendance, causing them to miss classes. In particular, high levels of poverty and the lack of parental involvement in monitoring children's school attendance contributed to pupil absenteeism in the area.

4.7. Other Factors Contributing to Pupils' Absenteeism

The study established other factors that led to learner absenteeism.

One pupil from school C said that:

"I haven't been coming to school regularly because I have a medical condition asthma, I fear coming to school during sports day because the teachers tell us to run ... then my condition worsens... the teachers should be exempting us with asthma from doing sports."

When asked whether the home environment contributed to pupil absenteeism, one pupil from school D narrated as follows:

"I have a lot of work which I do at home... I look after my mother's baby, clean the surrounding, clean plates and cook for the family because my parents go to the field early. If am not done taking care of household chores on time... I don't go to school..."

The Guidance and Counselling Teachers (GCT) were asked to explain the factors that perpetuated pupil absenteeism at their school. Distance was one of the problems that perpetuated pupil absenteeism as reported by the GCT from School A:

"Distance affect a lot of children at this school. Many children come from farms which are sparsely located ... it is not a surprise to see children absent they get tired..."

A GCT from school B indicated that:

"Absenteeism at this school is common because of puberty rites. You see children who reach puberty age are secluded from the community so that they perform cultural rites. This prevents them from attending school regularly. Secondly, children in this community are used for farm labour... thus during the farming season numbers are usually small in class."

There was agreement among the GCTs and parents that tradition and culture placed strong demand on the households to involve children in domestic labour to the extent of herding cattle and farming. This was stressed by a parent from school a:

"It is in our tradition that children should be taught how to work at the farm. They need these skills to survive.....School somehow teaches them to be lazy. So I choose when they should be home to learn to work...and when to be at school to learn the white man's things."

4.8. Effect of Absenteeism as Reported by Guidance and Counselling Teachers

The GCTs were also asked to state the ways in which pupil absenteeism affected teaching and learning and pupil's academic performance in their schools. One GCT from school B had the following to say:

"Pupil absenteeism is bad. It affects the running of the school and the children themselves. For example, children who do not come to school regularly perform low on class assessments, have insufficient

comprehension of concepts due to inconsistencies in lesson attendance, and backwardness especially in mathematics and science. Those in lower grades find it difficult to break through in reading and writing, poor handwriting ability, passivity and inattentiveness to classwork. Mostly absentees prefer to sit at the back in class as they have low self-esteem due to failure to answer or participate in class. Mostly, if you check, they are the most indisciplined and rude.”

Another GCT from school C explained that:

“Pupil absenteeism at this school has been affecting learner performance. Despite good coverage of the syllabus by the teacher, absentees are a let-down. Unfortunately tests analysis includes children who miss exams... this really affects the percentages.”

At school A, the GCT noted that:

“Absenteeism is bad... just imagine children who come once or twice a week, how they can progress in terms of literacy. Children need previous information to connect to new information... we call it learning from known to unknown... now at this school, that principle is hard that is why you cannot compare most of the learners at this school with other schools in other zones. Results of performance shows, when we go for district debate or quiz activities. The problem really is as a result of absenteeism everyone at this school knows better....”

The GCT from school D observed:

“The effects of absenteeism are seen when pupils’ tests and examination results are analysed. We analyse the results child by child and compare with the number of days he or she attended school in the class register. We always note that those learners that are constantly absent from school do not perform well compared to those that come frequently. We also find it difficult to complete the syllabus on time because of trying to do revision and catch-up strategies in order to help those that have been absent from school.”

In line with the above, Rivers (2010) asserts that erratic school attendance by pupils can lead to maladjustment, poor academic performance, school dropout, substance abuse, delinquency, and teenage pregnancy in the short term, and violence, marital instability, job instability, adult criminality, and incarceration in the long term.

4.9. Summary

This chapter presented the findings of the study on how farming, cattle herding and socio-economic factors lead to absenteeism among pupils in selected schools in Kalomo district of southern province in Zambia. These findings have been presented in line with the three objectives set out in Chapter One. The researcher used the thematic approach to present results. The next chapter discusses the findings of this study. The bottom line is that socio-economic status hinders certain households from affording hired labour to take care of their animals and do the farm work. Thus school-going children are involved.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

5.1. Overview

This chapter presents discussions based on the findings of the study in relation to the reviewed literature as well as the theoretical framework employed during the study. It also highlights the extent to which the objectives of the study, as stated in chapter one, were achieved based on the various factors attributed to pupil absenteeism. The present research supports the conclusion that children involvement in farming activities, cattle herding and poor economic status of parents represents a potential source of poor school attendance among the pupils. The chapter also considers the aspect of socio- demographic characteristics of the participants.

5.2. Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Participants

From the findings presented, there were more females than males who participated in the study. This was because there were more female absentees than male at the time of the study. The other reason could be the fact that during the period of the study, most women and girls are not involved in active social responsibilities hence most of them are sent to school. Additionally, there are usually more girls in attendance between the ages of 7 and 13. However as they ascend in upper classes the numbers for female begin to dwindle as most of them dropout due to cultural practices such as initiation ceremonies, early marriages, early pregnancies and vending. In fact, more pupils begin to drop out or abscond school when they reach grade six especially girls and that the reason why more pupils in grade six participated in the study.

Before exploring the causes of absenteeism from participants, the researcher begun with collecting statistics of those absent. The findings presented in table 4 of the current study confirm that absenteeism was a real problem in primary schools. This is affirmed by a study by Banda (2017) who found that 26% of the learners enrolled in primary schools during his research visit were absent from school. Consortium for Research on Educational Access, Transitions and Equity (CREATE) (2011) also found that on the day of the field visit, 22 percent of children were absent from one sampled school, 35 percent in the second school and 47 percent in the third school.

The findings generally revealed that children from economically and educationally disadvantaged families had high levels of absenteeism and repetition.

5.3. Cattle Herding and Learner Absenteeism in Kalomo District

It has been revealed that some of the parents have allowed their children into working as herds' boys and girls in cattle ranches in Kalomo district as most of these parents had cattle. Thus, the activity provides a source of income to both the family and the child. Also, some tycoons in the area engage primary school children in livestock farming at the expense of education. This form of child labour may be as a result of poverty and leads to children being denied education.

This finding is confirmed by a study carried out by UNICEF (2012) which revealed that shepherds are a group of people who are illiterate. Some of them get employed in order to help their parents with monies to pay for their sisters' education. When these boys are enrolled in school, they are usually absent from class because they spent most of their time in looking after sheep, goats or cattle. In some cases, children as young as six years are employed to look after cattle or become shepherds. They are unfortunate for they will not have a bright future if they stay illiterate shepherd up to their adulthood. Most shepherds are paid little money to be used by their parents, pay rent and buy food. They wear worn-out clothes and dirty bare feet. Most children are denied pre-school education which is a fundamental human right and a child's right to education.

In Africa, culturally, a boy child should grow herding cattle and the girl child is to nurse babies and do household chores, (Chemagnet, 2015). UNICEF (2016) adds that the ages of herds' boys range from seven to eighteen and while the majority are between ages 12 to 18. This implies that they have little or no access to formal education. Majority drop out of school and most become shepherds ending up with little or no education at all.

Unlike the current study a study by Mburu, (2017) found that herd migration has a significantly negative effect on school attendance – about a 26% probability of failure to attend among the children of livestock migrating households. The child's age and mother's literacy have a positive impact on child school attendance, but with girls more likely to attend than boys, probably because of higher opportunity costs. That is,

attending school takes boys away from activities like herding, which have greater economic value than the non-monetisable household duties performed by girls.

5.4. Farming and Learner Absenteeism in Kalomo District

The study found that farming was a major activity in the study area of Kalomo District. Since most households did not have hired labour; others were single parented; lived with grandparents or were child headed, they had little option but to involve school-going children in farming activities. Children were also found to be easier and cheaper labour. High levels of absenteeism were during the peak farming season when it was difficult to compel parents to send their children to school. The findings of this study reveal that farming settlements are significantly different from high density areas where learners' access to school is easier due to proximity. Farming households are spaced far apart and schools located far. Younger learners face various challenges.

The findings of the current study relate with a study by Mafa, (2018) who found that child labour alone was not the cause of learner absenteeism in rural farming areas. A number of factors have been identified as being the prime cause of absenteeism among these learners. These factors include their social and economic setup, geographical location and distance to school, and the unavailability of parental guidance and support. It was noted that learners would sneak out of school without being noticed. This has been attributed to a failure of the school management system and school management teams. School management team members did not seem to be proactive in dealing with issues of learner attendance and principals were regarded as the only persons who should deal with learners who transgressed national learner attendance policy. School Management Teams (SMTs) seemed to also be relying on the School Nutrition Programme (SNP) as a way of combating absenteeism in schools.

The aspect of domestic labour involving school-going children was also established among other farming communities in a study by Kabanga and Mulauzi, (2020) who assessed factors that perpetuate pupil absenteeism in rural primary schools in Nyimba district. The study found households which depended on domestic labour largely involved children and therefore deprived them of continued school presence. The study identified ways in which absenteeism affected the teaching and learning processes including poor performance, fostering indiscipline, insufficient

comprehension of concepts and the difficulties experienced by teachers. Interventions to curb pupil absenteeism were ascertained calling for parents, teachers and all stakeholders in education to make firm decisions to stop absenteeism among the learners by avoiding early marriages, fostering collaboration and being flexible in time management.

5.5. Parent's Socio-Economic Status and Pupil's School Absenteeism

The research findings revealed that pupil absenteeism was caused by high levels of poverty by parents/guardians' who did not see immediate value of education and hence, they sent their children to sell bananas and mangoes along the Road to raise some income for the family to supplement the family income.

It has been revealed that some of the parents have allowed their children into working as herds' boys and girls in cattle ranches. Thus, the activity provides a source of income to both the family and the child.

The study established that pupils especially boys are sent to till land in the field and herd cattle. While girls are mostly given responsibilities of cooking or cleaning or fetching water or firewood. The research further showed that some pupils were withdrawn from school even during the term to help their guardians with farming during the farming season and herding cattle. In the process of doing so, many pupils get tired and ended up absenting or dropping out of school.

Wadesango and Machingambi (2016) also reported that students' attendance were sometimes affected as pupils had to fulfil their home related obligations and provide for their personal and family needs since they were from poor family backgrounds. It is unfortunate that the education system today is still battling with parents who do not understand the importance of school for children.

It is common knowledge that education is the future investment for a child. If not well handled children may live to regret the entire life of theirs. This is not good for any country. Strides have to be made towards reducing inequality between urban population that seem to be informed and the rural dwellers. Parents should be sensitized to help their children with school requisites as it was their right.

Some parents failed to provide the needed school requirements such as uniforms and books to their children due to poverty. Shooba (2013) also noted that some pupils

lacked appropriate clothing or were too worn or soiled to attend school and sit for an examination. This finding also agrees with Balfanz and Byrnes (2012) whose study also revealed that family financial concerns were all conditions that can cause a child not to attend school.

From the findings of this study, it is evident that family circumstances such as the socio-economic status, influence learner absenteeism. This resonates well with the findings by Molepo and Mji (2017) who indicated that in Zambia there are many instances of families headed by orphans who have to work for a living during school hours. In families affected by HIV/AIDS children attend school irregularly because they are often required to care for siblings or sick parents. Other socioeconomic factors for learner's absenteeism are: teenage pregnancy, domestic chores, transport problems, child labour in rural areas, neighbourhoods marked by violence, child abuse, and where both parents need to work or wish to pursue a career.

The study established that some learners are from child-headed families and depend on the community and the school to provide for their needs. Child labour is particularly widespread in rural areas usually where families' need their children work to supplement the family income or take over duties of parents who are working in the fields.

Many learners in rural areas devote a certain amount of time before or after school each day to family and agricultural. While girls do domestic chores such as cooking, fetching water and firewood, the boys may stay at home to care for the livestock. This finding is in line with the Nelson Mandela Foundation Research Report (2019) which suggested that in rural areas in South Africa learners are frequently absent from school because their parents needed them to prepare meals at home. This report also found that learner absenteeism is often high in rural areas but decreases when learners move from commercial farming areas to homeland and from homeland to urban informal areas.

5.6. Other Contributing Factors to Pupil Absenteeism in Kalomo District.

The study identified a number of other factors contributing to pupil absenteeism in Kalomo district. These factors can be summarized into four (4) categories: physical factors (e.g. long distances), health factors (e.g. sickness), personal factors (peer pressure, lack of interest, early marriages), and cultural factors (puberty rites).

Similarly, a study by Weiss and García (2018) revealed that poor health, residential mobility, extensive family responsibilities (e.g. children looking after siblings) - along with inadequate supports for students within the educational system (e.g. lack of adequate transportation, unsafe conditions, lack of medical services, harsh disciplinary measures, etc.) - are all associated with a greater likelihood of being absent, and particularly with being persistently absent.

5.6.1. Physical Factors

Proximity of the school in relation to pupil's attendance was identified by the study to be one of the physical factor that caused absenteeism. The study has revealed that long distance to a nearby school was a challenge among school going children in selected primary schools in Kalomo district as reported by both teachers and pupils.

Most of the villages in Kalomo district were over 10km away from the nearest school and this had made the pupils to cover long distances to school on foot and those who were not strong enough often stopped on the way or gave up school all together. Participants attributed this situation to high levels of poverty among the parents who could not afford to buy even a bicycle for the children to use in covering long distances to school.

This finding is also reported in Moseki, M. (2014) that children in rural areas did not regularly attend school due to the challenge of long distance. Because of long distance, most pupils were discouraged and the most affected were girls who were usually abused on the way. Sometimes pupils were scared of wild animals on the way to school. In relation to distance, the research findings further showed that another factor that caused pupils to be absent from school was lack of bridges during the rainy season as crossing rivers was impossible. This finding is similar to Shooba (2013), who alluded to the same challenge when he investigated the causes of pupil absenteeism from grade 7 composite examination in Zambia.

In the 21st century, this situation cannot be allowed to continue but the reality is that this problem still persists. It is generally, accepted that education is the cornerstone of any meaningful development. Building schools closer to communities is a step towards achieving this developmental ambition.

5.6.2. Health Factors

From the research findings, another factor that contributed to pupil absenteeism was ill-health of a parent or guardian especially those with prolonged illnesses. Some pupils especially girls are told to look after their sick parents or do household chores. Balfanz and Byrnes (2012) in Baltimore also found that illness was a major cause of student absenteeism. Annual colds, flu, and other childhood ailments contributed to school absenteeism. Bridgeland, et al. (2016) also found that caring for a family member promoted pupil absenteeism. Children who are ill may not attend class and if they do, they fail to maintain the alertness and concentration needed to learn. An urgent need to establish the kind of illnesses that deterred children in rural primary schools from attending school was necessary. Critical diseases needed to be identified, and immunization programs as well as vaccines needed to be given to help these children accelerate in taking advantage of learning opportunities provided to them and eventually achieve their dreams.

In addition, the findings revealed that pupils missed school because of loss of the bread winner in the family. In worst situations, some pupils ended up heading the families or lived with old grandparents forcing them to take up the roles of parentage. According to Shooba (2013) many children in such situations end up dropping out of school or fail to attend school regularly because there is none to provide the school necessities or they become heads of families. There is need for such children to be supported through social welfare so that they can continue with school.

5.6.3. Personal Factors

The findings revealed that the other cause of pupil absenteeism from actual school attendance was the pupils themselves. Pupils were not interested in school mostly due to peer pressure which in turn landed most learners into early marriages or early pregnancies due to poverty. Similar findings were reported by Lubeya (2012) that peer pressure contributed to pupil absenteeism during national practical examinations. Wadesango and Machingambi (2011) also alluded that the motivation for pupil absenteeism was the need to be with their friends and peers. Reid, (2015) further adds that truant pupils were influenced by their peers not to attend school and encouraged peers to engage in activities outside of the school with them. Balfanz and Byrnes (2017) also mentioned that students choose not to attend school because of

external influence because either they or their parents do not see the value in school but marriage.

5.6.4. Cultural Factors

The study revealed that puberty rites also affected pupil attendance. According to Mulauzi, Nyambe and Mtanga (2014), initiation ceremonies like puberty rites are found in most parts of Zambia and are conducted nearly in every ethnic group in the country. Its continued presence in rural areas and its penetration into urban areas is a clear testimony of its tenacity. Girls especially who became of age were secluded during puberty rites like *kuvundika* (Seclusion) for a period of time and mainly during school calendar. To make matters worse, some learners opted to attend the same activities either for themselves or their friend on daily basis, weekly, monthly or yearly basis at the expense of school hours. This means that learners were mostly preoccupied and could hardly pay attention to school work such as homework. Even when they wanted to do so, their villages were polluted with noise of drums for puberty rites for most times.

The findings of the study resonate well with Raising (2017) who established that initiation rites were an intrinsic part of traditional societies because express solidarity among men and women from generation to generation. During the initiation ceremony, norms and values concerning gender, production and reproduction as well as cosmological ideas are passed on to the initiate. However, there is need for sensitization of parents on the importance of both the traditional values and indeed the acquisition of education and on the need to conduct these rites during holidays to enable children attend class during the academic year. This is of utmost importance during these puberty rites, boys and girls are taught how to behave as grownups and also how to behave as future husbands or wives.

Mulauzi, Nyambe and Mtanga (2014) confirms this particularly for girls by stating that “during initiation ceremonies, the young woman is introduced for the first time in her life to a number of issues relating to sexual conduct which includes women therapeutically techniques for sexual enchantment, reproduction and ailments...young women are given instructions not only on how to enjoy sexual encounters and sexual intercourse but also how to keep their virginity, how to take care of their families once married and good behaviour.” The desire to practice or test

what is being taught during while in seclusion results in early sex debut and pregnancies which in turn results in early marriages and eventually school dropout. So failing to sensitize parents may jeopardize the future of the young ones as education is key to their success.

5.6.5. Findings from Other Studies

Other studies have found factors that necessitate pupil absenteeism. In a study done in Australia by Moseki (2004), it was found that age is a cause of pupil absenteeism from schools. Older learners are more likely to absent schools than younger ones because of many reasons such as peer pressure and joining of gang groups which do various devious activities during school hours. For example, in most rural areas of Zambia parents use their children to do most home activities for them. The older the children the more home obligations they are expected to have hence making it difficult for them to attend school regularly. Apart from the learners' age, Moseki' study also found that personality factors such as lack of recognition of regular attendants can promote learner absenteeism. Learners need some acknowledgement for regular school attendance and when this is not done they down play the importance of school attendance. The age differences between secondary school going learners and primary school going pupils may have some implications on the findings.

In Namibia, a study done by Katanga, (2016) on the management of learners' absenteeism in rural primary schools, found that the causes of learner absenteeism from schools were categorized as; family, individual, school environment and socio-economic. Most respondents stated that, learners basically absent themselves from schools because of their involvement in performing domestic chores at home and in the fields. The study also cited various personal reasons such as absenteeism of female learners during their menstrual periods, lack of motivation to attend school and early marriages.

According to a research done by UNESCO (2009), learner absenteeism in rural areas was seen to be caused by lack of proper modes of transport from homes to schools and limited hostel facilities which expose learners to difficulties in times of bad weather such as when it is too rainy, very cold or hot. The research further cited incidents of intimidation of girls by boys and outsiders as a contributing factor to learner absenteeism.

5.7. Summary

This chapter has discussed the major findings based on the three research objectives of this study. The proceeding and last chapter provide conclusions to the study and make recommendations.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1. Overview

This chapter presents the summary of the study, conclusions drawn from the findings and recommendations made for application. Suggestions on areas for further research are also presented.

6.2. Conclusion

In the light of the data presented above, the researcher came to the conclusion that learner absenteeism is a serious problem in Kalomo district. This study investigated how farming, cattle herding and socio-economic factors lead to absenteeism among pupils in selected schools in Kalomo district of southern province in Zambia. The objectives of the study were to: assess if cattle herding contributes to pupil absenteeism; ascertain in which ways farming contributes to pupil absenteeism in selected schools and to determine the relationship between parental socio-economic status and pupil absenteeism in selected schools in Kalomo district of southern province.

A descriptive research design which was supported by qualitative methods of data collection was used in the study. Interview Guides and four FGDs were used to collect data from a sample of (28) study participants comprising of four (4) guidance and counselling teachers from four schools, four (4) pupils' FGDs and twenty (20) parents. The study used thematic analysis to analyse data, where common themes were identified, grouped for easy interpretation and presented using verbatim based on the research objectives.

The study established that absenteeism exists in primary schools of Kalomo District in Zambia. The study found that pupils' involvement in cattle herding and farming activities, and poor socioeconomic status of their parents or guardians were among the major factors that contributed to pupil absenteeism from school. The study showed that, learners were involved in cattle herding and farming activities to supplement family income due to high levels of poverty.

The research findings revealed that pupil absenteeism was caused by high levels of poverty by parents/guardians' who did not see immediate value of education and hence, they sent their children to the fields to help in cultivating their farm land and taking care of animals.

The study further established that other factors that contributed to learner absenteeism included; physical factors such as long distance to school; health factors such as prolonged sickness and death in the family and other related issues included household factors which borders on parents and guardians lack of financial capability to provide for school demands for their children, as well as cultural and social factors such as initiation ceremonies. Therefore, the study confirms that cattle herding, farming and poor economic status of parents are the major home factors contributing significantly to high levels of pupil absenteeism in primary schools in Kalomo district of southern province in Zambia.

6.3. Recommendations

In the light of the findings and the conclusions of this study as outlined above, the following recommendations are made:

- i. Parents should form pressure groups to sensitize each other on the importance of education. ii. Parents should practice traditional ceremonies during the holidays.
- ii. Government and school administrators should engage in constructive sensitization of parents on the importance of education especially for their children.
- iii. The government of the Republic of Zambia should also consider building enough schools and putting bridges in streams that lead to schools.
- iv. Harsh punishments and measures should be given to those parents who marry off their early or to men who impregnate school going girls.
- v. Parents should be empowered for them to stop over depending on their children's labour for survival

6.4. Suggestions for further study

Areas of possible future research was suggested. This includes:

- i. To carry out a comparative study between the levels of pupil absenteeism in rural and urban primary schools.
- ii. To investigate the rate of pupil absenteeism in government and private schools.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX I: CONSENT LETTER

Dear Respondent, I am Webster Simuzya a post graduate student at the University of Zambia. I am carrying out a research on **how farming, cattle herding and socio-economic factors lead to absenteeism among pupils in selected schools in Kalomo district of southern province in Zambia**. The findings of the study will be used for academic purposes only. The information you are going to provide in this interview/ discussion will be treated with a high degree of confidentiality. Your participation in this study is voluntary and therefore you have the right to accept or refuse to participate. In this regard I request you not to write your name but only append your signature to show your consent.

Respondent's signature _____

Thank you for your co-operation.

APPENDIX II: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR GUIDANCE TEACHER

Date..... Time.....

Place.....

1. What is the exact number of pupils in your class?
2. How frequent do they come to school?
3. What do you think could be the major reason for them not coming to school?
4. Do you think farming contributes to pupil absenteeism in your school? Give reasons.
5. Do you think cattle herding contributes to pupil absenteeism in your school? Give reasons
6. Does parental socio-economic status influence or contributes to pupil absenteeism in your school?
7. State other factors you think contributes to pupil absenteeism at your school.

Thank you for your participation.

APPENDIX III: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR PARENTS

Date..... Time.....

Place.....

1. What is the exact number of children you have who are in school?
2. How old are they?
3. What exactly is your major source of income?
4. Do you keep any animals?
5. What type of animals do you have?
6. Who herds these animals for you?
7. How often your school going children do helps you in herding your animals?
8. How frequent do your children go to school?
9. Do you have enough resources to provide for all your school going children needs?
10. What do you think could be the major reason for them not going to school?
11. Do you take your children with you to farm during school days?
12. Do you think farming contributes to your children not going to school? Give reasons.
13. Do you think cattle herding contributes to your children not going to school? Give reasons
14. Do you think your socio-economic status influence or contributes to your children not going to school?
15. State other factors you think contributes to your children not going to school.

Thank you for your participation.

APPENDIX IV: FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONNAIRE

Instructions:

Please respond to the following questions by putting a tick {✓} in the boxes or by filling in the blank spaces provided. Please do not write your name on this questionnaire.

1	What is your gender?	
	Male	
	Female	
2	State your age	
3	In which class are you?	
4	What is your father's/guardian's level of education?	
	i. Never went to school	
	ii. Primary school education	
	iii. Secondary school education	
	iv. Tertiary/training college	
	v. University education	
5	What is your mother's guardian level of education?	
	i. Never went to school	
	ii. Primary school education	
	iii. Secondary school education	
	iv. Tertiary/training college	
	v. University education	
6	Is your father/guardian employed?	
	i. Employed	
	ii. Not employed	
	iii. Retired	
7	Is your mother/guardian employed?	
	i. Employed	
	ii. Not employed	
	iii. Retired	
8	What is your parents/ guardians major source of income? (tick where appropriate)	
	i. Farming	
	ii. Livestock farming	
	iii. Formal employment	
9	Do you participate in the work that your parents do?	
	i. Yes	
	ii. No	
10	Do you earn any money from the work herding cattle or selling herds?	
	i. Yes	
	ii. No	

11	Do you have any other extra work apart from this?	
	i. Yes	
	ii. No	
12	State the monthly income of your parents	
	i. Father	
	ii. Mother	
	iii. Do not know	
13	There are many economic problems a family faces in a given year. How often do you think the following economic difficulties have occurred in your family during the last one year?	
	(Where 1 = Never, 2 = Rare, 3 = most of the time, 4 =all the time)	
	i. Family has a lot of difficulty in buying school uniform	
	ii. Family has a lot of difficulty in obtaining money for treatment, medicine etc.	
	iii. Family has a lot of difficulty in buying food stuffs	
	iv. Family has a lot of difficulty in paying of school fees	
14	How many hours do you actually participate on daily basis in the following activities?	
	(Where: During weekend, 2=During school holidays, 3=During school days)	
	Type of activity	
	1 Cattle herding	
	2 Milking	
	3 Fetching water/firewood	
	4 Garden digging	
	5 Harvesting	
	6 House hold activities	
7 Others, specify		
15	How often do you enjoy the following activities?	
	(Where 1 = Never, 2 = Rare, 3 = most of the time, 4 =all the time)	
	Type of activity	
	i. Cattle herding	
	ii. Milking	
	iii. Fetching water/firewood	
	iv. Garden digging	
	v. Harvesting	
	vi. House hold activities	
vii. Others, specify		
16	What other factors do you think contributes to your absenteeism from school?	

END OF DISCUSSION