
**EFFECT OF REGULAR CLASS ATTENDANCE ON ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN
KENYA CERTIFICATE OF PRIMARY EDUCATION IN PUBLIC PRIMARY
SCHOOLS IN TURKANA NORTH SUB-COUNTY**

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Abstract

Pupils' class attendance in school and its effect on academic performance is a matter of concern to all stakeholders in education. This is because pupils who absent themselves from schools for one reason or another end up not achieving their maximum potential. The purpose of this study was to the effect of regular class attendance on academic performance in Kenya Certificate of Primary Education in public primary schools in Turkana North Sub-County. Classical Liberal Theory of Equal Opportunities provided the theoretical underpinning of this study. The study adopted descriptive survey design. The target population comprised of all the head teachers and teachers in Turkana North Sub-County from which a sample size consisting of 15 head teachers and 59 teachers was selected to give a sample size of 74 respondents. This represented 30% of the sample. Questionnaires were used to collect data from Head teachers and teachers while interview schedule was administered to the Sub county Education Officer. In addition, document analysis was undertaken with the target documents being the class attendance registers and KCPE performance. Both quantitative and qualitative techniques were used to collect and analyze the data. Statistical Package in Social Sciences version 20 was used to analyze data for the study. Quantitative data was analyzed using t-test while qualitative data was analyzed thematically by closely examining the qualitative data in order to identify common themes, ideas and patterns of meaning that came up repeatedly. The results from data analysis are presented using frequency tables, means, and percentages. The study established that pupils in the county attend class occasionally. It further revealed that class attendance among the pupils is sporadic and irregular. Further, there was a general consensus among the respondents that regular attendance of class resulted in graduating competent pupils and these pupils eventually perform well in their terminal examination and thus regular attendance was an indicator of positive academic achievement. The study recommends that there is need for increased parental involvement in their children's education in order to address the problem of nonattendance. The findings of the study will be used by policy makers when formulating policies on attendance in

schools such as construction of boarding schools which will enhance the achievement of intended educational objectives.

Keywords: *Regular Class Attendance, Academic Performance, Public Primary Schools*

INTRODUCTION

School attendance is the daily or regular learner participation in school activities. Through regular school attendance, learners get to access consistent educational support for their academic attainment. It is well documented that better attendance is related to higher academic achievement for students of all backgrounds, but particularly for children with lower socio-economic status, (Wafula & Kiplagat, 2017). Additionally, students who attend school regularly score higher tests than their peers, who are frequently absent and the likelihood of them going on to graduate is significantly higher than students who demonstrate chronic attendance issues.

While some evidence suggests that lecture attendance is a stronger predictor of academic performance, conflicting and differing empirical results exist as well. In a recent study, no statistically significant relationship between class attendance and student performance was identified after adjusting for control variables that included gender and age (Kauffman, Derazin, Asmar, & Kibble, 2018; Shaban et al., 2021). Similarly, (Hollett, Gignac, Milligan, & Chang, 2020) in their study established that attendance did not significantly correlate with grades. In many cases, the lack of attendance is perceived as a waste of institutional resources and professional efforts that may well have a negative impact on the student's academic performance, preparation for future work and well-being. It is sometimes the case that a lack of attendance can lead to students withdrawing from their studies (Büchele, 2021).

When children attend school on a regular basis, they take an important step towards reaching their full potential, and are given the greatest opportunity to learn new things and develop their skills. The more time they spend around other children, whether in the classroom or as part of a school team or club, the more chance they have of making lots of friends and feeling included, boosting social skills, confidence and self-esteem. In a more recent study, (Khan, 2020) attempted to examine the effect of lecture attendance on the performance of MBA students enrolled in a leading business institute in Pakistan. Based on a sample of 225 students, the study found a negative relationship between attendance and students' performance.

Kenya has many gains in Universal Primary Education (U.P.E), and is on the roadmap to achieve Education for All (EFA). Educations at basic cycle levels have been decreed by the government to be free and compulsory. The children's act Cap. 114 of the laws of Kenya provides for every child's unhindered access to quality education. This can largely be effective if the learners' adherence to classes is always adhered to. If children will occasionally and in some cases routinely be absent from the classes for imagined or real reasons, then the goals to be sought by the students themselves and other stakeholders including the state, will not be met (Chiuri, King'ori & Obara, 2020).

Statement of the Problem

Balfanz, Chang, and Byrnes (2016) stated, "The promise of an equal opportunity to learn regardless of the circumstances or social class is a widely accepted human right across the world. A fundamental expectation of education is that students attend school daily. Students must be present and engaged if they are expected to learn; however, recent research has called this expectation into question (Balfanz et al., 2016; Chang, Bauer, & Byrnes, 2018). Attendance Works (2018), a national initiative in the US, reported more than seven million students nationwide are chronically absent from school. In Kenya, challenge of attendance of pupils in primary school has been a cause of major concern particularly in arid and semi-arid regions. In

most cases, many of these students come late to schools in the morning. While many of them participate in collective worship gathering at assembly, they leave schools before closing hours for other unauthorized activities and in some cases too, a handful number of these pupils will not even bother to come to school. Whereas extant literature has documented extensively the positive relationship between class attendance and academic performance (Sekiwu, Ssempala, & Frances, 2020; Wafula & Kiplagat, 2017), class attendance in Kenya and in particular the arid and semi-arid regions, has exhibited a worrying trend. According to available statistics in Turkana County development plan 2002-2008, out of a population of 497,779 learners in both primary and secondary schools only 115,989 are of primary school going age and 35,060 are attending schools in the County. This translates to only 30% against the national average of 76.6% (GoK, 2012). Children, especially girls, from ASAL areas are less likely to enroll and consistently attend school relative to their counterparts from high potential areas. An Analysis of KCPE performance across the 47 counties in Kenya reveal Turkana County has the second lowest disparity in KCPE performance after Mandera County (KNEC, 2013; Ministry of Planning, 2013). This situation should not be allowed to continue uncontrolled hence the need to investigate the effect of class attendance and academic performance in KCPE in public primary schools in Turkana County

Empirical Review

In the last two decades, numerous studies have been published on student attendance and its effect on academic performance, with mixed results being yielded. For instance in a study investigating the impact of classroom attendance on academic performance of university students in an Organic Chemistry course: moderating effect of gender on attendance and academic performance by (Ayodele, 2017) in Nigeria revealed a significant effect of attendance marks on academic scores. Data was collected through expo-facto survey involving real time documentation of attendance for each student at each class lesson throughout a particular (3 months) semester. The study further established that there was no significant effect of gender on academic scores.

In another study, (Karnik, Kishore, & Meraj, 2020) employed a dataset of over 900 students in an undergraduate degree programme and subjected it to statistical techniques, namely quantile regression and two-stage quantile regression. Their results show that attendance has a beneficial influence on academic performance and this benefit persists at higher percentile of grades. Bijmans and Schakel (2018) while examining the effect of (non-)attendance on the study success of three cohorts of Maastricht University's Bachelor in European Studies established that attendance matters for several measures of study success and also for the committed and participating student.

While investigating the relationship between class attendance and academic achievement in a flipped classroom that was designed to foster social learning in fixed groups and controlling for initial mathematical skill and attitudes, (Foldnes, 2017) found a substantial effect of class attendance on student achievement. He further established that Increasing class attendance by one standard deviation was associated with an increase in mathematics performance of 0.28 standard deviations.

Further, Previous research (Bamuhair, Al Farhan, Althubaiti, ur Rahman, & Al-Kadri, 2016; Louis, Bastian, McKimmie, & Lee, 2016) has shown that students' class attendance would have a positive influence on learning outcome. In terms of class attendance trends, there is an increasing trend for higher education institutions to be expected to monitor student attendance, on the assumption that better attendance leads to higher retention rates, higher marks, and a more

satisfying educational experience. In this respect, studies by Moores et al. (2019) research shows that there is a tendency for students who attend classes more regularly to gain better marks, especially if they are weaker or if they have the potential for a top mark, although it is not clear cut. In addition, there seems to be support amongst students for a more punitive approach to poor attendance, particularly in the context of improving the perceived quality of tuition on offer. A study by (Lukkarinen, Koivukangas, & Seppälä, 2016) on the relationship between class attendance and student performance revealed a positive relationship between classroom attendance and final examination grades.

In Kenya (Wafula & Kiplagat, 2017) in a study on attendance dilemma and its consequence on the academic performance of students in public mixed secondary schools, Kisii, Kenya, established that lack of academic requirements, household chores, disinterest in schooling, lack of lunch programme in school, sexual pressures in school, travelling time to school, poor health, orphans status, peer influence and cruel punishment at school were the top ten basis of students' missing classes in mixed public secondary schools in Kisii county, Kenya. Further, the study also showed that majority of learners' miss up to 40 days per year.

A study by Livumbaze and Achoka (2017) in day secondary schools in Laikipia County titled Attendance and Gender: Impact on Students' Academic Achievement in Public Secondary Schools in Hamisi Sub-County, Kenya established that the students' school attendance was way below acceptable low. Boys' attendance and participation in schooling was higher compared to that of girls. Similarly, It was established by Juma (2018) from a study on student's school attendance and measures put in place to reduce absenteeism in Njoro subcounty, Kenya that absenteeism was real, and it was one of the element that causes poor performance.

Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework brings order, unity and simplicity to what is being investigated (Kivunja, 2018). This study was informed by the Classical Liberal Theory of Equal Opportunities advanced by Horace Mann (1796-1889) as quoted by Ndegwa (2019). The classical liberal theory states that social mobility will be promoted through equal opportunity to education. The roots of this theory can be traced back to Rousseau (1712-1778) who claimed that in the "natural" state men were born equal and personal qualities should not jeopardize social equality so long as society rewards people according to their merits. Equal opportunity is a stipulation that all people should be treated similarly, unhampered by artificial barriers or prejudices. Unfortunately, in Turkana County, pupils seem to be denied this opportunity due to the harsh geographical and climatic conditions as well as the nomadic lifestyles of the people. Social institutions such as educational institutions should in some sense provide equal opportunities for all (Ndegwa, 2019). Classical liberal theory observes that each person is born with a given amount of capacity and potential which should be evidenced by education. Thus, education system should be designed so as to remove differences of any nature (socio-economic, gender geographical and policy) that deter students from exploring their inborn talents. The theory also suggests that participation in the education system should be determined on the basis of individual merit and not socio-economic background, gender, geographical barriers and policies. The orientation of this study is on school attendance that should be brought about by equal opportunity in education and which in turn determines the academic performance of those involved (Ndegwa, 2019).

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a mixed method approach. The study adopted the causal-comparative case study research design and was undertaken in Turkana North Sub-County in Turkana County.

The target population comprised of 51 primary schools. There were a total of 51 public primary schools, 15893 primary school pupils and 195 registered teachers. Three sampling methods were used in this study: purposive, stratified, and simple random sampling. Purposive sampling was used to select Turkana North Sub-County. Stratified sampling was used for selecting the schools from which participants would be selected. A list of schools was obtained from Turkana County education office and the schools were stratified according to the four zones namely, Kaleng, Kibish, Lake and Lapur zones. Four schools from each stratum were then purposively selected. The researcher then randomly selected the required number of participants from each school. From the 10 schools selected, the researcher proceeded to obtain the study participants. The sample size was guided by the formula given by Yamane (1967) $n = N/1+N(e^2)$. Where n is the sample size, N is the population size 246 and e is the level of precision set at .05. Hence, 15 head teachers, 59 teachers and the Sub-County education officer was selected for the study to give a sample matrix 74 respondents. This study collected primary data using questionnaire, interview schedule and classroom observation schedule and secondary data through document analysis to gather data for this study. Data analysis procedure involved both quantitative and qualitative procedures. Quantitative data was analyzed using Descriptive statistics such as frequency tables, means and percentages, charts and bar graphs. Qualitative data was analyzed using content analysis.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Response Rate

The study administered 74 questionnaires as per the research sample and scheduled 1 interview with the identified County Education Officer. From the administered questionnaires, 5 questionnaires were not received back. Out of this, 6 questionnaires were rejected due to incomplete information leaving 63 questionnaires for analysis representing 85.1% response rate for the questionnaires and 100% for the interview schedule. Kothari (2004), postulates that a response rate of 50% and above is sufficient, while Babbie (2004) further argue that the rate at which responses are made of 50% is acceptable, 60% is good, 70% is very good and anything above 80% is excellent.

Effect of Regular Attendance on Academic Performance

Table 1: Effect of Regular Attendance on Academic Performance

	Head Teachers			Teachers		
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Regular attendance of class result in graduating competent pupils	15	4.33	1.234	54	4.04	1.165
Pupils who regularly attend class eventually perform well in their terminal examination	15	4.47	1.060	54	4.26	.935
Regular attendance is an indicator of positive academic achievement	15	4.53	.516	54	4.11	.925
Regular class attendance stimulates the students to develop their thinking by comparing new ideas	15	4.07	1.335	54	4.06	1.123
Students only attend classes to fulfill the mandatory requirements	15	3.27	1.624	54	2.59	1.447
Regular class attendance fosters teamwork abilities among students thus improving their academic performance	15	4.27	.799	54	4.09	.937

The overall success of our school is affected by illegal student non attendance	15	4.53	.516 54	3.70	1.327
Affects student achievement levels in KCPE	15	4.53	.516 54	3.63	1.418
There is no direct association between academic performance class attendance.	15	4.40	.507 54	2.33	1.387
Valid N (listwise)	15		54		

Source: Field Data, 2019

An analysis of the data presented in table 1 reveal that there was a general consensus among the respondents that regular attendance of class resulted in graduating competent pupils (Head Teachers $M=4.33$ $SD=1.234$; Teachers $M=4.04$ $SD=1.165$) and these pupils eventually perform well in their terminal examination (Head Teachers $M=4.47$ $SD=1.060$; Teachers $M=4.26$ $SD=0.935$): as revealed by the means and standard deviations respectively. This is in agreement with extant literature that links student's achievement to class attendance. For instance, Nieuwoudt (2020) concludes that attendance is the most accurate known predictor of academic performance, superior to scores on standardized admissions tests such as the SAT, high school GPA, study habits, and study skills. Other studies that have arrived at similar conclusion include Dueden and Ellis, (2016) who concur that attendance does matter for academic achievement. This kind of evidence has led some authors to call for measures to increase student attendance and even to consider the possibility of making attendance mandatory. It is a continuing expectation among educators that students should attend classes. It is assumed that a student will not progress in knowledge and understanding of a course or topic without being in attendance to benefit from the classroom experience.

Further the study established that regular attendance is an indicator of positive academic achievement (*Head Teachers* $M=4.53$ $SD=0.516$; *Teachers* $M=4.11$ $SD=0.925$) as it stimulates the students to develop their thinking by comparing new ideas (*Head Teachers* $M=4.07$ $SD=1.335$; *Teachers* $M=4.06$ $SD=1.123$) and fosters teamwork abilities thus improving their academic performance among students (*Head Teachers* $M=4.27$ $SD=0.799$; *Teachers* $M=4.09$ $SD=0.937$). this echoes the finding of Kahu and Nelson (2018) in a study carried out to determine the interfaces between attendance, academic success and equal educational opportunities in the US, they, observed that there is a direct correlation between class attendance and academic achievement. He explained that students who go to class invariably do better in school and they maximize their chances for success.

Fadelelmoula (2018) examined the relationship between class attendance and examination performance in a sample of 347 students studying economics. Their findings demonstrated a strong positive correlation between class attendance and academic performance. Konold, Cornell, Jia, and Malone (2018) stated that when students have better attendance rates, they often have higher passing rates on standardized achievement tests (Hitt, McShane, & Wolf, 2018). Again, Konold et al. (2018), in a later study supported that student with better attendance scored higher on achievement tests than students who were frequently absent. Consequently, these correlations impact a student's ability to graduate in later years. In a 2011 study with Applied Survey Research, it was found that 64% of the students with good attendance in kindergarten and first grade scored "proficient" on the state's third-grade English Language Arts (ELA) test, compared to 41% of students who were chronically absent during one of those primary years and scored proficiently on the third-grade ELA test.

To establish whether there exists a significant effect of regular attendance on academic achievement, t-test analysis was undertaken and the findings presented as shown in table 2

Table 2: T-test Analysis on the effect of regular class attendance on academic performance

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	t-test for Equality of Means								
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Regular attendance is an indicator of positive academic achievement	Equal variances assumed	.000	1.000	.000	4	1.000	.000	.471	-1.309	1.309
	Equal variances not assumed			.000	4.000	1.000	.000	.471	-1.309	1.309

The results revealed that the P -value =1.000 is greater than the critical value α = 0.05. This implies that there is no statistically significant mean difference. Based on this result, we fail to reject the null hypothesis of no mean difference in the population that there is no statistically significant effect of regular class attendance on academic performance.

Conclusions

There was a general consensus that regular attendance of class resulted in graduating competent pupils and these pupils eventually perform well in their terminal examination. Regular attendance is an indicator of positive academic achievement as it stimulates the students to develop their thinking by comparing new ideas and fosters teamwork abilities thus improving their academic performance among students. Regular school attendance is thus an important factor in the success of learners in KCPE.

Recommendation

The study recommends that there is need for increased parental involvement in their children's education. There is also a need for the school administration to take urgent measures to eliminate all the school related determinants of pupils' attendance. In creating friendly schools environment, schools should establish guidance and counselling departments so as to help students in solving their problems parents, pupils, teachers, and administrators understand the importance of good attendance and its correlation to academic success. It is also recommended that primary schools should receive the necessary support and resources to track/monitor attendance, implement attendance incentive programs, educate parents and staff.

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