



**ASSESSMENT OF FACTORS THAT PERPETUATE PUPIL ABSENTEEISM IN
RURAL PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN NYIMBA DISTRICT, ZAMBIA**

BY

KABANGA FOSTER MUYATWA

A Dissertation Submitted to the University of Zambia in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
for the Award of the Degree of Master of Education in Education Administration and
Management

UNIVERSITY OF ZAMBIA

LUSAKA

2018

AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I, KABANGA FOSTER MUYATWA, do hereby declare that this dissertation is my own work and that the works of others have been duly and appropriately acknowledged. I further declare that this dissertation has never been submitted to any institution for the award of any academic paper.

Signature:

Date:

COPYRIGHT DECLARATION

All rights reserved. No part of this dissertation may be reproduced or stored in any form or by any means without permission in writing from the author or the University of Zambia.

Copyright © 2018

DEDICATION

This Dissertation is a special dedication to my parents Mr. Jack Kabanga Manjolo, Nasilele Nyambe and Shadreck Mukena Muyatwa who laid the foundation for my education. To Violet Namukolo Manenga my wife and my children Rabecca Nyambe Muyatwa, and Amos Manenga Muyatwa, the sky should be your limit in Education. May God be with you so that you can do much better in all your endeavors. God bless.

ABSTRACT

The study assessed factors that perpetuate pupil absenteeism in rural primary schools in Nyimba district. The objectives to: establish the causes of pupil absenteeism; identify ways in which pupil absenteeism affected teaching and learning process; ascertain home and school interventions to curb pupil absenteeism in rural primary schools in Nyimba district. A descriptive research design which was supported by qualitative methods of data collection was used in the study. Interview Guides and Focus Group Discussions were used to collect data from a purposively sampled population of forty two (42) study participants comprising of six (6) guidance teachers and thirty six (36) pupils. The study used Thematic Analysis to analyze data, where common themes were identified, grouped for easy interpretation and presented using verbatim based on the research objectives. The study indentified ways in which absentism affected the teaching and learning processes by creating 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 colaboration and being flexible in time management. The study therefore, recommended that school administrators should take keen interest in providing careers talk to learners through invitation of significant people in society to share experiences with learners. Schools should engage in constructive sensitization of parents against early marriages in order to curtail absenteeism in primary schools, parents should utilise PTA platforms to sensitize each other on the importance of education, promote traditional ceremonies like chinamwali during the holidays and week ends. The study also recommended that Ministry of General Education should consider building more schools in rural areas to alleviate the problem of long distances learners cover daily, harsh punishments and measures should be meted out to men who marry or impregnate school going children.

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

This Dissertation by KABANGA FOSTER MUYATWA is approved as a partial fulfillment of the requirement for the award of the Degree of Master of Education in Educational Administration and Management at the University of Zambia in conjunction with Zimbabwe Open University

Supervisor..... Signed..... Date:.....

Coordinator Signed..... Date:

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I give glory and honor to God almighty for his unfailing grace. My soul blesses the Lord, for He, indeed redeemed me from the pit, he is my buckler and my shield. Profound thanks to my Supervisor Mrs. F. Zulu. You guided me through this walk it was not easy but thank you for your patience and love. May the Lord remember you and his favor to locate you. Sincere thanks to the programme coordinator Dr. G. Masaiti and Mrs. Thompson. Special thanks to Mr. E. Banda and Mr. C. C. Mulenga for encouraging me to do a postgraduate programme. My dear wife Violet Namukolo Manenga occupies a very special place in this project as she was always on my side to support me whenever I felt like giving up. I owe to my children Rabecca Nyambe Muyatwa, and Amos Manenga Muyatwa for understanding the importance of this journey undertaken at their expense. Thank you and may the Almighty God continue blessing you in life. Last but not the least, my heartfelt gratitude go to my brother Sikota Mungili who has always been there for me and my family.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--------------------------------------|------|
| Author's Declaration..... | i |
| Copyright | ii |
| Dedication | iii |
| Abstract | xiii |
| Certificate of Approval | iv |
| Acknowledgement | v |
| Table of Contents | vi |
| List of Figures | x |
| List of Tables | xi |
| List of Abbreviations..... | xii |
| CHAPTER ONE..... | 1 |
| INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| 1.0 Overview | 1 |
| 1.1 Background of the Study | 1 |
| 1.2 Statement of a Problem | 3 |
| 1.3 Purpose of the Study | 4 |
| 1.4 Objectives of the Study | 4 |
| 1.5 Research Questions | 4 |
| 1.6 Significance of the Study | 4 |
| 1.7 Limitations of the Study | 5 |
| 1.8 Delimitations of the Study | 5 |

| | |
|--|----|
| 1.9 Theoretical Framework | 5 |
| 1.10 Conceptual Framework | 7 |
| 1.11 Definition of the Terms | 8 |
| 1.12 Summary | 9 |
| CHAPTER TWO | 10 |
| LITERATURE REVIEW | 10 |
| 2.1 Overview | 10 |
| 2.2 Global Perspectives of Pupil Absenteeism | 10 |
| 2.3 African Perspectives of Pupil Absenteeism | 16 |
| 2.4 Zambia’s Perspectives of Pupil Absenteeism | 18 |
| 2.5 Literature Gap | 21 |
| 2.6 Summary | 22 |
| CHAPTER THREE | 23 |
| 3.0 METHODOLOGY | 23 |
| 3.1 Overview..... | 23 |
| 3.2 Philosophical Design | 23 |
| 3.3 Research Design..... | 24 |
| 3.4 Pilot Study | 25 |
| 3.5 Target Population | 26 |
| 3.6 Sample | 26 |
| 3.7 Sampling Procedures | 27 |
| 3.7.1 Sampling Procedure for Selecting Primary Schools | 27 |
| 3.7.2 Sampling Procedure for Selecting Participants | 27 |
| 3.8 Research Instruments | 28 |
| 3.9 Data collection Procedures | 28 |

| | |
|---|----|
| 3.10 Methods of Data Analysis | 28 |
| 3.11 Ethical Considerations | 29 |
| 3.12 Summary | 29 |
| CHAPTER FOUR | 30 |
| PRESENTATION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS | 30 |
| 4.0 Overview | 30 |
| 4.1 Respondents by Gender, Status, Age and Grade | 30 |
| 4.2 Causes of Pupil Absenteeism | 32 |
| 4.2.1 Causes of Pupil Absenteeism as Reported by Teachers | 32 |
| 4.2.2 Causes of Pupil Absenteeism as Reported by Pupils | 35 |
| 4.3 Challenges of Pupil Absenteeism on Teaching and Learning | 37 |
| 4.4 Interventions to Curb Pupil Absenteeism in Primary Schools | 38 |
| 4.4.1 School Related Measures to Curb Absenteeism | 40 |
| 4.4.2 Home measures to Curb Absenteeism | 41 |
| 4.5 Summary | 43 |
| CHAPTER FIVE | 44 |
| DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS | 44 |
| 5.0 Overview | 44 |
| 5.1 Causes of Pupil Absenteeism in Rural Primary Schools of Nyimba District | 44 |
| 5.1.1 Physical Factors | 45 |
| 5.1.2 Health Factors | 46 |
| 5.1.3 Personal Attitudes | 47 |
| 5.1.4 Home Related Factors | 48 |
| 5.1.5 Cultural Factors | 49 |
| 5.1.6 School Related Factors | 51 |

| | |
|--|----|
| 5.2 Impact of Perpetual Pupil Absenteeism on Teaching and Learning | 51 |
| 5.3 Interventions to Curb Pupil Absenteeism | 52 |
| 5.4 Summary | 54 |
| CHAPTER SIX | 55 |
| CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS | 55 |
| 6.0 Overview | 55 |
| 6.1 Conclusion | 55 |
| 6.2. Recommendations | 56 |
| REFERENCES | 57 |
| APPENDICES | 63 |

LIST OF FIGURES

| | |
|---|---|
| Figure 1: The conceptual framework of Pupil Absenteeism | 8 |
|---|---|

LIST OF TABLES

| | |
|--|----|
| Table 1: Frequency Distribution of Participants According to Gender and Status | 30 |
| Table 2: Frequency Distribution of Pupils According to Age | 31 |
| Table 3: Frequency Distribution of Pupils According to Grade | 31 |
| Table 4: Situation of Class Attendance on Research Visit | 32 |

List of Abbreviation

| | |
|-------|--------------------------------------|
| CIP | Create India Policy |
| CSE | Community for Social Enquiry |
| DEBS | District Education Board Secretary |
| ECZ | Examination Council of Zambia |
| GRZ | Government of the Republic Of Zambia |
| FBEP | Free Basic Education Policy |
| HGSFP | Home Grown School Feedings Programme |
| IE | Invitational Education |
| JSE | Junior Secondary Examination |
| MoGE | Ministry Of General Education |
| MOE | Ministry of Education |
| NDP | National Development Plan |
| NGO | Non-Governmental Organization |
| PEO | Provincial Education Officer |
| SHN | School Health Nutrition |
| SDGs | Sustainable Development Goals |
| USA | United States of America |
| WFP | World Food Programme |

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Overview

This chapter presents the background to the study, statement of the problem, purpose, objectives, research questions, significance, delimitations, limitations, theoretical framework, conceptual framework and operational definition of terms.

1.1 Background of the Study

The world today is more resolved in educating its citizens than never before in the history of evolution of man. This is evident through commitments by both the developing and developed countries to put measures to educate every child and educate them well. In 2016, United Nations (UN) member states, Zambia inclusive, met in New York to discuss the global agenda of Education where Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030 targets were set. Crucial to the SDGs was the goal for education, SDG 4 which stipulated to ‘ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all’ (United Nations, 2016). During the formulation of the SDGs 2030 agenda, experts directed their energy towards educating the global citizens through deliberate and well planned policy framework to help member countries conduct self-monitoring and evaluation of programmes to ensure that the targets set are met with appropriate measures.

A premium was placed on education because it was viewed as one of the largest industries in any country that affected everyone in society (United Nations, 2016; World Bank, 2014). It was borne in mind by global spectators of development that the problem of poverty and how to reduce it remained the most pressing issue in the international development agenda (World Bank,

2014). Despite the increase in global income levels and prosperity during the last few decades, Kasri (2014:1) observed that “poverty remained persistent such that, in 1990, the number of people living with daily income less than USD 1.25 was 1.9 billion. Around three decades later, the number only decreased slightly and remained high at 1.2 billion populations”. According to the World Bank (2014) report, most of the poor people lived in developing countries such as East Asia and Pacific (20.7%), Sub-Saharan Africa (34.1%) and South Asia (41.7%).

The Southern Africa Development Corporation (SADC) of which Zambia ascribe to, observed that “poverty was one of the major challenges facing the SADC region where, about 40 percent of the population lived in abject poverty: reflected in high levels of malnutrition, illiteracy, unemployment, underemployment, declining life expectancy and unsatisfactory access to basic services and infrastructure needed to sustain basic human capacities” (SADC, 2005:2).

The 2015 Zambia Demographic Health Survey (ZDHS) alludes to the same fact that, most rural communities in Zambia were still living below the poverty datum line (Central Statistics Office, 2015). Ministry of Education (MOE) policy document: Educating Our Future (1996) and Banda (2017) also noted that poverty in Zambia was a big challenge as malnutrition levels had remained extremely high especially in children as parasitic infections were on the increase due to poor sanitation and bad feeding. People everywhere faced risks and vulnerabilities. Unfortunately, those living in rural communities faced the harsh realities of the economy. The truth is that poverty, armed conflicts and other emergencies kept many children around the world out of school. According to United Nations (2016) in developing countries, children from the poorest households were four times more likely to be out of school than those of the richest households. Using this empirical evidence, it was probable that figures of poverty were going in

the wrong direction and that if measures to arrest the situation were not put in place, the world was headed towards illiteracy.

It was in this spirit that Zambia has continued to domesticate and implement a long-standing educational goal that every child that enters grade one should be able to complete free and compulsory primary school without opportunity costs (Ministry of Education (MOE), 1996; MOE, 2003; MOE, 2007). Unfortunately, all learners, yet for one reason or another, at one time or other time want to miss a day of school. The general tendency to engage in such unwillingness is referred to as absenteeism. Pupil absenteeism is defined by Teasley (2004) and Shooba (2013) as a period of time when a pupil does not attend school.

Preliminary investigations and indeed researchers own discretion has shown that pupils in rural primary schools in Nyimba district have continued to frustrate government efforts of educating the nation by absconding from class on reasons best known to them. This problem affects teacher pupil contact time as most of the learners are reported absent during learning time. This has devastating effects on both the pupils' academic performance and school administration. Therefore, the study sought to assess factors that perpetuated pupil absenteeism in rural primary schools in Nyimba district.

1.2 Statement of a Problem

The Universal Primary Education (UPE) policy in Zambia has considerably improved the enrolment rates in public primary schools (Ministry of Education Statistical Bulletin, 2012). However, there is still a lot more to be done to improve the quality of primary education in Zambia. Despite, the government's effort to introduce Home Grown School Feeding Programme (HGSFP) in rural and drought prone districts (Banda, 2017); squash primary school fees in 2003; deploy teachers; provide infrastructure and instructional materials, pupil absenteeism has

continued to prove to be problematic in primary schools (Shooba, 2013). If left unchecked, Zambia may fail to meet the 2030 agenda on Sustainable Development Goals specifically on education – SDG 4 where there is strive to promote lifelong and equitable education for all. The factors that perpetuate pupil absenteeism particularly in Nyimba district are not known, hence the study to bridge this knowledge gap.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to assess factors that perpetuated pupil absenteeism in primary schools of Nyimba district.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

- 1.4.1 To establish the causes of pupil absenteeism in primary schools of Nyimba district
- 1.4.2 To identify ways in which pupil absenteeism affected teaching and learning in Nyimba district
- 1.4.3 To ascertain home and school interventions to curb pupil absenteeism in primary schools in Nyimba district

1.5 Research Questions

- 1.5.1 What are the causes of pupil absenteeism in primary schools of Nyimba district?
- 1.5.2 How does pupil absenteeism affect teaching and learning in Nyimba district?
- 1.5.3 Which home and school interventions are required to curb pupil absenteeism in rural primary schools in Nyimba district?

1.6 Significance of the Study

The findings of this study may be important to the government of Zambia, specifically Ministry of General Education (MoGE), researchers, teachers, pupils and parents in many ways. It is

hoped that the findings of the current study may help MoGE to come up with interventions to address the challenges that absenteeism poses in rural primary schools. If the root causes of this problem were exposed, more learners may stay in school as strategies to prevent the situation would be devised. This may help policy makers come up with evidence-based decisions when dealing with the matter at school, district, and provincial and national level. The study may also add to the existing body of knowledge on pupil absenteeism. Findings may lead to the identification of new research avenues that may be carried out in future by interested researchers

1.7 Limitations of the Study

Factors perpetuating pupil absenteeism in Nyimba district may not be the same as in other districts hence, findings of the study may be restricted for generalisation due to variation of culture and socio-economic status of other districts since the study was conducted in Nyimba district only.

1.8 Delimitations of the Study

Kasonde-Ngandu (2013:21) posited that “delimitation of the study is usually indicated to address how the study will be narrowed in scope.” The study was confined to interviewing the primary school teachers specifically the guidance and counselling teachers in selected primary schools in rural areas because these teachers were considered to be reliable of the information and records of pupil absenteeism in Nyimba district.

1.9 Theoretical Framework

The study was inspired by Invitational Education (IE) Theory by William Watson Purkey in 1978. It was developed as a method of creating school environments in which self-concept could be enhanced and human potential more fully developed (Purkey, 1978; Purkey and Novak,

1984). The philosophy of IE has been applied in more than a hundred schools throughout the world, predominantly in the United States of America (Purkey and Strahan, 1995; Purkey and Novak, 2001). IE is a theory of practice that emanates from the self-concept theory and the perceptual tradition (Smith and Bernard, 2004; Purkey and Novak, 2001). It is deliberately directed towards broader goals than learners and their performance. According to Purkey (1978), Invitational Theory is a view of professional practice that addresses the total environment and all relationships formed in educational organizations. It is a process for communicating caring and appropriate messages to school going children intended to summon forth the realization of human potential as well as for identifying and changing those institutional and relational forces that defeat and destroy potential.

An invitation is simply a message that tells children that they are liked. These messages are the building blocks of community and of change. If teachers send messages that tell learners they don't like them, they undermine their best efforts to teach them and to retain them, with absenteeism as the final outcome. Invitations can be formal or informal, verbal or nonverbal, intentional or unintentional. Educators need to strive to be intentionally inviting and to make education a welcoming process. According to Purkey and Schmidt (1987), human potential can best be realized by good places, good policies, good programmes and processes that are specifically designed to invite learners.

According to Invitational Education Theory, every person and everything in and around the school adds to, or subtracts from, the process of being a beneficial presence in the lives of learners depending on the type of messages transmitted to the pupil (Maaka and Lipka, 1996). Therefore an intentionally inviting school environment impacts pupil positively and most likely to prevent pupil absenteeism. When invitational education functions well, students are motivated

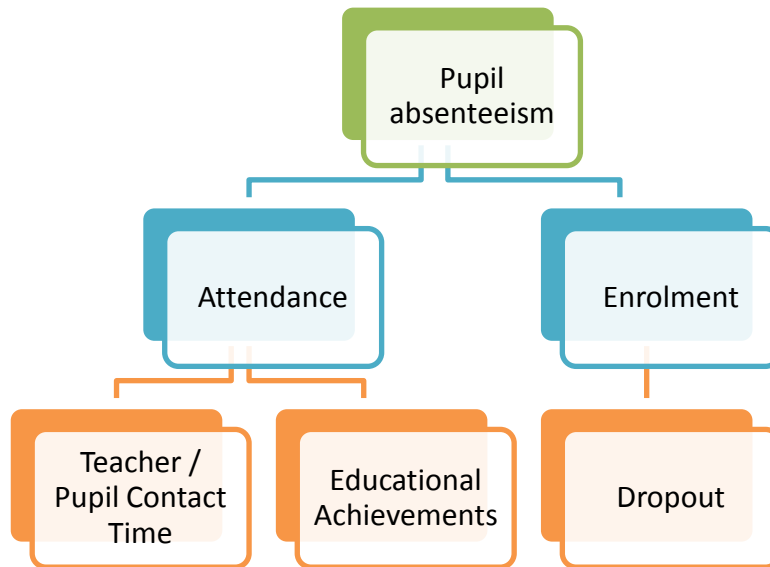
to work harder and to meet a teacher's high standards. Educators can and do make a positive difference in the lives of students. Pupils should be encouraged to express their own ideas and opinions and to realize that it is alright to make mistakes as part of the learning process (Purkey and Novak, 2001).

The current study used Invitational Education Theory to help explain factors that perpetuate absenteeism in rural primary schools. This Theory was important in the sense that it creates both a school environment and home environment which sends caring signals or messages to pupils. The theory was critical to the creation of an intentionally inviting school environment and home environment in which learners should be given the opportunity to work freely, which in turn helps them perceive school in much more positive ways. It is from this inspiration that the current study uncovered persisting factors that perpetuate pupil absenteeism in rural primary schools in Nyimba district.

1.10 Conceptual Framework

Orodho (2009) defines a conceptual framework as a model of presentation where a researcher represents the relationship between variables in the study and shows the relationship diagrammatically. A conceptual framework refers to a research tool intended to assist a researcher to develop awareness and understanding the situation under scrutiny and to communicate this based on observations or experiences (Kombo and Tromp, 2006). It is researcher's own position on the problem and gives direction to the study, showing the relationships of the different constructs that a researcher wants to investigate. It is also valuable in the sense that it sets the stage for presentation of research questions that drive the study. In this case, a conceptual framework assists a researcher to develop awareness and understanding of the situation under scrutiny. The conceptual framework for this study is as illustrated below:

Figure 1: The conceptual framework of Pupil Absenteeism



The model above simply shows different variables such that pupil absenteeism is an independent variable that has impacts on class attendance and enrolment. Lack of regular class attendance affects teacher pupil contact time which result in poor academic performance. Despite teacher preparation and preparedness learners were not there to receive the education. Time and resources were wasted on learners that did not attend school. On the other hand pupil absenteeism affected enrolment as dropout was eminent. Pupils who absented themselves from class were likely to dropout. This was not good as the MoGE was in a hurry to promote equitable and lifelong education for all children regardless of social economic status. It was this frame in mind that motivated the researcher to try and investigate factors that perpetuated pupil absenteeism in rural primary schools in Nyimba district.

1.11 Definition of the Terms

Absenteeism : Failure to make oneself available for an activity.

Abuse : This is the exploitation of learners or Improper usage or treatment of an entity, often to unfairly or improperly gain benefit.

Drop outs : Pupils who descent or who have stopped schooling

Re-entry : This is the going back into school after pregnancy or the process were the girl child is given another chance into school after pregnancy

1.12 Summary

Chapter one has given an introduction of the research study as it clearly introduced the research problem, objectives, significance, delimitations and limitations of the study. The chapter stated the theoretical and conceptual framework necessary for this study namely Invitational Education theory; and operational definition of terms for discourse. The next chapter is chapter two where literature by different scholars on absenteeism was reviewed to establish the link to the current study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Overview

This chapter presents reviewed literature related to the study on factors that perpetuate pupil absenteeism in rural primary schools in Nyimba district. The chapter explores Global perspectives of pupil absenteeism; African perspectives of pupil absenteeism; Zambia's perspectives of pupil absenteeism; literature gap and a literature summary.

2.2 Global Perspectives of Pupil Absenteeism

Pupil absenteeism seems to be a global problem that cripples smooth running of the education system in both developed and developing countries. Empirical evidence in many countries has shown that 'enrolled' students are frequently not in schools. Throughout history, school managements have often responded to student attendance and truancy issues by blaming students (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Hartnett, 2007). Schools have blamed students rather than seeking to understand their individual needs and those factors which may be driving their absenteeism. Consequently, one researcher suggested there is a need "to intervene in the causes of absenteeism beyond normative and reactive practices that end up generating more absenteeism" (Garcia-Gracia, 2008:276). Further, the researcher suggested schools identify and address any internal risk factors within the school which may lead to student absenteeism. This means schools must be willing and prepared to respond to any internal risk factors and to make change, as deemed necessary, in the best interest of students.

Researchers have suggested school managements take a more supportive approach to addressing student absenteeism (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). This would require school leaders to embrace the complex task of exploring their role in promoting student absence by evaluating their current

attendance practices and policies (Garcia-Gracia, 2008; Hartnett, 2007; Wilkins, 2008). Essentially, in studying their role, school leaders would need to identify and take ownership of their actions related to student attendance, whether positive or negative. School leaders would need to recognize and respond to the positives and negatives related to their actions with the intent of improving the system.

Hartnett (2007) suggested school managements' get personal with other stakeholders to change the culture of non-attendance. One study in particular pointed to the "benefits of going outside the school, of involving others, of understanding more fully the whole experience of the child" (Cullingford and Morrison, 1999). The authors suggested there is a need to understand individual students and their parents. In doing so, this involves establishing, building, and maintaining relationships. Taking a comprehensive approach would require school Managements' to look beyond the walls of the school by establishing and committing to a strong two way communication system with students and their families (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002).

More than one study suggested school managers must take into account student voice when addressing attendance problems (Hartnett, 2007; Reid, 2008). This means school managers must actively engage in reflective conversation with students to gain an understanding of their perspectives related to student absenteeism. As they build this understanding, school managers must be prepared to work with students to improve student attendance. According to Hartnett, (2007) school administrators should make effective change in a school set up by getting down to the personal relationship level and addressing the cultural beliefs and practices that affect learners students. In our *Zambian* situation this is being done through the students' prefecture board.

Elsewhere, in their book, *Chronic Absenteeism*, Balfanz and Byrnes (2012) assert that illness in Baltimore was a major cause of student absenteeism. Annual colds, flu, and assorted other

childhood ailments clearly contributes to school absenteeism. The authors further state that, acute health conditions are fortunately rare, and there are few chronic conditions that cannot be appropriately managed to enable school attendance. Children who are ill may not attend class and maintain the alertness and concentration needed to learn. The researcher finds this reading interesting and provides a novelty of inquiry to causal factors of pupil absenteeism in Zambia and in primary schools in Nyimba district.

In a study to understand the lives and circumstances of students who drop out of high school in America, Bridgeland, *et al.* (2006) used Focus Group Discussions and a survey, found that participants absented themselves from class for many days because they spent time caring for a family member. Create India Policy (CIP) (2011) explored the causes and correlations of absenteeism, repetition and silent exclusion. The analysis was based on the Create research in three clusters in the states of Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. The study found that absenteeism was rampant considering 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. These global revelations provides an introspection and self-checking whether economic hardships and family education backgrounds were lead cause of absenteeism in rural primary schools in Nyimba district. It was important to conduct the current study to ascertain these findings and quickly recommend for the way forward in the Zambian context, particularly in Nyimba district.

A study by Balfanz and Byrnes, (2012) on chronic Absenteeism in Baltimore found that family obligations also made some students not going to school. As children enter early adolescence, family responsibilities kept them from school. In high poverty environments, young adolescent girls sometimes provided emergency day care for younger siblings or were responsible for

getting younger children to school. Plank, *et al*, as cited by Balfanz and Byrnes, (2012) adds that; there is a growing evidence of even young adolescents taking on elder care responsibilities in single parent, multi-generational households. Adolescents, moreover, were sometimes pulled into helping with the family business or working to enable family or personal survival. In other cases, they were compelled or lured into illegal activities. Students who became involved in the juvenile justice system then often missed additional days of schools while being detained, going to court, and transitioning back into school. It is against this background that, this empirical research sought to investigate the main family obligations deterring pupils from attending classes regularly Zambia particularly in rural primary schools in Nyimba district.

Williams (2000) in a study of student absenteeism and truancy in England mentions that; schools, their curricula, and the strength of sanctions against chronic absenteeism are also contributing causes to students' absenteeism in schools. In support, Fleming, (1995) study, alludes that, the major reasons given by students in senior classes for non-attendance at lessons were poor teaching (23%), timing of the lesson (23%) and poor quality of the lesson content (9%). Teasley, (2004) also asserts that students that have poor or conflicting relationships with teachers may avoid school in order to avoid their teachers. Therefore, the current study was concerned to ascertain teacher cause factors of student absenteeism in rural primary schools of Nyimba district.

Wadesango and Machingambi (2011) said, many students especially in tertiary classes did not attend core learning sessions due to other pressing study related activities that they were doing. The authors mentioned several activities that were having a bearing on students' non-attendance for lectures, chief among them; being the need to work on assignments, completing assigned projects, researching in the library, preparing for presentations and studying for pending tests. Therefore, much as they may like to attend their lectures or related learning sessions, they ended

up not able to do so due to competing educational issues that demanded attention. The current study assesses the other educational pressing needs of rural primary school going children that made them absent from class in primary schools Nyimba district.

In addition, Williams (2000) found that the desire to participate in hedonistic activities and socialization with peers away from school provided other explanations for high pupil absenteeism. Wadesango and Machingambi (2011) also alludes that, the motivation for pupil absenteeism was the need to be with their friends and peers. Furthermore, Reid, (2005) asserts that, truant individuals were influenced by their peers not to attend school and encouraged peers to engage in activities outside of the school with them. Psychologists, behaviourists, psychiatrists and many other experts working with children and child delinquency complain of peer pressure as one of the factors that affect holistic development and growth of young adults to responsible citizens. In his book; *Mastering the Psychology of Teaching and Learning*, Munsaka (2011) stated that children who cannot attend school regularly due to peer pressure cannot learn well. It would be difficult for the teacher to terror activities for the pupil who is always absent from school. It was hoped that the findings of the current study could ascertain the level of peer influence on absenteeism from school in rural primary schools in Nyimba district.

Meanwhile, Unger *et al*, (1997) posited that students who participate in co-operative work experiences actually have a higher rate of absenteeism. While the cause for this occurrence is not conclusive, the researchers point out two possible explanations that is: students who already exhibit absenteeism might be attracted to the programmes in order to leave school and thus have more days of nonattendance; and students in co-operative programmes might disassociate themselves more from the school setting since they are experiencing the world of work, and older students who participate may have access to their own transportation and find it easier to be absent. Wedasango and Machingambi (2011) also posited that students attendance are sometimes

affected as they had to fulfil their work related obligations and provides for their needs since they were from poor family background. Therefore, the current study sought to bring conclusion on how co-operative work causes student absenteeism in rural primary schools in Nyimba district.

In trying to answer to the question whether Class Attendance was a proxy variable for Student Motivation in Economics Class?, Durden and Ellis, (2003) found that class attendance and motivation were related; and they noted that if motivation was not controlled for, the effect of absence from class on performance may be overstated. Shahzada, *et al.*, (2011) argued that; harsh school rules and regulations could cause absenteeism that is; corporal punishment. When schools have harsh or punitive discipline policies, students feel less connected to school. However, it was unclear whether restrictive school policies caused pupil absenteeism, or whether punitive discipline policies alienated students from school. Balfanz and Byrnes, (2012) reveals that, students who are forced to leave school, either through suspension, expulsion, or being sent to an alternative school, are not likely to increase their connectedness to or engagement with school. In pursuit to investigate factors that perpetuate pupil absenteeism in primary schools, the current study assessed the extent to which harsh school rules and regulations contributed to pupil absenteeism in rural primary schools in Nyimba district.

In a study of sociability, school experience, and delinquency, Lotz and Lee, (1999), asserts that, most of the adolescents today receive less supervision than in the past. The contributing factors to chronic absenteeism involve parental and school-based responsibility. In many cases, parents actually condone the absence by ignoring excuses when no valid reason is apparent for their children's absence from school. In contrast, Williams, (2000) said, forcing older students to remain in school when they were not motivated could only increase their absenteeism. Others avoid school for lack of clean or appropriate clothes. Balfanz and Byrnes, (2012) stipulates that; poor planning, family needs, or unpredictable transportation lead to students being late and they

stayed away from school altogether to avoid the hassle and sometimes the sanctions from school authorities.

In a study of negotiating the ethics of care and justice, Enomoto (1997) said, when students perceive that teachers do not care enough to follow up on absences, their motivation for attendance was not high. Lotz and Lee, (1999) collaborates students negative self- students choose not to attend, either because they or their parents or guardian do not see the value in school attendance or they have something else they would rather be doing; they have the agency and ability to skip school to do it since they are not being deterred by anything specific. Chang and Romero, (2008) elaborates that, choosing not to attend school on a regular basis begins early in a child's formal education when some parents do not yet see the importance of their child being in school every day. For others, it takes a while to establish a family routine that enables regular school attendance. By conducting the current study, the researcher was set to find out interest from parents, whether is the one causing pupil absenteeism in rural primary schools in Nyimba district.

In a nutshell, factors causing pupil absenteeism at global level have been established. Somewhat, research has revealed adequate literature at global level depicting causes of student absenteeism. Despite these revelations pupil absenteeism in primary schools in Nyimba district is still high. The current study was conducted to ascertain these revelations and identify persisting factors that needs urgent redress.

2.3 African Perspectives of Pupil Absenteeism

A study in Nigeria by Olufunke (2014) examined the causes of attendance challenge and their impact on the academic performance of Secondary Schools' students in Osun State. To achieve this aim, scores in attendance and examinations for 3,050 students in the last three years were collected from 61 state-owned Secondary Schools out of a total of 208 Schools in the State. The

results indicated that the average attendance scores of students across the ten constituencies in the state were proportional to their examination scores. Also, parents/guardians ranked poverty level, unbearable extra fees imposed on students by the school authority and high cost of instructional materials were major significant causes for their wards' absenteeism at school. It was concluded that a mechanism should be put in place by the State Government to curb the extra fees being charged by the various school authorities.

This research is of great significance as it highlighted the great influence that high fees play in the retention of pupils at different levels of education. It was excruciating in the current study to investigate whether fees were an issue of concern considering that primary schools in Zambia were still under the Free Basic Education Policy (FBEP) of 2003 introduced by President Levy Patrick Mwanawasa. In addition, Olufunke, ignored the role which is played by parents and society at large in curbing absenteeism.

On the other hand a research conducted by Musa (2014) in Ogun State revealed that peer pressure is among the most causes of absenteeism and truancy among pupils. To this effect he recommended that the guidance and counselling departments in school plays a key role in counselling pupils against the vices of peer pressure. This research was important for consideration because of the important role played by guidance and counselling department in modelling the behaviours of pupils in primary schools.

A study of factors that contribute to student absenteeism by Ali (2012) in Kenya revealed that learners who absent themselves from school were not likely to graduate from primary school. In order to solve the problem of pupil attendance, much needs to be done by all stake holders and this is left in the hands of all. These cases should be revisited and the loose bolts tightened to ensure learners do not suffer the fate of dropping out of school at a tender age.

In a study of learner absenteeism in South African schooling system, Community for Social Enquiry (CSE) (2007) reported that dealing with learner absenteeism required effective policy framework as well as effective monitoring systems that can provide a basis for decision-making and intervention. Approaches to managing absenteeism should be devised in a holistic way, to take account of the broader problems that contribute to pupil absenteeism. These should take into account specific socioeconomic and cultural characteristics of the schools and surrounding communities where absenteeism is a problem. Attendance policies are an important first step in managing, monitoring and reducing learner absenteeism. These findings are important to the current study because systems world over cannot be effectively run without policy guidelines. In the absence of regulatory policies, programmes and functions of government or parastatals may fail. Therefore, schools should be assisted and encouraged to develop these policies. In this regard efforts should be made to increase the involvement of parents, representatives of the PTA and the community in general in ensuring attendance and monitoring absenteeism and truancy. This literature guided the researcher to check the policy framework and measures put in place to curb absenteeism in primary schools in Nyimba district.

2.4 Zambia's Perspectives of Pupil Absenteeism

Shooba (2013) sought to compare pupil absenteeism from Grade 7 composite examination. The research employed the survey design which was descriptive in nature. Both qualitative and quantitative approaches were employed. The sample included 62 Grade 7 teachers and 10 parents' Focus Groups, in selected schools of Mumbwa district. Purposeful sampling procedure was employed to arrive at the respondents. The research revealed that, there was no difference with regard to pupil absenteeism from examinations from 2006-2009, as the differences noted were negligible. However, there was an upward trend in 2010 with girls in the lead. The findings showed that, the major drivers of pupil absenteeism from Grade 7 composite examination were

physical factors such as long distance to school and adverse climate, especially in the rainy season when roads became impassable due to floods; health factors such as illnesses and death in the family, and personal attitude like pupils not being interested in school due to peer pressure and laziness. This literature is crucial but may not capture all factors that perpetuate absenteeism in rural schools since the study was just about learners in grade 7 at a composite examination. The current study is different and its determination was to recruit even children in a non-examination class to investigate their motivations and frustrations.

Shooba (2013) argues that children who absent themselves from attending examinations should not be forgotten after the results are published. There should be a follow-up to redress their predicament. She conceded that pupil absenteeism during grade 7 composite examination was real and that the Government of the Republic of Zambia (GRZ) through the Ministry of General Education (MoGE) in partnership with Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) such as World Food Programme (WFP) should revamp programmes such as School Health Nutrition (SHN) for deworming and Home Grown School Feeding Programme (HGSFP). This, just like the government's intentions is meant to increase pupils' attendance, retention and reduce on absenteeism and dropout rates. This literature is important to the current study especially on the role of school feeding to reduce pupil absenteeism. School feeding is an important activity that can act like a magnet and get all school age children into the classroom. Banda (2017) shared similar sentiments on HGSFP. He posited that school feeding was a social safety net that helped to tackle the problem of pupil absenteeism and recommended its rolling out to other schools for similar benefits. The current study investigated the implementation of school feeding programme as a measure to curb pupil absenteeism in primary schools in Nyimba district.

Mwaanga (2012) warned that Zambia risked ending up with a future leadership that does not know how to read and write if children continue to be absent from class which effectively means

it cannot lead. She recommended guiding and counselling the pupils as a measure for curbing pupil absenteeism otherwise it was not right to take lightly the absence of pupils from school. A study by Mukanu (2017) on Absenteeism from school and the academic performance of learners stated that most studies and literature indicates that learner absenteeism was the beginning of a serious challenge in education. For example, Epstein and Sheldon (2002) observed that many children who are normally enrolled in school do not attend class on a regular basis. Other scholars like Bennett (2010) in Examination Council of Zambia (2013) have actually stated that although there have been concerted efforts among various stakeholders to reduce absenteeism in schools; challenges still exist as many learners continue to absent themselves from classes.

Shooba (2013) observed that absenteeism causes low self-concept of academic ability leading to low attainment in school. Children who through their domestic and personal circumstances are forced to acquire adult status too early often become persistent absentees. Thereafter, school life becomes boring, irrelevant, petty and restrictive. Such attitudes lead to withdrawal and conflict. Culturally the young children assist their parents in domestic chores. Some children are withdrawn from school by parents in rural areas to assist in household chores that include babysitting younger siblings, accompanying parents to hospitals, collecting firewood and water among others. The girl child does most of this work but where there are no girls, the boys are used to perform the same tasks. Chronic absenteeism affected performance as children are not regular to cover and grasp all the concepts. Despite these findings being restricted to a composite examination conducted for five days only, it was interesting to investigate in the current study whether similar sentiments shared in this literature affected the running of primary schools in Nyimba district.

In a study of teachers' and pupils' perceptions of causes of pupil absenteeism during grade 12 national practical examinations in Kabwe district, Lubeya (2012) employed a mixed survey

design of data collection and found that various factors contributed to pupil absenteeism during national practical examinations such as pupil and teacher unpreparedness, lack of support from school administration, parents and teachers, peer pressure, fear of the examinations, pupils' laziness, inadequate provision of learning and teaching materials, poor infrastructure and unfavourable learning environment, poor teaching strategies by teachers, and low staffing levels. This literature is important in the discourse of pupil absenteeism. What is not known is whether similar factors affected pupil absenteeism in a non-examination class in a rural primary school of Nyimba district, hence the study.

In a study of curbing absenteeism from Junior Secondary Examination (JSE) in Chingola district, Musumpuka (2016) employed a descriptive survey design following a qualitative technique of data collection and analysis. The qualitative method used semi-structured interviews and observation for head teachers. The sample consisted of 10 head teachers drawn from the 10 schools which offered JSE. The data was analysed by use of thematic analysis of data, where the data was coded according to the emerging themes. The results of the study revealed that schools employed various strategies among which were; registration of pupils, counselling of pupils, parental involvement in education, motivation of pupils, syllabi coverage and examination preparation techniques. In the current study it was interesting to check how primary schools in Nyimba district conducted registration of pupils to record daily attendance, how effective guidance and counselling services were; parental involvement of pupils who absconded from school and pupil motivation through career counselling.

2.5 Literature Gap

The chapter has discussed absenteeism as absence from attending class by school going children. There are many factors that make learners absent themselves from attending school. These include physical, healthy, economic, home and school factors. However, the literature reviewed

does not give a clear picture for persisting factors that perpetuate absenteeism in rural primary schools. Reviewed literature has shown an adequate number of studies showing causes of pupil absenteeism during a national examinations and mostly in secondary schools. It appears researchers have not invested enough energy in documenting pupil absenteeism at primary school in a non examination class especially in Nyimba district. If left unchecked, many rural children could eventually stop school thereby perpetuate the vicious cycle of poverty. Zambia may also fail to achieve the lifelong and inclusive education in the vision 2030 as stipulated by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) SDG4 and 7th National Development Plan (NDP).

2.6 Summary

The chapter reviewed literature related to the factors that perpetuate pupil absenteeism at Global level, Africa and Zambia. A literature gap was clearly identified and needed to be filled by the current research. The next chapter is methodology for the current study. It highlights the methods, approaches and strategies used to execute the current study. The means by which data was collected and analysed is explained. Ethical issues in respect to study participants and their protection are also explained.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Overview

This chapter presents the methods that were used to carry out the study on factors that perpetuated pupil absenteeism in rural primary schools in Nyimba district. It introduces and describes the following: philosophical assumptions, research design, target population, sample size, sampling methods, research instruments, data collection procedures, methods of data analysis and ethical issues.

3.2 Philosophical Assumptions

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 (Creswel 2009). In this philosophical design, researchers rely on participants views over a given phenomenon to construct meaning through discussion and interaction. Open ended questions are 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.

It emphasises a search for meaning, understanding and social interaction as the basis for knowledge. 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, assessing factors that perpetuate pupil absenteeism in rural primary schools in Nyimba 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. 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 Nyimba district.

3.3 Research Design

Research design has been defined by different researchers differently yet it means the same thing. Crotty (2005) for example, defined a research design as a method used to gather information from various sources in order to generate answers to research problems. Kasonde-

Ng'andu (2013) also defined a research design as the structure of research that holds the elements in a research project together. In essence, a research design locates the researcher in the frame of mind to get to places where to find information that is relevant to the question in mind. Accordingly, Kombo and Tromp (2006) says, research design is an arrangement of conditions for collection and analysis of data in a manner that aims to combine relevance to the research purpose.

This study used a descriptive research design to help lead to formulation of important principles of knowledge and coming up with solutions to significant problems. A descriptive research design was employed in order to obtain extensive results on factors that perpetuated pupil absenteeism in rural primary schools in Nyimba district. According to Creswel (2009) descriptive research is a method of collecting information by interviewing or administering a questionnaire to a sample of individuals. It allowed 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.

The study adopted qualitative research methods in a way of exploring attitudes, behavior and experiences through interviews in order to get an in-depth opinion from participants. In other words, the qualitative approach was employed as it needed in-depth views, ideas and knowledge from the participant's own perception and not researcher's fixed responses on pupil absenteeism.

3.4 Pilot Study

The researcher conducted a pilot study in selected primary schools in Nyimba district to test the authenticity of the research instruments namely; structured interview guide. This pilot study was done in order to identify, add or remove misunderstanding and bias due to questioning and procedural techniques. Komb and Tromp (2006:102) are of a view that "a pre-test of research

instruments must be done to enable a researcher find out if the questioning technique is measuring what it is supposed to measure and whether the wording is clear”. Although Komb and Tromp warn researchers to desist from using findings of the pre-test of a study on the main research project, this study did not use findings of the pilot study to write this report, but findings were merely used to ensure quality control of the research instruments to guarantee reliability of the findings.

3.5 Target Population

Komb & Tromp (2006), Creswel (2009) and Kasonde-Ng’andu (2013) have all commented on a target population in the research study as a set of cases, objects or events of interest to the researcher; from which a sample is drawn and to which the research findings would be generalizable. All teachers and pupils in rural primary schools in Nyimba district formed up the study population. Teachers were targeted in this study because they were reliable with record keeping of pupils’ daily attendance. The pupils were also targeted because they were the ones who attended or absented from school. Getting their views on this problem was ideal in a way of solving the problem of pupil absenteeism.

3.6 sample

A sample according to Kothari (2011) is a subset or group of subjects selected from the larger population and whose characteristics can be generalised to the entire population. The sample comprised of forty two (42) respondents consisting of six (6) primary school teachers and thirty six (36) pupils in six (6) rural primary schools in Nyimba district. One teacher from each school visited was sampled. These teachers were those manning guidance and counselling department. Perpetual absentees enlisted by the school authorities at their discretion were also added to the

sample of learners to help investigate factors that perpetuate pupil absenteeism in primary schools.

3.7 Sampling Procedures

Sampling procedures were applicable as follows;

3.7.1 Sampling Procedure for Selecting Primary Schools

The study used purposive sampling to select all the six (6) primary schools in Chiweza zone in Nyimba district. The zone was preferred because the researcher observed during preliminary investigations after working in this zone for more than seven years that absenteeism was a big challenge that school administrators were wrestling with. A pilot study also revealed that the problem had reached escalating levels. For example during a pilot study school A had 26%, school B 19% and school C had 31% of its learners absent on a day visit. This intrigued the researchers curiosity to investigate more to help solve the existing problems of pupil absenteeism in the zone.

3.7.2 Sampling Procedure for Selecting Participants

The study used purposive sampling technique to select the teachers and the pupils. 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 teacher’s 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. Perpetual absentees at the school were also sampled. At authority’s discretion, these were sampled and included for

participation in the study. It was perceived that such pupils could help greatly in bringing out information that perpetuates pupil absenteeism.

3.8 Research instruments

Interview Guide and Focused Group Discussion Guide were used to collect data. These were administered to the teachers and pupils respectively. Interview Guide were administered to the teachers to solicit for responses that point to causes of pupil absenteeism, roles of parents as well as measures put in place to help solve this problem. Like many other researchers, Creswel (2009) noted that the use of interviews in social research is important to help the researcher to ask follow-up questions, and hence, get well-detailed clarifications.

Focus Group Discussion Guide was used to collect data from the pupils on their experiences towards absenteeism. It was aimed at soliciting information on what made them absent from school regularly.

3.9 Data collection procedures

Data collection can simply be defined as gathering of information in order to prove or refute facts. Komb & Tromp (2006) state that researchers collect data to help policy makers plan properly and effectively by influencing progressive and legislative policies and regulations. In-depth interviews - open-ended conversations with key participants (teachers) were conducted with the aid of a structured topic guide and meetings were held in a quiet place that were most convenient to participants. The interviews were carried out in English and local language (Cinyanja) to allow maximum participation. Focus group was also done in Cinyanja with a bit of English because the pupils hardly expressed themselves in English.

3.10 Methods of data analysis

The study used Thematic Analysis to analyze data. Thematic Analysis is when common themes are identified based on the research objectives of the study. The data was presented using verbatim. In supporting thematic analysis, Creswell (2003) stated that theme formation was common in social research especially qualitative research because data that is similar is grouped in order to easily interpret it.

3.11 Ethical Considerations

As part of ethical considerations, all participants were assured of total confidentiality and privacy. The identity of the respondents was not required and the researcher ensured that the phrasing of questions did not cause psychological or emotional injury on the part of the respondents. The researcher also made sure that no participant was forced to participate in the exercise. Seeking consent of the school administration in the concerned schools was a priority before anything was done at a school. Moreover, as much as possible disruption of the process of learning in schools was avoided. During interviews, the freedom of the interviewee was well respected. All collected information was kept under lock and key, accessible only by the researcher for confidentiality and privacy sake. Above all, permission from the District Education Board Secretary (DEBS) to work with the schools in the district was sought.

3.12 Summary

The plan of how the research was carried out, the kind of people involved in the study and the instruments used were outlined in the methodology chapter. This chapter established all it took for the researcher to successfully collect and analyse data. In the following chapter, findings of the study were presented as were given by the respondents.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.0 Overview

This chapter presents the findings of the study that assessed factors that perpetuated pupil absenteeism in rural primary schools in Nyimba district. The findings were presented and interpreted in relation to the research objectives. The : causes of pupil absenteeism; challenges of pupil absenteeism to teaching and learning; and home and school interventions to curb pupil absenteeism. The chapter ends with a summary.

Background information

4.1 Respondents by Gender, Status, Age and Grade

Table 1: Frequency Distribution of Participants According to Gender and Status

| Position | Gender | | Total |
|--------------------------|--------|--------|-------|
| | Male | Female | |
| Guidance Teachers | 2 | 4 | 6 |
| Pupils | 11 | 25 | 36 |
| Totals | 13 | 29 | 42 |

Table 1 shows the frequency distribution of study participants according to gender and status. There was a total of 42 study participants drawn from six selected primary schools comprising of thirteen (13) males and twenty nine (29) females. The study recruited two (2) male and four (4) female Guidance and Counselling teachers. Eleven (11) male and twenty five (25) female pupils from selected rural primary schools.

Table 2: Frequency Distribution of Pupils According to Age

| Age | Male | Female | Totals |
|-------------|------|--------|--------|
| 7-9 years | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 10-12 years | 3 | 9 | 12 |
| 13-15 years | 4 | 12 | 16 |
| 16-18 years | 3 | 2 | 5 |

Table 2 shows the frequency distribution of pupils according to age. The table shows that pupils in the age category of 13 – 15 years were a majority in the sampled schools followed by those in the age range of 10-12, then 16 – 18 and lastly 7 - 9 years.

Table 3: Frequency Distribution of Pupils According to Grade

| Age | Male | Female | Totals |
|-------|------|--------|--------|
| 1 | 2 | 4 | 6 |
| 2 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 3 | 2 | 6 | 8 |
| 4 | 3 | 7 | 10 |
| 5 | 1 | 3 | 4 |
| 6 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| 7 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| Total | 11 | 25 | 36 |

Table 3 shows the frequency distribution of pupils according to grade. The table shows that pupils were sampled from all the primary school grades 1-7.

Assessment of pupil absenteeism

Table 4 shows the total number of learners enrolled in six (6) rural primary schools of Nyimba district during the research visit as 2571. 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: Situation of Class Attendance on Research Visit

| Number of schools | Enrolment | | | Absent | | |
|-------------------|-----------|--------|-------|--------|--------|-------|
| | Male | Female | Total | Male | Female | Total |
| 6 | 1,229 | 1,342 | 2571 | 199 | 277 | 476 |

4.2 Causes of Pupil Absenteeism

4.2.1 Causes of Pupil Absenteeism as Reported by Teachers

Teachers were asked to explain what the factors were at their school that promoted perpetual pupil absenteeism. One teacher said that;

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...

Another teacher said that;

Absenteeism at this school is common because of puberty rites. You see children who reach 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

Another teacher at another school stated that;

The main problem at this school is the Nyimba river. Children do not cross the river at times during the rain season. This affects class attendance. Sometimes they try but often times miss class. This problem is reduced during dry seasons I think you have seen the river as you were coming to this school.. uh

At another school, one teacher mentioned that;

The economic activities of this place is selling bananas, you find that some parents send their children to sell bananas to travellers along great east road 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 bananas and mangoes.

At another school one teacher mentioned 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 for their babies as I have already said that poverty here is something else ...

Another teacher said that;

Most of the children do not come to school regularly due to prolonged sickness such as HIV related for example there is a girl in grade three... she misses class regularly, the school headteacher is aware because the guardian came to explain the medical conditions of the child.

One teacher mentioned 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 anyway 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.

4.2.2 Causes of Pupil Absenteeism as Reported by Pupils

Data from a focussed group discussion with pupils revealed a number of factors that perpetrated pupil absenteeism. One pupil 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.

Another pupil said that;

I havent 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 exmpting us with asthma from doing sports.

One pupil also narrated that;

I abscond from school because teachers punish a lot for any misconduct. Insteady of just talking to you they like giving harsh punishment. I sometimes avoid to reach school if am late to avoid teacher punishments

One pupil also narrated 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 cant remember school (laughs.....!)

Another pupil commented that;

Moses and Zyambo have been telling me to go with them to sell bananas and mangoes to the travellers at the great east road ... these boys come to school with money .. so we went last week and made k36 ... so we used the money during break time to buy fritters.

When asked whether the home environment contributed to pupil absenteeism, one pupil narrated that;

I have a lot of work which I do at home... I look after my mothers 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...

One pupil 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 ... if I tell her again she will beat me .. she beat me last time so am scared...

4.3 Challenges of Pupil Absenteeism on Teaching and Learning

The teachers were asked what the challenges of perpetual pupil absenteeism were on teaching and learning. One teacher 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 teacher said 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 another school one teacher noted that;

Absenteeism was bad... just imagine children who come once or twice a week, how can they 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 nowander 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 rsult of absenteeism everyone at this school knows better....

4.4 Interventions to Curb Pupil Absenteeism in Primary Schools

The respondents reported that much needed to be done by education stakeholders in order to curb absenteeism. One teacher stated that;

There was need for cordinated parental support and guidance, introduction of sexuality education to bring awareness of dangers of early sex debut, pregency and early marriages, discouraging peer pressure, punishing erring parents by chiefs and government, providing necessary school requirements and monitoring actual school attendance by teachers.

Others respondents felt that, monitoring pupils' play activities at home, and sensitizing parents so that they are made aware of the importance of education and in the process reduce household chores to pupils may drastically reduce absenteeism. Further one teacher stated that;

Pupils need role models at school and at home, more especially girls. Each and every school should have female teachers as role models while at home there is suppose be retried women and men to encourage them on matters related to school achievements and

careers and giving them motivational talks on the importance of education. I think as a school we can do more by inviting officers from other departments such as doctors, nurses, military personnel, police, politicians and others just to come and help motivate our learners on the importance of staying in school.. this may eventually help in reducing cases of pupil absenteeism.

Another teacher said that:

Absenteeism could be stopped by giving bicycles to pupils living more than 5km away from school as a way of motivation to them. The government should build high bridges on rivers to enable pupils with bicycles or those on foot to cross smoothly and this would be done in partnership with world bicycle relief programmes and Government to provide bursaries to the vulnerable pupils according to the children's needs. In addition, more schools needs to be built in rural areas to reduce the distances children cover daily to reach to a nearby school.

In addition, one teacher said that;

Primary schools should improve school health nutrition programmes to provide school meals that would attract children into school, such as giving them a well balanced diet of body buiding foods , protetive foods and energy giving foods not only the boiled mazie as it is done in some schools. Of course this programme of school feeding is there but lacks consistency by the Ministry of General Education.

Another teacher from one school explained that;

Sensitising parents during PTA meetings should be taken seriously to prevent more girls from dropping out... we cannot allow this situation to continue like this. I know that schools should also give material support such as books to children in dire needthis is good for practice as teachers.

Another teacher said that;

Guidance and Counselling services should be improved to help sensitise girls on the importance of education as well as to interact with girls on the problems they face. This department seem to be active in secondary schools and less is seen happening in primary schools... then one wonders whether school administrators understand how important this innovation is to teaching and learning.

Another teacher suggested that;

School headteachers should be calling parents when their children absent themselves or show signs of dropout... in doing that class teachers can also make home visitations to familiarise themselves with home environments were children come from. This may help to provide quick interventions to pupils at risk of dropping out...

4.4.1 School Related Measures to Curb Absenteeism

The teachers reported the following school interventions to curb absenteeism among the school going children especially the girls and needy pupils. One teacher said that;

The Ministry of General education policy from internal circulars indicate that morning class should start at 07:00 hours. This honestly is not applicable at this school. Because most children cover long distances every day there is need for the school to have a flexible schooling hours and system to ensure that children who come from distant places don't feel discouraged.

One teacher suggested that;

Schools should consider automatic promotion of over aged children to the next grade... you find that children in this community start school very late due to cattle rearing... if such children show some signs of improvement in literacy, then schools may peradventure consider automatic promotion to the next grade....

Another teacher said that;

School administrators and class teachers should be on the look out to identify children with potential of absenteeism to encourage them to be attending school regularly and help by providing with them school materials such as text books and other incentives.

4.4.2 Home measures to Curb Absenteeism

The teachers noted that there was need to take home factors seriously. One teacher said that;

Government should criminalise early marriages by punishing those who marry or impregnate school pupils.

However, one pupil said;

I was absent from school because I was sick and I lost my grandmother ... who used to pay for my school fees, uniform and books, but the school did not ask why I was absent the teacher on duty almost punished me for being absent I had to explain myself. The school has done nothing from the time I enrolled. All I hear is that you were absent, work here or there (punishment). I think the school should be assisting us children in need.

Contrary to the above assertion, some pupils from the same school indicated that, they were at one time, visited by the school authorities. One child said:

The school called my parents. We went together with my parents to the school and the school headteacher told me to be coming to school. She also promised to help me with money.

Another pupil said:

The school called me and asked me why I was absent from school for three weeks, when I told them I had no one to pay fees for me they even promised to help me financially.

Therefore, pupils interviewed suggested bringing dropouts back to school, calling absentees to school and talk to them about the importance of school, punishing them, make follow ups with them, helping them financially/making education free/giving financial help to pupils who cannot afford fees and finding out from perpetual absentees why they did not come to school regularly.

In addition one pupil said:

Education should be made free for all grades to help pupils who cannot afford fees to remain in school or they have to be assisted financially. They can also give them loans to enable them meet school

requirements. Schools should counsel pupils in problems, sensitising them on the importance of education.

4.5 Summary

Chapter four has presented the findings of the study conducted in Nyimba district on pupil absenteeism. The chapter has presented the causes of pupil absenteeism as reported by teachers and pupils themselves; the challenges on the teaching and learning; and interventions to curb pupil absenteeism in selected primary schools of Nyimba district. The next chapter which is chapter five discusses the findings according to how they were presented in chapter four in relation to the objectives of the study.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

5.0 Overview

The study revealed a number of factors that perpetuated pupil absenteeism in rural primary schools in Nyimba district, impact of pupil absenteeism on teaching and learning, and measures in curbing pupil absenteeism. It is in this view that, this chapter discusses some of the major causes of pupil absenteeism in rural primary schools of Nyimba district, their implication on teaching and learning, and interventions that could be put in place to curb the problem.

Background information

From the findings presented, there were more females than males who participated in the study this was due to the fact that the ages considered in the study comprised of children (pupils) aged between 7 and 13 where many girls are attend school. The other reason that could be sited is that during this period most girls have not become involved in active social responsibilities hence most of them are sent to school. However as the ascend in the upper classes the number s for female are likely to dwindle as most of them dropout due to cultural issues for example initiation ceremonies, early marriages, pregnancies and also get involved in vending along the roads. wWhy?

Assessment of pupil absenteeism

Absenteeism is the challenge facing pupils' overall progression and completion of the basic school programme. On a research visit as shown on table 4 of the current study, there was an enrolment of 2 571 in 6 rural primary schools under sample of which 476 pupils were absent representing 18.3% absence. This was to confirm whether absenteeism was real. It was clear

from this finding that absenteeism was a real problem in primary schools. This is affirmed by a study by Banda (2017) on home grown school feeding found that, who found that 26% of the learners enrolled in primary schools during his research visit were absent from school. Create India Policy (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.

The explanation is that pupil absenteeism is still a development challenge that needs drastic measures to reverse its effects on teaching and learning. If nothing is done to help absentees attend class, the Ministry of General Education may continue to record poor results on academic performance. This may not resonate well with the spirit of the 2030 agenda of quality and equitable education to all citizens. It is in this vain that Invitational Education theory encourages school managers to make schools inviting to learners by deliberately putting up policies and programmes that attract children and communicate caring and appropriate messages for children to like school. This theory invites school administrators to identify and change institutional and relational forces that defeat and destroy potential in young ones.

Pupil absenteeism is real in rural primary schools in Nyimba district and its causes should not be looked at lightly; early intervention as regards to attendance will make a difference for those students who are moving towards disengagement from school and as a result begin to practice social evil in the society such as stealing, prostitution, drug abuse, gambling thereby exposing them to risk behaviours and diseases. Therefore, it is very important for the government, policy makers in the Ministry of General Education, school administrators, media, parents, and the general public to accurately monitor, identify early and intervene about this silent killer. Pupil

absenteeism as a silent killer has long term effects to the learners and the nation. It leads to school dropout hence a blockage of students academic growth; poor performance in examinations due to low syllabi coverage; a waste of tax payers money; and deteriorating performance. These factors lead to increase in crimes because of being attracted to the out side environment full of bad elements. In addition, they become a burden to the society because of unemployment since one has no employable skills.

5.1 Causes of Pupil Absenteeism in Rural Primary Schools of Nyimba District

The current study identified a number of causes of pupil absenteeism and these drivers can be categorized as: physical factors (e.g. rivers, long distances), health factors (e.g. prolonged sickness), personal attitude (poverty and early marriages), home related factors (farming, household chores, family business), cultural factors (puberty rites), and school related factors (teacher punishment) Shooba (2013) .

5.1.1 Physical Factors

The study revealed that long distance to a nearby school was a challenge among school going children in selected primary schools in Nyimba district as reported by both teachers and pupils. Most of the schools in Nyimba district were over 10km apart and this had made pupils to cover long distances to school on foot and those who were not strong enough stopped on the way. The most affected, from the findings, were girls who were usually abused on the way. This finding is also reported in Kelly (1999) that children in rural areas did not regularly attend school due to the challenge of long distance. This implied that some pupils who enrolled at grade one did not progress to grade seven since they dropped out on the way. One wonders how the picture of their future could look like if they are not in school? This calls for policy makers in the Ministry not to

sit back and relent but design policies that shall summon all school age children and ensure that they are in school. Therefore, the study established that distance children covered to a nearby school was still a problem in Nyimba district and needed urgent attention from policy makers.

The research findings further showed that, climate was another factor that caused pupils to be absent from school. During the rain season crossing rivers become impossible as the rivers were flooded. This finding is similar to Shooba (2013), who alluded to the same point on an investigation into the causes of pupil absenteeism from grade 7 composite examination in Zambia. In the 21st century, this situation can not be allowed to continue. Most developing countries have made progress especially in investment in education. It is generally, accepted that education is the cornerstone of any meaningful development. Building schools closer to communities is a step towards achieving this development ambition. Although the government of the Republic of Zambia is in motion putting up infrastructure to eradicate poverty and illiteracy, less activities are reported in Nyimba district hence the challenges that learners face in covering distances and crossing streams during rain season to attend class. Therefore, the government should consider building more primary schools in Nyimba district to help alleviate this problem.

5.1.2 Health Factors

From the research findings, the most commonly cited factor that caused pupils' absenteeism according to the teachers and the pupils was prolonged illness. More pupils missed school due to this reason. Balfanz and Byrnes (2012) in Baltimore, also found that illness was a major cause of student absenteeism. Annual colds, flu, and assorted other childhood ailments clearly contributed to school absenteeism. Bridgeland, *et al.* (2006) also found that caring for a family member promoted pupil absenteeism. Children who are ill may not attend class and maintain the alertness and concentration needed to learn. Therefore, there was an urgent need to establish the kind of

illnesses that deterred children in rural primary schools from attending school. If these illnesses were identified, immunisation programmes and vaccines could be given to help these children accelerate take 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 because they were reported to be attending funerals or busy with activities associated with funerals. Additionally, with the advent of HIV/AIDS, many families were child headed. Shooba (2013) had similar findings when she commented that, the children end up dropping out of school or fail to attend school regularly because the eldest child of the family is unable to provide all the school necessities to the other siblings or they are told to stay home to take care of the sick especially the girls or it may be that the bread winner in the family has passed on. Children who are vulnerable must be identified by school authorities who represent government and recommended to social welfare to receive assistance as they deserve. Failing to help vulnerable pupils is not good. Society may be toxic if children grow up without school as such children grow up to be destitutes.

5.1.3 Personal Attitudes

The finds revealed that the other cause of pupil absenteeism from actual school attendance was the pupils themselves, pupils were not interested in school work due to peer pressure which landed most learners into early marriages due to poverty. Similar findings were reported by Lubeya (2012) that peer pressure contributed to pupil absenteeism during national practical examinations. In addition, Munsaka (2011) said that children who cannot attend school regularly due to peer pressure cannot learn well. It would be difficult for the teacher to terror activities for the pupil who is always absent from school. Wadesango and Machingambi (2011) also alludes

that, the motivation for pupil absenteeism was the need to be with their friends and peers. Reid, (2005) said that, truant individuals 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 (2012) also mentioned that, students choose not to attend school because of external influence either they or their parents do not see the value in school but marriage. This finding makes sad reading as teachers seem not to have done much to advertise careers to learners. Teachers should wake up from slumber and advance a campaign for show casing significant others to the learners such as the renowned musicians, footballers, doctors, engineers, nurses, politicians and other notable and famous people in society. This may help motivate children to work hard and attend school regularly.

5.1.4 Home Related Factors

The research findings revealed that pupil absenteeism as reported by teachers and pupils was caused by parents/guardians' negative attitude towards school. Some parents did not value education as they saw nothing profitable in educating a child. Hence, they sent their children to sell bananas and mangoes along the great east road to raise some income for the family. Wadesango and Machingambi (2011) also reported that students' attendance were sometimes affected as they had to fulfil their work related obligations and provided for their personal and family needs since they were from poor family backgrounds.

Further, findings showed that, household chores, too, caused pupils to miss school. Most pupils were made to care for the sick relatives, care for the children, cook or clean or fetch water and firewood. In the process of doing so, the pupil was ever tired and ended up absenting or dropping out of school. Some parents failed to provide the needed school requirements such as uniforms and stationery to their children due to poverty, and in the process the child dropped out of school.

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 reveals that; family health or financial concerns were all conditions that can cause a child not to attend school. 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 a 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.

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. The boys were more affected in this case, and it was for this reason that their children were made to stop school and sent to till the land and herd cattle. These reasons are critical because they lead to poor performance in class, drop out and waste of government funds and as a result it affects the government objectives of increasing access to quality education. This study conforms partly to Balfanz and Byrnes, (2012) because they mentioned that family obligations make some students not go to school without mentioning the reasons and level of prevalence in their study.

5.1.5 Cultural Factors

The study revealed that puberty rites affected pupil attendance. Girls especially who became of age were secluded during puberty rites (cinamwali). Unfortunately the same learners attended 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, they could not study when the village was polluted with noise of drums for puberty rites. If absenteeism is avoided, these pupils usually came to school already tired since these activities usually breaks dawn.

In alluding to this finding, Raising (2007) had posited that initiation rites were an intrinsic part of traditional societies as they have existed for many centuries and can be traced back to 400 AD. Initiation rites or ceremonies are similar from one culture to another with few differences across cultures. They 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.

The information above stipulates that most of the learners were greatly affected with various forms of having conducted the initiation ceremonies. These facts are vividly showing us that the traditional norms are very strong in the chieftdom under research - Ndade and as such a sensitization on the importance of both the traditional values and indeed the acquisition of education is of vital importance to every human being of the Nsenga people who cherish the traditional norm.

In addition, the research findings revealed that some of the early marriages were due to religious traditional ceremonies such as chinamwali. Early sex debut and pregnancies were yet another cause of pupil absenteeism. It was revealed that, most of the girls were affected as they were made to dropout of school when they were pregnant. Cinamwali kept their children in seclusion for along period of time when they came of age, teaching them how to behave as grown ups and also how to behave as future wives. This implied that, the causes of early marriages and early pregnancies increased as these little adults called mooyes (a girl who becomes of age and is kept in seclusion for a period of time being taught how to behave as a future house wife and mother),

when they were out of seclusion, they regarded themselves as adults. Hence, begun to practice what they were taught while in seclusion. The explanation can be that, traditional beliefs and practices are good as they help preserve culture, but they should be done during holidays to enable children attend class during the academic year. Failing to do so may jeopardise the future of the young ones as education was key to their success.

5.1.6 School Related Factors

The study revealed that pupils complained that some teachers did not listen to students' reason of coming late even if a student had a genuine reason and as a result a student opted to stay away from school on those days when they were very late. This finding rhymes well with Shahzada, *et al.*, (2011) who admitted that corporal punishment could cause absenteeism in school. Teasley, (2004) also found that students that have poor or conflicting relationships with teachers may avoid school in order to avoid their teachers. Balfanz and Byrnes (2012) mentioned that when schools have harsh or punitive discipline policies, students feel less connected to school. Teachers should observe government policies and avoid taking matters in their hands or using discretion. It is unfortunate to note that even when corporal punishment was abolished a decade ago some teachers continued to administer it. Headteachers should play advisory role to inform, educate and warn erring teachers to safeguard and promote class attendance.

5.2 Impact of Perpetual Pupil Absenteeism on Teaching and Learning

The study revealed that pupil absenteeism in selected primary schools in Nyimba district had negative effects on the teaching and learning process. Since teaching and learning according to the findings requires previous information to connect to new information, absenteeism creates knowledge gaps that make pupils in affected areas to under perform as compared to other

learners in other zones. Further, findings reveal that pupil absenteeism affected class attendance and management of the system making it difficult for teachers to deliver lessons effectively. It was also discovered that pupils that often missed classes were likely to be indisciplined and rude making it difficult for teachers to handle the class which later affected punctual pupils performance. On the other hand learners who absconded classes performed low on school assessments as they had insufficient comprehension of concepts especially in mathematics and science. Early graders had also difficulties to breakthrough in reading and writing as they perpetually missed class. According to Lotz and Lee (1999) students' non attendance of class are reasons for non-performance which supports the findings. As observed by Kelly (1999) a child must be physically present in school if he/she is to derive maximum benefit. Irregular attendance led to wastage and stagnation. Educational wastage has continued to be one of the dominant problems that educationist confront. Absence is the preliminary step that leads to wastage and stagnation.

5.3 Interventions to Curb Pupil Absenteeism

From the research findings, it was observed that, parents, teachers and all stakeholders in education needed to make a firm decision to stop absenteeism among the learners. Strong parental support was forwarded as one of the reason for curbing absenteeism in primary schools. Musumpuka (2016) also forwarded parental involvement in education as key to stopping pupil absenteeism. One teacher suggested, guiding and counseling the pupils, providing teaching and learning materials and building more schools as an intervention to halt pupil absenteeism. Parents should be motivated to show interest towards education of their children. The findings showed that, parents needed to provide school requirements but failed to do so for their children. Despite the Free Basic Education policy from Grades 1 – 7, parents had an obligation to buy

books, pens and food for their school going children. These enable the child to feel as part of the larger community and concentrate on school activities. This entails that, when a child has all school necessities, participation, registering of information and storage in the mind becomes very good. Furthermore, parents need to guide and counsel their children.

It was reported that most of the parents did not spend time with their own children and learn of problems they encountered at school. Parents should see to it that, they take time off to sit with their children and talk to them on matters related to education thereby guiding and counseling them in the way they are supposed to go. In view of these facts, parents and schools need to do more than guiding and counseling the pupils and also provide conducive environments for teaching and learning. In addition, the findings revealed that parents had a duty to provide for the family and not send their children into the streets to sell some merchandise such as bananas and mangoes to an extent that, the child remains with no time to attend to his/her school work.

Absenteeism causes, should be identified and rectified both by teachers and parents. Create India Policy (2011) stated that; family health or financial concerns, poor school environment, drug and alcohol use, transportation problems, and differing community attitudes towards education were all conditions that cause a child not to attend school. Therefore, the parents need to provide necessary support to their children if absenteeism is to be uprooted in primary schools through financial assistance to the child. The parents should also free their children from domestic works. In addition Balfanz and Byrnes (2012) said that, students choose not to attend, either because they or their parents or guardian do not see the value in school.

On the other hand teachers should pay personal interest to check absenteeism in classrooms. Kilpatrick (1996) said that, lack of challenging and interesting course work and curriculum were reasons for student non-attendance while on the other hand, Fleming, (1995) said that, the major

reasons given by students for non-attendance at lessons were; poor teaching, timing of the lesson and poor quality of the lesson content. Therefore, the current study establishes that teachers should ensure that they provide games and sports materials to children with a rich curriculum, meeting the needs, interests and attitudes of the absentees. Teachers should treat all the children equally irrespective of their background, sex or religion. In doing so, school administrators should work towards creating an inviting school as stipulated Purkey 1978.

5.4 Summary

Pupil absenteeism is real in rural primary schools in Nyimba district and its causes should not be looked at lightly; early intervention as regards to attendance will make a difference for those students who are moving towards disengagement from school and as a result begin to practice social evil in the society such as stealing, prostitution, drug abuse, gambling thereby exposing them to risk behaviours and diseases. Therefore, it is very important for the government, policy makers in the Ministry of General Education, school administrators, media, parents, and the general public to accurately monitor, identify early and intervene about this silent killer. Pupil absenteeism as a silent killer has long term effects to the learners and the nation. It leads to school dropout hence a blockage of students academic growth; poor performance in examinations due to low syllabi coverage; a waste of tax payers money; and deteriorating performance. These factors lead to increase in crimes because of being attracted to the out side environment full of bad elements. In addition, they become a burden to the society because of unemployment since one has no employable skills.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.0 Overview

In this chapter the researcher has come up with a number of conclusions based on the issues raised in the study and the recommendations thereof.

6.1 Conclusion

The study concludes that the major drivers of pupil absenteeism from actual school attendance were physical factors such as long distance to school and flooding streams during rain season; health factors such as prolonged sickness and death in the family and personal attitude like pupils not being interested in school, poverty, peer pressure and laziness; home related factors like parents and guardians having a negative attitude towards school, household chores, parents' failure to provide school requirements, and children being withdrawn from school during the farming season. Furthermore, the other causes included the cultural and social factors such as early marriages, early pregnancies and initiation ceremonies (chinamwali).

Absenteeism posed a challenge in the management of primary schools in Nyimba district. Performanace in school assessments was affected due to non-school attendance by some learners. Children who absconded from school had poor comprehension of reading and writing skills in mathematics and science as they had difficulties to breakthrough to literacy. The research also revealed that parents had a role to play in curbing pupil absenteeism such as guiding and counseling their children and providing school requirements.

The findings from the study bring to question a number of issues that can generate debate amongst educational stakeholders such as; selling merchandise along the great east road especially

in areas from kacholola to Luangwa bridge, telling them to herd cattle, look after the baby while their mother as gone for a funeral or spending them at the griding meal to go and grid mazie for mealie meal, to accompany their parent at malizike gardens in kacholola to order bananas for sale. The boy child also involed in charcoal burning with his parent and takes weeks from school. This in effect, implies that efforts to stamp out or to deal with the problem of absenteeism should be directed towards addressing all the factors within the wider social, economic and political environment rather than merely concentrating at the learners. This energy has to be directed towards sensitising the community on the importance of daily school attendance and the importance of education in general. However, pupil absenteeism calls for the attention of two critical stakeholders, namely the parents and the teachers as they could be instrumental in preventing and remedying the situation in primary schools.

6.2. Recommendations

In view of the foregoing findings and conclusions of the study, the study made the following recommendations.

- School managers should invite important people in society such as Doctors, Politicians, Musicians, Police and other Military personnel to give career talk to children to help motivate learners stay in school. This can be done annually or during school open and or careers day.
- School managers should engage in constructive sensitization of parents against early marriages in order to curtail absenteeism in primary schools.
- Parents should utilise PTA platforms to sensitize each other on the importance of education.

- Parents should practice traditional ceremonies like chinamwali during the holidays and week ends to promote school attendance among the pupils.
- Ministry of General Education should consider building more schools in rural areas to alleviate the problem of long distances learners cover daily.
- The government of the Republic of Zambia should also consider putting bridges in streams that lead to a school.
- Harsh punishments and measures should be meted out by the government to men who marry or impregnate school going children.
- Schools should stop giving corporal punishment to absentees but should intensify on providing guidance and counselling services on the dangers of school absence, early sex debut, early marriages and teenage pregnancies.

REFERENCES

- Ali, R. A. (2012). *Factors that Contribute to Student Absenteeism in Nakuru East Division: A Case Study of Lanet, Upperhill and Meroneni Day Secondary School*. University of Kenyatta: Masters dissertation.
- Balfanz, R. and Byrnes, V. (2012). *Chronic Absenteeism: Summarizing What We Know From Nationally Available Data*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Centre for Social Organization of Schools.
- Banda, E. (2017). *An Evaluation of the Implementation of Home Grown School Feeding Programme in Selected Primary Schools in Nyimba District, Zambia*. Masters Dissertation: University of Zambia.
- Bridgeland, J. M. Dilulio, J. J. and Morison, K. B. (2006). *The Silent Epidemic: Perspectives of High School Dropouts*. A Report by Civic Enterprises in Association with Peter D. Hart Research Association for the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.
- Central Statistics Office (2015). *Zambia Demographic and Health Survey 2013-14*. Lusaka: Ministry of Health.
- Community Agency for Social Enquiry and Joint Education Trust (2007). *Learner Absenteeism*. South African Schooling System; Department Of Education.
- Creswell, J. W. (2003). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches (2nd edition)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. London: SAGE publications.
- Crotty, M. (2005). *The Foundations of Social Research: Meaning and Perspective in the Research Process*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

- Cullingford, C, and Morrison, M. (1999). Relationships between parents and schools: A case study. *Educational Review*, 51(3), 253-262.
- Dilthey, W. (1976). *The Rise of Hermeneutics Critical Sociology*. Hammondsworth: Penguin.
- Durden, G. C. and Ellis, L.V. (2003). Is Class Attendance a proxy variable for Student Motivation in Economics Class? An Empirical Analysis, *Institutional Social Science Review*, 78 (1 and 2):42-46.
- Enomoto, E. (1997). Negotiating the Ethics of Care and Justice. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 33: 351-370.
- Epstein, L. J. and Sheldon, S. B. (2002). *Getting Students to School: Using Family and Community Involvement to Reduce Chronic Absenteeism*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Examination Council of Zambia (2013). Research Study on Learner Absenteeism from Public Examinations: *An Inquiry into the Extent and Causes of Absenteeism at the Primary and Junior Secondary School*. Lusaka; UNICEF
- Fleming, N. (1995). *Attendance. Why don't They Attend?* London: Macmillan Press.
- Garcia-Gracia, M. (2008). Role of secondary schools in the face of student absenteeism: A study of schools in socially underprivileged areas. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 12(3), 263-280.
- Hartnett, S. (2007). Does Peer Group Identity Influence Absenteeism in High School Students? *The High School Journal*, 35-44.
- Kasonde-Ngandu, S. (2013). *Writing a Research Proposal*. Lusaka, University of Zambia Press.
- Kasri, R. A. (2014). *The Role of Zakah in Poverty Alleviation: Evidence from Indonesia*. A Doctoral Thesis, Durham University, Business School
- Kelly, M. J. (1999). *The Origins of Education in Zambia*. Lusaka: Image Publishers.

- Kilpatrick, P. (1996). Missing school. *Youth Studies* 15(4), 19-22.
- Kombo, D. K. and Tromp, D. L. A. (2006). *Proposal and Thesis Writing*. Nairobi: Pauline's Publications Africa.
- Kothari, C. R. (2011). *Research Methodology. Methods and Techniques*. (2nd edition). New Delhi: New Age International Publishers.
- Lotz, R., and Lee, L. (1999). *Sociability, School Experience, and Delinquency*. *Youth & Society* 31(3), 199-224.
- Lubeya, F. M. (2012). *Teachers' and Pupils' Perceptions of Causes of Pupil Absenteeism during Grade 12 National Practical Examinations in Selected Practical Subjects: A Case Study of Selected High Schools of Kabwe District*. Masters Dissertation: University of Zambia Library.
- Maaka, M. J. and Lipka, P. A. (1996). Inviting Success in the Elementary Classroom: *First Steps from Theory to Practice*. *Journal of Invitational Theory and Practice*, 4(1), 51-62
- Ministry of Education (2003). *Strategic Plan-2003-2007*. Lusaka: Zambia education publishing house.
- Ministry Of Education Science Vocational Training and Early Education (2012). *Zambia's 2012 Educational Statistical Bulletin*. MESVTEE; Lusaka; Zambia.
- Ministry of Education (1996). *Educating our Future: National Policy on Education*. Lusaka: Zambia Educational Publishing House.
- Ministry of Education (2007). *National Implementation Framework 2008-2010: Implementing the Fifth National Development Plan*. Lusaka
- Munsaka, E. (2011). *Mastering the Psychology of Teaching and Learning*. Lusaka: University of Zambia Press.

- Musumpuka, E. S. (2016). *Curbing Absenteeism from Junior Secondary Examination: Investigating Strategies Employed in Selected Schools of Chingola District*. Masters Dissertation: University of Zambia.
- Musa, T. (2014). Absenteeism and Truancy on Academic Performance of Secondary School Students in Ogun State, Nigeria. *Journal of Education and Practice*. 22(5) pp 81-87.
- Mwaanga, D. January 13, 2012. Curb Grade 7 Exam Absenteeism. *Daily Mail*. no. 2492, p3.
- Olufunke, F. A. (2014). Attendance Dilemma and its Effects on the Academic Performance of Secondary School, Students in Osun State, Nigeria. *In International Journal of Humanities Social Sciences and Education (IJHSSE) Vol 1, No. 4, pp 13-20*.
- Orodho, C. K. (2009). *Conflict Management Styles Implemented by the Administrators in the Public Sector*. California: Sage publications.
- Phiri, J. T. N. (2013). *Statement by the Honourable Minister, Dr. John T. N. Phiri, MP on the 2013 Grades 7, 9 and 12 Examinations Results*. Lusaka: MESVTEE.
- Purkey, W. W. (1978). *Inviting School Success: A Self-Concept Approach to Teaching and Learning*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company.
- Purkey, W. W. and Strahan, D. (1995). School transformation through invitational education. *Researching in the Schools*, 2:1-6.
- Purkey, W. W. and Schmidt, J. (1987). *The Inviting Relationship: An Expanded Perspective for Professional Helping*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc.
- Raising, T. S. A. (2001). *Female Initiation Rites in Urban Zambia*. African Studies Centre: New Brunswick
- Reid, K. (2008). Behaviour and Attendance: The National Picture; A Synopsis. *Educational Review*, 60(4), 333-344.

- Shahzada, G., Ghazi, S. R., Nawaz, H., and Khan, A. (2011). Causes of Absenteeism from the Schools at Secondary Level. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, Vol.2, No.2, 2001; (291-298).
- Shooba, E. (2013). *An Investigation into the Causes of Pupil Absenteeism from Grade 7 Composite Examination in Zambia: A Case Study of Selected Schools of Mumbwa District*. Masters Dissertation; University of Zambia
- Smith, K. and Bernard, J. (2004). The Psychometric Properties of the Inviting School Survey (ISS): An Australian study. *Journal of Invitational Theory and Practice*, 10, 7-25.
- Southern Africa Development Community (2005). *Report on the SADC Consultative Conference on Gender and Development*. Gaborone, December, 2005.
- Teasley, M. L. (2004). Absenteeism and Truancy. *Children and Schools*, 26: 117-127.
- Unger, L., Morton, C., & Laing, D. (1997). A Brief Report on Paradoxical Effect of Education on School Attendance. *Guidance and Counselling* 12(3), 20-23.
- United Nations (2016). *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2016*. Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA); ISBN: 978-92-1-101340-5
- Wadesango, N. and Machingambi, S. (2011), *Causes and Structural Effects of Student Absenteeism: A Case Study of Three South African Universities* Centre for Learning and Teaching Development, Walter Sisulu University, Republic of South Africa Kamla-Raj 2011 J SocSci, 26(2): 89-97.
- Wilkins, J. (2008). School Characteristics that Influence Student Attendance: Experiences of Students in a School Avoidance Programme. *The High School Journal*, 12-24.
- Williams, L. L. (2000). Student Absenteeism and Truancy: Technologies and interventions to Reduce Chronic Problems among School-Age Children. *Journal of Children*, 7: 23-34
- World Bank (2014). *World Development Indicators Series*. Washington: World Bank

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interview Guide for teachers

Interview questions for teachers aimed at collecting information on the factors that perpetuate pupil absenteeism in rural primary schools in Nyimba district

1. Are there factors in the school that contribute to pupil's absence?

.....

2. What are the factors?

3. Are there factors at home that contribute to pupil's absence?

.....

4. What are these factors?

5. How does pupil absenteeism affect the teaching and learning process?

.....

6. What are the roles of parents in curbing pupil absenteeism?

.....

7. What are the roles of teachers in curbing pupil absenteeism?

.....

8. What measures has been put in place by the school to prevent pupil absenteeism?

.....

9. How effective are these measures taken by both the school and individual class teachers in preventing school going children from school absence?

.....

10. What linkages exist between home and school aimed at preventing children from absenteeism?

Appendix B: Focus Group Discussion Guide for Pupils

Focus group questions for pupils aimed at collecting information on the factors that perpetuate pupil absenteeism in rural primary schools in Nyimba district

1. Do you think school is important in the lives of children?
2. In which ways do you think school is important in the lives of children?
3. What makes some children decide to be absent from school?
4. In your opinion do you think the decision to be absent from school is a correct one?
5. Are there factors in the school that contribute to making children absent from school?
6. Are there factors at home that contribute to making children absent from school?
7. What does the school do when children decide to be absent from school?
8. What action do you think the school should be taking towards children who decide to absent from school?

Appendix C

‘Written Assent’ for teachers of ages 25-60 years

I have read this letter which asks me to be part of a study at my school. I have understood the information about my study and I know what I will be asked to do. I am willing to be in the study.

Teachers’s name:.....Teacher’s signature:.....Date:.....

Headteacher ’s name:..... Headteacher’s signature:.....Date:.....

Researcher’s name:.....Researcher’s signature:.....Date:.....

Appendix D: Consent form

Dear Participant,

My name is KABANGA FOSTER MUYATWA. I am a student at the University of Zambia pursuing Masters of Education in Educational Management and Administration. This is a collaborative Post Graduate Programme between the University of Zambia and Zimbabwe Open University. You are invited to participate in a research study entitled: Assessment of factors that perpetuate pupil absenteeism in rural primary schools in Nyimba district, Zambia. It is my hope that this information can contribute to the little existing literature on perpetual pupil absenteeism performance of learners, thereby helping in policy formulation. There are no identified risks from participating in this research. The information you will provide during the interview guide and focus group discussion is highly confidential. The results will be presented at the University of Zambia Post Graduate seminar presentations. Neither the researcher nor the University has a conflict of interest with the results. Should you have any questions about the research or any related matters, please contact the researcher at fkabanga68@yahoo.com or telephone numbers +26 0977 284811; +260965 284811; +260955137626