

Exploring Factors Influencing Absenteeism and Academic Performance: A Study on Early Childhood and Primary Education (ECPE) Classes

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ABSTRACT

This study delves into the various factors influencing absenteeism and academic performance among children enrolled in Early Childhood and Primary Education (ECPE) classes. Data was collected through fieldwork in 2011, focusing on demographics, attitudes of parents and teachers towards ECPE classes, methods used for retention of learners, roles of teachers in children's performance, causes of absenteeism, and proposed solutions. The analysis revealed that poor teaching methods, inadequate structures, long distances to schools, weak administration, absenteeism of teachers, and harsh punishments contribute significantly to absenteeism among ECPE learners. These factors impact the academic performance of absentees, leading to subpar educational outcomes. Additionally, positive attitudes towards ECPE classes were found to correlate with better academic performance, emphasizing the importance of a conducive learning environment. Based on the findings, recommendations were made to address these challenges, including the elimination of harsh punishments, establishment of more schools to reduce travel distances, penalties for absent teachers, and the adoption of effective teaching methods. The study underscores the need for targeted interventions to improve attendance and enhance academic performance in ECPE classes.

Keywords: Absenteeism, Academic performance, Early Childhood and Primary Education

INTRODUCTION

According to the Ministry of Education Science and Technology (MoEST) document called "Every Child in School," it is necessary for teachers to be trained in order to be effective [1]. The Kenya Education Sector Support Programme (KESSP) manual states that 56% of untrained ECPE (Early Childhood Primary Education) teachers in public schools are having a negative impact [2]. The Ministry of Education Strategic Plan (2005–2010) clearly identifies that the majority of ECPE teachers have not been trained, and the Center for Early Childhood Education [3] recommends training teachers for effective delivery. The ECPE class is a crucial foundation for further learning. It is essential to ensure that learners are well-prepared at this level, as it will impact their performance in national examinations such as the Kenya Certificate of Primary Examination (KCPE)

[4]. The programs at this level have well-organized syllabi or guidelines that should be followed for optimal outcomes. Therefore, the learners' success depends on their regular attendance to cover the syllabus and complete the expected activities. Educators are familiar with these programs, and it is important to extend this knowledge to caregivers so they understand the importance of this class. Caregivers play a vital role in motivating learners to attend regularly. Siblings can also act as good role models by attending school consistently, which may motivate the younger ones. Trained and qualified teachers who possess various techniques and knowledge of using appropriate learning and teaching aids are necessary to handle the learners effectively. They should also be fully knowledgeable in catering to the needs of young and tender learners.

Statement of the problem

The researcher aims to come up with findings as to why there is a big disparity in performance between the regular attendants and the irregular attendants in ECPE class, as may be indicated in the randomly

sampled schools. He intends to get findings to suggest whether the absenteeism in the ECPE centers could have contributed to the kind of performance experienced by the sampled schools

Specific Objectives of the Study

1. To find attitudes towards the program.
2. To find out the methods used for the retention of learners in schools.
3. To identify the role of teachers in children's performance.

Research Questions

1. What are the attitudes of respondents towards the program?
2. What are the methods used for the retention of learners in schools?
3. What are the roles of teachers in children's performance?

The significance of the study

1. The research findings and recommendations will be important to the educators, managers, School Management Committees (SMC), and parents in controlling absenteeism in the classes, which results in poor performance.
2. It will be significant in opening up new avenues for policymakers and non-governmental organizations with an interest in the child's learning.
3. Research methods, techniques, and instruments established in the current study may be relevant in future studies targeting other curriculum areas of early childhood education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Attitude towards the ECPE Program

The attitude is divided into two groups: negative and positive.

Negative attitude on the teacher's part

Poor payment or total lack of payment

Most of the teachers who are poorly paid do not impart knowledge, and therefore the children are not developed holistically. According to Fontana [5], how a child develops depends on the people around him. A child learns skills and values needed for social

living, i.e., knowing the difference between right and wrong. The researcher supports Fontana and urges the adults to ensure that the child is reared in a good environment so that the right values are instilled in a child.

Lack of recognition of the ECPE teachers by other stakeholders

There are some stakeholders who are good at not recognizing the good work done by the ECPE, and because of this, teachers don't pay attention to the

needs of the children, hence affecting their academic performance.

Discrimination in various forms by the head teachers

Discrimination is any situation in which a group or individual is treated unfavorably based on prejudice, usually against their membership in a socially distinct group or category. Such categories include ethnicity, sex, sexual orientation, religion, socio-economic

status, age, and disability. Discrimination applying to the equal availability of employment opportunities, housing, and goods and services is widely legislated against.

Poor and inadequate provision of teaching and learning resources

Government allocations for education are low. On the three islands that make up Comoros, over half of the population lives in poverty and can contribute little to their children's education. Handling a huge and

unmanageable number of learners by a single teacher. A class may be too big for one teacher to handle, and this affects the performance of the children in that most of them do not participate in class work.

Poor teaching methods

Poor teaching methods and approaches (Kenya Ministry of Education strategic plan 2005–2010 of July, 2005): 56% of the public ECDE centers are

handled by untrained teachers whose methods are poor, hence the negative impact on the learners [2].

Lack of feeding programs in centers

Children's academic performance is affected by not having lunch or tea break at school. Many pupils drop out of school due to the fact that they don't get lunch at school, as we know that nothing can take place when one is hungry. Many schools don't give children

lunch. This was witnessed in some schools, i.e., those that do not provide lunch perform badly as compared to those that do, and when parents were interviewed about this, they responded that they prefer schools with the ability to provide lunch.

Use of corporal punishment and other forms of punishment

Many school-going children drop out of school due to the heavy punishments that are given at school. For example, you may find a child who has been given the

punishment of digging up an anti-hill, and what is expected of that child is that his or her performance will drop.

Unconducive learning environment

Sanitation is defined as matters and methods connected with the maintenance of public health. Poor sanitation may lead to children's performance

dropping as they feel that they cannot be in a poor environment, resulting in absenteeism from school.

The long distance between home and school

Some schools are a bit far from their homes. You may find that a school is about seven miles from where they are staying. Some children are lazy, and they

can't move those long distances; hence, they end up dropping out of school.

Teaching Methods used for the retention of learners in schools

The teacher should vary his or her teaching methods. Learners learn better through play, experimentation, discovery, and exploration within the environment in which they are growing. The teacher and parents should encourage them to do the above. According to

Julia Gitobu [6], 'Principles and Practices of Home Management Play, play an attractive role in encouraging the learners to attend school regularly, thus resulting in good coverage of the scheduled work, hence good performance.

Teaching/Learning Resources

Learners learn better in an environment that is rich with teaching and learning resources. Therefore, teachers and parents are encouraged to provide a variety of the same [7]. Every child in school should ensure learners have appropriate learning materials to retain them in school. Teachers use locally available teaching and learning materials to stimulate

the learners, thus controlling the absenteeism of those who may not wish to miss school. According to the Kenya Ministry of Education strategic plan (2005–2011), lack of motivating methods and approaches and appropriate teaching and learning resources is also a factor that has increased absenteeism in ECPE centers, hence poor academic performance [8].

Quality of manpower

A teacher handling an ECPE class should be trained and qualified. He or she should not impose his or her wishes on unprepared young ones. 'Jean Jacques Rousseau' (1712–1778), 'Participation Training Project NACECE [4]. ECPE teachers have to be

trained for effectiveness, resulting in high retention of learners and thus good academic performance. Also, in 'Every Child at School by MOEST, effective teachers must be trained [9].

The role of teachers in academic performance

The ECPE teacher can assist the children to learn comfortably by being loving, warm, and natural, building positive self-esteem and confidence in them. The ECPE teacher should use child-centered methods. According to NACECE [4], the teacher should use practical approaches or child-centered methods. The teacher should provide more activities for the children, and the children should be active participants in learning. The ECPE teacher should use plenty of teaching and learning aids to enable children to master what they have learned. According to Piaget, children who are at the concrete operational stage should be given a lot of materials to help them acquire various skills. The ECDE teacher should respect and acknowledge individual differences in children and motivate each child to achieve at his or her own level of ability. The ECDE teacher must understand the children well and know their talents and potentials. The teacher promotes desirable health and hygienic habits, nutritious meals and snacks, and transmits desirable habits, values, attitudes, and norms. Kuslan [10] calls for understanding of child development by ECDE teachers. The teacher plans activities that encourage the child to touch, taste,

smell, hear, and see, i.e., use their senses. According to Montessori, children should be guided to discover and explore using their senses. The teacher sets the learning environment (the classroom) so as to stimulate a child's interest and motivate him or her to explore the world around her or him. According to Erickson's theory, if the child's learning environment is unfriendly and unstimulating, the child learns to mistrust and withdraw. Positive experiences develop in a child a good self-concept and a feeling of self-esteem. According to Said et al. [11], the task of the ECDE teacher is enormous. He or she is everything for the child at school. Children demand love, attention, assistance, guidance, and comfort from him. Lillie [12] defines a teacher as an instructional expert and stage setter. Since the teacher plays a fundamental role in assisting and enabling children from varied child rearing categories to learn comfortably and be successful in life, it is the researcher's appeal to the government and fellow parents to appreciate and pay this ECDE teacher some good salary so as to enable him/her to implement her roles comfortably and happily.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A quantitative descriptive design was used because

of the need to obtain a detailed description of

absenteeism and academic performance.

Area and Population of the Study

The area of study is Mogotio district, and the study comprises ten schools, ten ECPE teachers, ten head teachers, ten parents, and ten class parents, totaling

forty respondents from Emining, Borokwo Rada, and Kabogor primary schools. Mogotio has a population of 22,857.

Sample Selection

Purposive sampling and stratified sampling were used, whereby class representatives and head teachers were purposefully selected and teachers and parents

were selected by using simple random sampling to represent the entire population of Mogotio.

Sample Size

In the proposed study, 40 respondents were selected to represent the population of Mogotio. These were

as follows: 10 teachers, 10 head teachers, ten parents, and ten class parents' representatives.

Data collection instruments

In order to carry out this research effectively, different instruments were employed to collect all the

required data. These included, among others, the following:

Questionnaires

Questionnaires were designed and used to get primary data, and respondents were required to

answer the questions. All the respondents were given questionnaires.

Structured interview

A structured interview was used to get or collect data, and it was built on the impact of absenteeism on

academic performance. The head teachers were interviewed.

Focus Group Discussions

Focus group discussions were used to answer opinion questions like, how has the performance of your children been? and what attitude do you have toward

teachers? However, it was difficult to organize respondents for a meeting. This was solved by making appointments with the respondents.

Data Collection Methods

Two methods of data collection were used: primary

and secondary data collection methods.

Primary Data Collection Method

Data was obtained from the field through questionnaires, observation, and focused group

discussions.

Secondary data sources

Textbooks and other related works of outstanding scholars, whether published in magazines, written data sources, including published and unpublished

documents, agency reports, newspaper articles, internet sources, and so forth, were referred to.

Procedures

The study required the researcher to get a letter of introduction from the faculty of education at Kampala International University, which was presented to the various respondents. The researcher then introduced

herself and the purpose of the study. Guarantee and confidentiality were assured by not asking the respondents names and only those willing to participate would be given questionnaires.

Data analysis

The data was analyzed and computed using Microsoft Excel. The information was summarized

into percentages and frequencies.

PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF DATA

Sex

Table 1: Sex of the respondents

Sex	Frequencies	Percentages
Males	23	57.5
Females	17	42.5
Total	40	100.0

Source: Fieldwork 2011

From table 1, it can be established that most of the respondents were males with 23 (57.5%) and the rest

were females with 17 (42.5%)

Age
Table 2: Age of the respondents

Age	Frequency	Percentages
25 — 34	18	45.0
35 — 44	15	37.5
45	7	17.5
Total	40	100.0

Source: Fieldwork 2011

Marital status
Table 3: Marital status of the respondents

Marital Status	Frequencies	Percentages
Single	26	65.0
Married	9	22.5
Divorced	5	12.5
Total	40	100.0

Source: Fieldwork 2011

From the study, it was established that most of the respondents were single with 65% followed by married with 22.5% and divorced with 12.5%.

Through the informal interview with the respondents, single were many because they fear commitment as they were fresh graduates.

Education level
Table 4: Education level of the teachers

Education level	Frequencies	Percentage
Certificate in ECPE	11	55
Diploma in ECPE	6	30
Bachelors degree in ECPE	3	15
Masters	0	0
Total	20	100

Source: Fieldwork 2011

The results indicate that 55% of teachers have certificate in ECPE, 30% have diploma in ECPE while 15% are graduate teachers. There were no teachers with master's degree in ECPE. Most of the teachers

(55%) had certificate in ECPE. This was because people had a negative attitude and they did not see the need to invest in the early years of the child.

Table 5: occupation of the respondents

Occupation	Frequencies	Percentages
Civil servants	23	57.5
Business proprietor	5	12.5
Farmer	12	30.0
Total	40	100.0

Source: Fieldwork 2011

From the study it was found out that most of the respondents were civil servants with 23 (57.5%) followed by farmers with 12 (30.00%) and business proprietor last with 5 (12.5%). civil servants were

many because it constitutes the teachers, doctors, and other professionals who are employed by the government. Attitudes toward ECPE Programme

Attitude of parents towards the ECPE class
Table 6: Attitude of parents to the ECPE class

Attitude	Frequency	Percentage
Positive	6	60
Very good	3	30
Negative	1	10
Total	10	100

Field Source, 2011

Table 6 indicates that parents have a positive attitude towards ECPE class with 60%, 30% have a very good attitude and 10% have a negative attitude towards

ECPE class. Respondents had a negative attitude and they did not see that there is need to invest in the early years of the child.

Attitude of teachers towards ECPE classes
Table 7: attitude of teachers towards ECPE class

Attitude	Frequency	Percentage
Positive	4	40
Negative	6	60
Total	10	100

Source: Fieldwork 2011

From table 7, it can be established that most of the teachers have a negative attitude towards ECPE with

60% and the rest (40%) have a positive impact.

Negative attitude
Table 8: Negative attitude of teachers against ECPE classes

Negative attitude	Frequency	Percentage
Poor payment	2	20
Low recognition	1	10
Discrimination	5	50
Inadequate teaching materials	2	20
Total	10	100

Source: Fieldwork 2011

Table 8 indicates that most of the teachers suffer from discrimination as it is shown by 50%. 20% were facing the problem of poor payment and inadequate

provision of teaching materials and the rest are rarely recognized by other stakeholders.

Poor payment

Teachers are paid little money according to what they do to develop young pupils and payments are not

made in time hence this affects academic performance of the pupils as teachers they don't want to teach on

empty stomachs thus increasing absenteeism among children as they get to know that there are teachers

who are going to teach them.

How recognition

There are some stakeholders who are good at not recognizing the good work done by the ECPE and because of this, teachers don't pay attention to the

needs of the children there by affecting their academic performance.

Discrimination

It is any situation in which a group or individual is treated unfavorably based on prejudice, usually against their membership of a socially distinct group or category. Such categories include ethnicity, sex, sexual orientation, religion, socio-economic status,

age, and disability. Discrimination applying to the equal availability of employment opportunities, housing, and goods and services is widely legislated against.

Inadequate provision of teaching materials

Government allocations for education are low. On the three islands that make up Comoros, over half of the

population live in poverty and can contribute little to their children's education.

Handling huge and unmanageable number of learners by a single teacher

A class may be too big for one teacher to handle, some children end up dodging and not coming to attend classes hence this affects their performance of the

children in that most of them do not participate in class.

Negative attitudes on learners

Table 9: Negative attitudes on learners

Attitude	Frequency	Percentage
Poor teaching methods	3	30
Punishments	1	10
Lack of feeding programmes	2	20

Source: Fieldwork 2011

Table 9 shows that poor teaching methods and long distances are the most negative attitudes of learners on ECPE classes with 30% each followed by lack of

feeding programmes with 20%, punishments and poor sanitation with 10% each also.

Poor teaching methods

Poor teaching methods and approaches (Kenya Ministry of education strategic plan 2005-2010 of July, 2005, that 56% of the public ECDE centres are

handled by untrained teachers whose methods are poor, hence negative impact on the learners).

Lack of feeding programmes

Children's academic performance is affected by not having lunch or break at school. Many pupils drop out of school due to the fact that they don't get lunch at school as we know that nothing can take place when one is hungry. Many schools don't give children

lunch. This was witnessed in some schools, that is to say, those which do not provide lunch perform badly as compared to those providing lunch that they prefer schools with ability of providing lunch.

Punishments

Many school-on-going children drop out of school

due to heavy punishments which are given at school.

Long distances between schools and homes

Some schools are a bit far from their homes. For example, you may find that a school is about seven miles from where the girls are staying. Some children

are lazy and they can't move those long distances hence end up making her/his self-absent from school.

Methods used for the retention of ECPE learners in schools

The study was done to find out whether the ECPE teachers were using the practical methods that enabled the child to get the necessary skills,

knowledge and values. Here both the teachers and head teachers were interviewed

Table 10: Methods used

Method	Frequencies	Percentages
Child centered	18	90
Lecture	2	10
Total	20	100

Source: Fieldwork 2011

From the table 90% of the ECDE teachers used the child centered methods while 10% used lecture method. The 90% of the teachers who used the child-centered methods were trained and appreciated the

importance of child-centered methods. Thus it reduces absenteeism hence good academic performance of the children.

Roles of teachers in children's performance

Table 11: Roles of teachers in children's performance

Roles	Frequency	Percentage
Encourage children to read	12	30
Prepare children for exams	10	25
Equip children with necessary materials	5	12.5
Helps children to pass exams	13	32.5
Total	40	100

Source: Fieldwork 2011

Table 11 shows that the major role of teachers is to help children pass their exams, followed by encouraging children to read, then by preparing them for exams and

equipping children with necessary materials with 32.5%, 30.0%, 25.0% and 12.5% respectively.

Absenteeism and Academic Performance

Causes of Absenteeism

Table 12: Causes of absenteeism

Causes	Frequency	Percentage
Weak administration	8	20
Poor structures	12	30
Long distance	9	22.5
Punishment	3	7.5
Absenteeism of teachers	6	15
Poor teaching methods	12	30
Total	40	100

Source: Fieldwork 2011

From table 12, it can be established that the major cause of absenteeism is poor teaching methods and poor

structures both with 30.00%, followed by long distances, weak administration, absenteeism of teachers,

and punishments with 22.5%, 20%, 15%, and 7.5% respectively.

Poor teaching methods

Some teachers use poor teaching methods that may cause the children to absent themselves from school. They get bored when the teacher is teaching.

Poor structures

Structures for study include building, compound, among others. When these structures are in improper shape, many children are likely to absent themselves when it rains as they fear the falling of school structures.

Long distances

Many schools are located far away from homes where by children have to foot for 6km daily from Monday to Friday. This may lead to a child preferring to absent herself or himself as he feels too tired.

Weak Administration

In some schools, the administration is weak in that they don't take roll-calls, they don't give light punishment to absentees, and this encourages children to absent themselves.

Absenteeism of Teachers

You can't stop a child from being absent when teachers always absent themselves. This also encourages the children to absent themselves as they say that the young ones learn from older people.

Punishments

Children are always entitled to heavy punishments and because of these punishments children decide not to come to school in order to dodge them.

Solutions

Table 13: Solutions to the problems

Solutions	Frequency	Percentage
Elimination of punishments	15	37.5
Establishment of more schools	14	35
Punish absent teachers	7	17.5
Proper teaching methods	4	10
Total	40	100

Source: Fieldwork 2011

From table 13, it can be indicated that the major solution to causes of absenteeism is elimination of punishments in school with 37.5%, followed by establishment of more schools, punishing absent teachers and proper teaching methods with 35.00%, 17.50% and 10.00% respectively.

Elimination of punishments

Heavy punishments or corporal punishments should be eliminated in schools so as to curb absenteeism. They should be substituted with light punishments like sweeping of the classroom for two days instead of caning.

Establishment of more schools

More schools should be established so as to reduce on the long distances traveled by young pupils or children. At least schools should be established in every zone.

Punishing absent teachers

Teachers who are always absent without a standing reason should be penalized so as to reduce on their absenteeism.

Proper teaching methods

Proper teaching methods should be introduced in schools. For example, demonstrations should be practiced when teaching a practical subject so as to make the children like the subject. Once children like it they will not absent themselves from school.

Performance of absentees
Table 14: Performance of absentees

Performance	Frequency	Percentage
Excellent	0	0
Very good	2	5
Good	5	12.5
Bad	13	32.5
Very bad	20	50
Total	40	100

Source: Fieldwork 2011

Table 14 shows that the performance of the majority of the absentees is very bad with 50.00% followed by bad, good and very good with 32.50%, 12.5% and 5.00% respectively. There is no one who responded as the performance is very excellent.

Performance of those who always present
Table 15: Performance of children who are always present

Performance	Frequencies	Percentage
Excellent	30	75
Very good	10	25
Total	40	100

Source: Fieldwork 2011

Table 15 shows that the performance of children who are always present is excellent with 75.00% and the rest responded as the performance is very good.

Relationship between absenteeism and academic performance
Table 16: Relationship between absenteeism and academic performance

Relationship	Frequency	Percentage
Positive	27	67.5
Negative	13	32.5
Total	40	100

Source: Fieldwork 2011

Table 16 indicates that there is a positive relationship between absenteeism and academic performance as it was represented by 67.5% and the rest 32.5% said that there is a negative relationship. Through the informal interview with the respondents there is a positive relationship in that once a child is ever absent he or she is most likely to perform badly and vice.

SUMMARY OF THE MAJOR FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary

The study revealed that the majority of respondents were males (57.5%), while the remaining respondents were females (42.5%). In terms of marital status, the highest percentage of respondents were single (65%), followed by married (22.5%) and divorced (12.5%). Among the teachers, 55% had certificates, 40% had diplomas, and 15% were graduate teachers. The majority of the graduate teachers were civil servants (57.5%), followed by farmers (30%) and business

proprietors (12.5%). Regarding attitudes towards class, 60% of parents had a positive attitude, 30% had a very good attitude, and 10% had a negative attitude. On the other hand, most teachers had a negative attitude towards the program, while the remaining 40% had a positive impact. The negative attitudes of teachers included discrimination, poor payment, and inadequate provision of teaching materials. These concerns were not often recognized by other

stakeholders. The study also found that 90% of teachers used child-centered methods, while only 10% used lecture methods. Among the teachers who used child-centered methods, 90% had received training and appreciated the importance of such methods. When asked about the major role of a teacher, most respondents (32.5%) said it was to help children pass their exams. This was followed by 30% who believed teachers should encourage children to read, 25% who said teachers should prepare children for exams, and 12.5% who believed teachers should provide necessary materials. The main causes of absenteeism were identified as poor teaching methods and poor structures, each accounting for 30%. Other factors included long distances, weak administration, absenteeism of teachers, and punishments, with percentages of 22.5%, 20%, 15%, and 7.5%,

respectively. The suggested solutions to address absenteeism were the elimination of punishments in schools (37.5%), establishment of more schools (35%), punishment for absent teachers (17.5%), and adoption of proper teaching methods (10%). In terms of academic performance, the majority of absentees performed poorly (50%), while 32.5% performed badly, 12.5% performed well, and 5% performed very well. None of the respondents indicated excellent performance. On the other hand, children who were consistently present achieved excellent performance (75%), while the rest reported very good performance. The study indicated that there is a positive relationship between absenteeism and academic performance, as reported by 67.5% of respondents. The remaining 32.5% believed that there is a negative relationship.

CONCLUSION

Through the study, it was found out that there is a positive relationship between absenteeism and

academic performance.

Recommendations

There was a need to sensitize the community so that highly accomplished academics could be interested in teaching in the centers. Therefore, the ECPE teacher should ensure that there is a feeding program in the school and educate the parents on the importance of providing basic needs to their children. The parents should provide for the child's basic needs. Despite the many socio-economic activities, parents should spare some time for guiding and counseling their children. The ECPE teacher should appreciate his or her role in the development of the child, use a variety of

teaching and learning aids, use child-centered methods, and create a conducive learning environment for the child. The ECPE teacher should handle each child with love because of their varied environment, i.e., orphans, gifted, handicapped, etc. Parents, teachers, and the community should ensure that children's environment is socially acceptable, i.e., free from drunkards and any form of misconduct, because children learn by observation and imitation.

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