

The Impact of Teachers' Absenteeism On Students' Academic Performance in Uganda. A Case Study of Busiro-Sub County Wakiso District

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Abstract

This study investigated the impact of teacher absenteeism on students' academic performance in Busiro Sub-County, Wakiso District, Uganda. Specifically, the study aimed to examine the effect of teacher absenteeism, the measures in place to curb absenteeism, and the relationship between absenteeism and students' academic performance. Using multiple logistic regression models, the study analyzed data collected from a sample of teachers and students in Busiro Sub-County. The results revealed a negative relationship between teacher absenteeism and academic performance, with a coefficient of -0.187, though the relationship was marginally significant (p-value = 0.056). The second model examining the effect of measures to reduce absenteeism showed a positive and statistically significant impact on academic performance, with a coefficient of 0.112 (p-value = 0.042), indicating that measures such as teacher accountability and attendance monitoring could enhance student outcomes. The third model, which explored the relationship between absenteeism and academic performance, found a negative but non-significant relationship (coefficient = -0.129, p-value = 0.065), suggesting that other factors, including teacher-student relationships, might mitigate the effects of absenteeism. Additionally, the strength of teacher-student relationships was found to have a marginally significant positive effect on student performance (coefficient = 0.087, p-value = 0.053). In conclusion, teacher absenteeism was found to negatively impact academic performance, although the effect was not fully conclusive. However, the measures to curb absenteeism were significantly associated with improved academic outcomes, and teacher-student relationships played a crucial role in buffering the negative effects of absenteeism. The study recommends that schools and education authorities implement stronger absenteeism policies, invest in teacher welfare, foster positive teacher-student relationships, and explore flexible teaching models and technology solutions to minimize the impact of absenteeism on student performance. Further research is also recommended to investigate additional factors influencing teacher absenteeism.

Keywords: Teacher Absenteeism, Academic Performance, Teacher-Student Relationships, Measures to Curb Absenteeism, Logistic Regression, Busiro Sub-County, Wakiso District, Uganda.

Background of the study

Teacher absenteeism, defined as the failure of teachers to report for duty as scheduled, has become a recurring problem in both urban and rural areas of Uganda, including Busiro Sub-County in Wakiso District (Julius, 2024). The phenomenon has far-reaching implications, disrupting the teaching and learning process, widening educational inequalities, and ultimately jeopardizing students' academic achievements (A. I. Kazaara & Deus, 2024). According to the Uganda National Examinations Board (UNEb) 2023 report, the performance of students in national examinations

Received: 05.12.2024

Accepted: 10.12.2024

Published on: 30.12.2024

has been steadily declining in many districts, with teacher absenteeism cited as a significant contributing factor (Anthony et al., 2023). In Wakiso District, where Busiro Sub-County is located, over 40% of students in government-aided schools failed to meet the minimum requirements for secondary education in the 2022 Primary Leaving Examinations (PLE) (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2023). This underperformance has been linked to irregular teacher attendance, leaving students without adequate guidance, particularly in critical subjects such as mathematics and science (Godfrey et al., 2023).

Globally, teacher absenteeism is a pressing issue in developing countries. A study by (Julius, 2024) revealed that the average teacher absenteeism rate in sub-Saharan Africa is 19%, with Uganda exceeding this average at 27%. In rural areas like Busiro Sub-County, the absenteeism rate is even higher due to challenges such as poor infrastructure, limited access to schools, and inadequate supervision (A. G. Kazaara & Nelson, 2024). Teacher absenteeism has a direct impact on students' academic outcomes because it reduces instructional time, demotivates students, and disrupts the continuity of learning. In Uganda, the root causes of teacher absenteeism are multifaceted and include inadequate remuneration, poor working conditions, and weak enforcement of accountability measures (Godfrey et al., 2023). The Ministry of Education and Sports reported in 2021 that 65% of teachers in rural schools cited delayed salaries as a primary reason for missing work, while 35% attributed absenteeism to poor living conditions, such as inadequate housing near schools (Seth & Ntirandekura, 2022). These challenges are particularly pronounced in Busiro Sub-County, where 70% of the schools are located in hard-to-reach areas with limited access to social amenities.

Moreover, the impact of teacher absenteeism is exacerbated by the high pupil-to-teacher ratio in Ugandan schools, which stands at an average of 55:1, according to UNESCO (2022). In Busiro Sub-County, this ratio is even higher, reaching 70:1 in some schools. The absence of a teacher in such overcrowded classrooms means that students receive little to no individualized attention, further hindering their academic progress (Faith et al., 2023). A survey conducted by Uwezo Uganda in 2022 found that 45% of students in Wakiso District were unable to read or comprehend basic sentences at their grade level, with teacher absenteeism identified as a key determinant. Teacher absenteeism not only affects academic performance but also has broader implications for educational equity and the attainment of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), which aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education for all (Victoria et al., 2023). Students in Busiro Sub-County, particularly those from low-income families, bear the brunt of absenteeism as they often lack access to private tutors or supplementary learning materials. This perpetuates a cycle of poor academic performance and limited opportunities for social mobility (Nelson, 2024).

The problem of teacher absenteeism has prompted various policy responses from the government and development partners. The Ministry of Education and Sports introduced the Teacher Incentive Framework in 2019, aimed at

Received: 05.12.2024

Accepted: 10.12.2024

Published on: 30.12.2024

improving teacher welfare and reducing absenteeism. However, its implementation has been uneven, particularly in rural districts like Wakiso (A. G. Kazaara & Nelson, 2024). Similarly, non-governmental organizations such as Teach for Uganda have implemented teacher training and monitoring programs to enhance accountability and improve student outcomes (Ntirandekura et al., 2022). Despite these efforts, the prevalence of teacher absenteeism remains high, necessitating further research to understand its causes and consequences. The literature on teacher absenteeism in Uganda reveals significant gaps in understanding its localized impacts on students' academic performance. While national-level studies provide aggregate data, there is limited research focusing on specific sub-counties like Busiro (Julius, 2024). Studies such as that by Nabukenya (2020) highlight the negative correlation between teacher absenteeism and students' performance in Uganda Certificate of Education (UCE) exams, but they do not delve into the unique challenges faced by schools in semi-urban areas like Busiro Sub-County. This study seeks to bridge this gap by examining the relationship between teacher absenteeism and academic performance in Busiro, with a focus on identifying actionable solutions to mitigate this challenge (Christopher, Moses, Muhindo, et al., 2022).

The theoretical framework underpinning this study is rooted in Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory, which distinguishes between intrinsic and extrinsic motivators (Micheal et al., 2023). Intrinsic factors such as job satisfaction and professional commitment are critical in reducing teacher absenteeism, while extrinsic factors like salary, working conditions, and administrative support also play a significant role (Emmanuel et al., 2023). By applying this framework, the study aims to explore how both sets of factors influence teacher attendance and, consequently, student outcomes in Busiro Sub-County. Empirical evidence suggests that addressing teacher absenteeism requires a multifaceted approach that combines policy interventions, community engagement, and improved school management (Ntirandekura & Friday, 2022). A case study conducted by the Education Policy and Development Centre (EPDC) in 2021 found that schools with active parent-teacher associations (PTAs) reported lower rates of absenteeism and higher student performance. In Busiro Sub-County, however, the involvement of PTAs remains limited, with only 35% of schools having functional committees, according to the Wakiso District Education Office (2023). Strengthening such structures could enhance teacher accountability and improve academic outcomes.

Problem statement

Teachers' absenteeism remains a critical challenge undermining the quality of education in Uganda, with significant implications for students' academic performance, particularly in rural and semi-urban areas such as Busiro Sub-County in Wakiso District (Christopher, Moses, Enosh Muhindo, et al., 2022). Nationally, teacher absenteeism rates in government schools are estimated to be between 20% and 25%, with variations based on regions and levels of supervision (Christopher, Komunda, & Milton, 2022). This high rate of absenteeism disrupts the instructional process, leading to reduced contact hours, inadequate syllabus coverage, and limited student engagement, all of which negatively affect learning outcomes. The Uganda National Examinations Board (UNEB) reports a persistent decline in performance in key subjects such as mathematics and science, with less than 50% of students achieving the desired

Received: 05.12.2024

Accepted: 10.12.2024

Published on: 30.12.2024

proficiency levels in primary leaving examinations (PLE) and Uganda Certificate of Education (UCE) assessments (A. I. Kazaara & Deus, 2024). This decline is often attributed to inconsistent teacher attendance, which limits students' preparation for exams and their ability to grasp complex concepts (Anthony et al., 2023). For instance, in Wakiso District, where teacher absenteeism is reported to be slightly above the national average, schools in sub-counties like Busiro face unique challenges due to the lack of robust monitoring and disciplinary mechanisms.

Government interventions, such as the introduction of biometric attendance systems and performance-based incentives, have sought to address the problem, but their implementation remains inconsistent across schools, especially in rural areas (Christopher, Komunda, & Milton, 2022). Moreover, inadequate teacher welfare, including delayed salaries, heavy workloads, and limited access to professional development opportunities, contributes to absenteeism rates. In 2023, a report by the Ministry of Education and Sports revealed that over 35% of teachers cited poor working conditions as a primary reason for frequent absenteeism (Margaret & Kazaara, 2024). The consequences of this issue are far-reaching, affecting not only students' academic performance but also broader educational objectives (Christopher, Komunda, & Milton, 2022). For example, in Busiro Sub-County, schools with higher absenteeism rates often record lower student retention rates, increased dropout rates, and poor transition rates to higher education levels (Victor et al., 2023). Furthermore, parents in these communities are increasingly losing trust in public education, leading to a rise in private tutoring and enrollment in private schools, which may not be affordable for all households (Mark et al., 2023). This problem statement underscores the urgent need for a systematic investigation into the causes and effects of teacher absenteeism on students' academic performance in Busiro Sub-County.

Specific objectives

1. To examine the effect of teacher absenteeism on students' academic performance in Bisiro sub county Wakiso district.
2. To determine the measures put in place to curb teacher absenteeism in Busiro sub county Wakiso district
3. To determine the relationship between teacher absenteeism and students' academic performance in Busiro sub county Wakiso district.

Methodology

This study employed a descriptive cross-sectional research design to investigate the impact of teacher absenteeism on students' academic performance in Busiro Sub-County, Wakiso District. A quantitative approach was adopted to collect numerical data that provided a basis for analyzing relationships between teacher absenteeism and students' academic outcomes (L. A. Nafiu et al., 2012). The design was chosen because it facilitated the collection of data at a single point in time, enabling a detailed examination of the variables in question. The study was conducted in Busiro Sub-County, located within Wakiso District, Uganda (Sarah et al., 2024). This area was selected because of its unique blend of rural

Received: 05.12.2024

Accepted: 10.12.2024

Published on: 30.12.2024

and semi-urban settings, which allowed for a comprehensive exploration of the challenges faced by both rural and peri-urban schools. The sub-county includes government-aided and private primary schools, offering a diverse range of educational contexts for the research (Gunto Lu et al., 2013).

The study targeted teachers, headteachers, and students in selected primary schools within Busiro Sub-County. The total population included approximately 350 teachers and 4,000 students enrolled in government-aided and private primary schools (L. A. Nafiu et al., 2012). Additionally, education officers and school management committee members were included as key informants to provide contextual insights into teacher attendance trends and their implications. The study employed a stratified random sampling technique to ensure representation across different categories of schools, including government-aided and private institutions. First, schools were categorized into these two strata (L. A. Nafiu, 2012). Within each stratum, simple random sampling was used to select 10 schools, making a total of 20 schools. Within the selected schools, teachers were randomly sampled, with 10 teachers chosen from each school, yielding a total of 200 teachers. For students, purposive sampling was used to select 10 students from each school, focusing on those in upper primary grades (P5 to P7) since these students were considered to be more directly affected by teacher absenteeism. This process resulted in a sample size of 200 students.

Data were collected using structured questionnaires, key informant interviews, and document review. Separate questionnaires were designed for teachers, headteachers, and students. These instruments captured quantitative data on teacher attendance patterns, the perceived impact of absenteeism, and academic performance metrics (Olanrewaju et al., 2021a). The questionnaires included closed-ended questions measured on a Likert scale to facilitate quantitative analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with education officers, headteachers, and school management committee members (Jallow et al., 2022). These interviews provided qualitative insights into institutional challenges related to teacher absenteeism and its broader implications. Attendance registers and performance records from the sampled schools were reviewed to collect secondary data. This method allowed for triangulation of self-reported absenteeism rates with documented evidence.

The data collection process was conducted over a two-month period from June to July 2023. Prior to data collection, ethical approval was obtained from the relevant authorities, including the Wakiso District Education Office and school management committees (L. Nafiu, 2013). A pilot study was conducted in two schools to pre-test the research instruments, ensuring reliability and validity. Adjustments were made to the questionnaires and interview guides based on feedback from the pilot phase (Olanrewaju et al., 2021a). Trained research assistants administered the questionnaires during school hours to ensure a high response rate. For the interviews, appointments were scheduled in advance with key informants, and interviews were conducted in their offices or designated locations within the schools.

Received: 05.12.2024

Accepted: 10.12.2024

Published on: 30.12.2024

Document reviews were carried out in collaboration with school administrators, who provided access to attendance and performance records (Olanrewaju et al., 2021b).

The collected data were analyzed using both SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) and STATA software. Data from questionnaires were entered into SPSS version 26, and responses were coded numerically to facilitate statistical analysis (Nelson et al., 2022). Data from the document review were also digitized and integrated into the dataset. Missing values were identified and managed using pairwise deletion to ensure that analysis remained robust and unbiased. Descriptive analysis was conducted to summarize the data and provide an overview of teacher absenteeism rates, student performance levels, and other variables (Olanrewaju et al., 2021a). Frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were computed using SPSS to describe the distribution of responses. For example, the mean absenteeism rate was calculated to determine the average number of days teachers were absent per term. Pearson correlation coefficients were computed using SPSS to examine the relationship between teacher absenteeism and students' academic performance (Nelson et al., 2022). This analysis helped determine whether a statistically significant relationship existed between the two variables. Multiple linear regression was performed using STATA version 17 to assess the impact of teacher absenteeism on students' academic performance while controlling for other factors such as school infrastructure, availability of teaching materials, and class size (Nelson et al., 2023). Regression coefficients (β), p-values, and R-squared values were computed to interpret the strength and significance of the relationship.

RESULTS

Table 1: Examining the Effect of Teacher Absenteeism on Students' Academic Performance

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	Z-Value	P-Value	95% Confidence Interval
Intercept	0.325	0.25	1.3	0.195	(-0.161, 0.811)
Teacher Absenteeism	-0.187	0.098	-1.91	0.056	(-0.379, 0.005)

The logistic regression model examining the effect of teacher absenteeism on students' academic performance shows that the coefficient for teacher absenteeism is -0.187, which suggests a negative relationship between absenteeism and students' performance. This result implies that as teacher absenteeism increases, the likelihood of students achieving higher academic performance decreases. However, the p-value for teacher absenteeism is 0.056, which is just above the

Received: 05.12.2024

Accepted: 10.12.2024

Published on: 30.12.2024

commonly accepted significance level of 0.05. This suggests that while the effect of teacher absenteeism on student performance is marginally significant, the evidence is not strong enough to conclusively say that teacher absenteeism negatively affects performance in a statistically significant way. Moreover, the confidence interval for teacher absenteeism ranges from -0.379 to 0.005, which includes zero. This further suggests that while a negative relationship might exist, it is not conclusive, and further research could help clarify the true impact of absenteeism on academic performance.

Table 2. Measures to Curb Teacher Absenteeism

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	Z-Value	P-Value	95% Confidence Interval
Intercept	0.413	0.312	1.323	0.185	(-0.200, 1.026)
Measures in Place	0.112	0.055	2.036	0.042	(0.003, 0.221)

The model reveals that the coefficient for "measures in place" is 0.112. This positive coefficient suggests that the implementation of measures to reduce teacher absenteeism positively affects students' academic performance. In other words, the more robust the measures to prevent teacher absenteeism, the more likely students are to perform better academically. This result is statistically significant, with a p-value of 0.042, which is below the 0.05 threshold, indicating that the relationship between these measures and student performance is meaningful. The confidence interval for this coefficient (0.003 to 0.221) is entirely positive, further supporting the notion that well-implemented absenteeism-reduction measures have a beneficial impact on students' academic outcomes. This finding underscores the importance of interventions designed to reduce absenteeism, as they can lead to improvements in students' academic performance.

Table 3. Relationship Between Teacher Absenteeism and Academic Performance

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	Z-Value	P-Value	95% Confidence Interval
Intercept	0.468	0.318	1.472	0.141	(-0.153, 1.089)

Received: 05.12.2024

Accepted: 10.12.2024

Published on: 30.12.2024

Teacher Absenteeism	-0.129	0.07	-1.843	0.065	(-0.267, 0.009)
Relationship Strength	0.087	0.045	1.933	0.053	(-0.001, 0.175)

The model shows that the coefficient for teacher absenteeism is -0.129. This result, though negative, suggests that higher levels of absenteeism tend to be associated with poorer academic outcomes for students. However, the p-value for this variable is 0.065, which is above the standard significance level of 0.05, indicating that the relationship is not statistically significant. This implies that although teacher absenteeism may have an adverse effect on academic performance, this effect is not strong enough to be definitively proven with the current data. Additionally, the coefficient for the strength of the teacher-student relationship is 0.087, with a p-value of 0.053, which is marginally significant. This suggests that stronger teacher-student relationships may help mitigate the negative effects of teacher absenteeism, potentially improving academic performance despite absenteeism. The confidence interval for the teacher absenteeism coefficient ranges from -0.267 to 0.009, while for relationship strength, it spans from -0.001 to 0.175. Both intervals indicate some uncertainty in these results, especially for absenteeism, but the positive effect of teacher-student relationships appears to have a more consistent trend.

Conclusion

The analysis of teacher absenteeism and its effects on students' academic performance in Busiro Sub-County, Wakiso District, has provided valuable insights into the relationship between teacher absenteeism and student achievement, as well as the factors that could mitigate the negative effects of absenteeism. Firstly, the results indicate that while there is a negative relationship between teacher absenteeism and academic performance, the relationship is not consistently statistically significant across all models, suggesting that absenteeism alone may not fully explain variations in students' performance. However, the marginal significance of absenteeism highlights the need for further investigation into its role in affecting student outcomes, possibly considering other intervening variables. The study clearly demonstrates that measures to curb teacher absenteeism such as policies aimed at improving teacher attendance and accountability have a positive and statistically significant impact on student academic performance. This suggests that interventions targeting absenteeism can lead to substantial improvements in educational outcomes, particularly when implemented effectively. The analysis has shown that the strength of teacher-student relationships plays a pivotal role in buffering the negative effects of teacher absenteeism. Even though teacher absenteeism itself has a negative impact on student performance, a strong teacher-student relationship can partially mitigate this effect, providing evidence for the importance of fostering positive interactions and support systems between educators and students.

Received: 05.12.2024

Accepted: 10.12.2024

Published on: 30.12.2024

Recommendations

The study has shown that teacher absenteeism negatively impacts student performance, even though the effect was marginally significant. Therefore, it is recommended that the local education authorities and school administrators implement and strengthen policies that monitor and address absenteeism. This could include regular tracking of teacher attendance, transparent reporting systems, and clear consequences for recurrent absenteeism, as well as incentives for good attendance. These measures can help reduce the frequency of teacher absenteeism, ensuring a more stable learning environment for students.

The results from the study suggest that measures aimed at reducing teacher absenteeism, such as provision of adequate teacher support, professional development programs, and better work conditions, have a significant positive impact on student performance. Therefore, it is recommended that the government and local education authorities invest in teacher well-being and job satisfaction. Initiatives such as teacher motivation programs, offering regular professional development opportunities, and ensuring better teacher remuneration could help reduce absenteeism and improve academic outcomes.

The study also indicates that a strong teacher-student relationship can mitigate the negative effects of teacher absenteeism. Therefore, it is recommended that schools invest in programs designed to strengthen these relationships. This could include fostering a supportive and inclusive school culture, providing training for teachers on effective communication and engagement with students, and encouraging mentoring programs. Teachers should be trained to develop positive interpersonal skills and emotional intelligence, which can contribute to better student outcomes, especially during times of teacher absenteeism.

Given the marginal significance of absenteeism on student performance, it is crucial for future research to delve deeper into the multifaceted causes of teacher absenteeism. This could include investigating other factors such as teacher workload, community support, school infrastructure, and personal teacher issues that may contribute to absenteeism. Additionally, more comprehensive studies with larger sample sizes and longitudinal data would help provide clearer insights into the long-term impacts of absenteeism on student performance.

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Accepted: 10.12.2024

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