



An Investigation of the Challenges Faced By School Managers in Addressing Pupil Absenteeism in Selected Schools in Lunte District, Northern Province, Zambia

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Abstract – Pupil absenteeism remains a persistent challenge to educational access, participation, and achievement in many rural parts of Zambia. Although national policies promote equitable access to education, school managers in rural districts often face practical constraints when monitoring attendance, engaging parents, and implementing interventions for chronically absent learners. This study investigated the challenges faced by school managers in addressing pupil absenteeism in selected schools in Lunte District, Northern Province, Zambia. The study was guided by Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory and Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory. A descriptive mixed-methods design was adopted to collect both quantitative and qualitative data from school managers, teachers, District Education Board officials, parents, and community leaders. Data were collected through questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and document review. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative data were analysed thematically. The findings indicate that pupil absenteeism in Lunte District is driven mainly by poverty, long distances to school, seasonal agricultural labour, illness, early marriage, teenage pregnancy, inadequate menstrual hygiene facilities, and weak parental involvement. School managers used strategies such as attendance registers, home visits, counselling, parent meetings, collaboration with community leaders, and limited school feeding support. However, their efforts were constrained by inadequate transport, limited funding, shortage of staff, weak institutional follow-up, and insufficient policy guidance on chronic absenteeism. The study concludes that absenteeism in Lunte District is a multidimensional problem requiring coordinated school, household, community, and policy-level interventions. It recommends strengthening attendance monitoring systems, expanding school feeding programmes, improving rural school infrastructure, supporting girl-friendly sanitation, and empowering school managers through training, resources, and clearer operational guidelines.

Keywords – pupil absenteeism; school managers; rural education; attendance management; Lunte District; Zambia.

I. INTRODUCTION

Pupil absenteeism is one of the major challenges affecting the delivery of quality education in many rural parts of Zambia, including Lunte District in Northern Province. Regular school attendance is essential for learner achievement, progression, retention, and the overall efficiency of the education system. When pupils frequently miss school, they lose instructional time, fall behind academically, and become more vulnerable to grade repetition and eventual dropout.

In rural contexts, absenteeism is rarely caused by a single factor. It is often shaped by poverty, long distances to school, household labour demands, illness, cultural practices, inadequate infrastructure, and limited parental support. These factors place school managers in a difficult position because they are expected to monitor attendance and promote retention, even when many causes of absenteeism originate outside the school environment. School managers are central to attendance management. Their responsibilities include supervising teachers, monitoring registers, identifying chronically absent learners, communicating with parents, working with community leaders, and implementing school-based interventions. However, in resource-constrained rural districts such as Lunte, school managers may lack adequate transport, funding, staffing, training, and

institutional support to respond effectively. This study therefore investigates the challenges they face in addressing pupil absenteeism in selected schools within Lunte District.

Background to the Study

Education is widely recognised as a foundation for individual empowerment and national development. In Zambia, successive education policies have sought to improve access, equity, retention, and quality. The Education Act of 2011 provides a legal basis for compulsory school attendance, while Zambia's free education policy has aimed to reduce financial barriers to schooling. In addition, the school re-entry policy supports the return of girls who leave school due to pregnancy.

Despite these policy efforts, pupil absenteeism continues to undermine education delivery in many rural districts. Lunte District is predominantly rural, with many communities depending on subsistence farming and informal economic activities. Learners may be absent because they are required to support household labour, assist in farming, care for siblings, attend cultural ceremonies, or travel long distances to school. Girls may also face attendance barriers linked to menstruation, early marriage, teenage pregnancy, and gendered household responsibilities.



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School managers in such contexts are expected to translate national policies into practical school-level actions. However, they often work under difficult conditions, including inadequate school infrastructure, teacher shortages, poor road networks, limited transport for home visits, and weak parental engagement. These constraints create a gap between policy expectations and the practical realities faced by school leaders. Understanding these challenges is essential for designing context-sensitive interventions that can improve attendance, retention, and learning outcomes in Lunte District.

Statement of the Problem

Although the Zambian government and education stakeholders have implemented policies aimed at improving access to education, pupil absenteeism remains a serious challenge, especially in rural districts. In Lunte District, school managers are expected to monitor attendance, identify absent learners, engage families, and implement corrective measures. However, absenteeism persists due to socio-economic hardship, distance to school, illness, cultural practices, early marriage, inadequate sanitation, and limited parental support.

The problem is compounded by the fact that school managers often lack the resources and institutional support needed to address absenteeism effectively. Many schools rely on manual registers, have limited capacity for systematic follow-up, and receive inadequate logistical support for home visits or community engagement. As a result, pupils who are frequently absent may not be identified early enough, and interventions may be inconsistent or unsustainable. This study therefore investigates the specific challenges faced by school managers in addressing pupil absenteeism in selected schools in Lunte District.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the challenges faced by school managers in addressing pupil absenteeism in selected schools within Lunte District of Northern Province, Zambia. The study examined the causes of absenteeism, strategies used by school managers, forms of stakeholder support available, and barriers that limit effective attendance management.

Research Objectives

The main objective of the study was to investigate the challenges faced by school managers in addressing pupil absenteeism in selected schools in Lunte District, Northern Province, Zambia.

The specific objectives were to:

- Identify the major causes of pupil absenteeism in selected schools within Lunte District.
- Examine the strategies used by school managers to monitor and reduce absenteeism.
- Explore the specific challenges school managers face in implementing attendance management strategies.

- Assess the level of support school managers receive from parents, teachers, community leaders, and education authorities.
- Propose practical measures for improving the effectiveness of school managers in reducing pupil absenteeism.

Research Questions

- What are the major causes of pupil absenteeism in selected schools within Lunte District?
- What strategies are used by school managers to monitor and reduce pupil absenteeism?
- What challenges do school managers face when addressing pupil absenteeism?
- How do stakeholders support school managers in managing pupil absenteeism?
- What measures can be recommended to improve the effectiveness of school managers in reducing absenteeism?

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it provides context-specific evidence on the challenges faced by school managers in addressing pupil absenteeism in a rural Zambian district. The findings may assist the Ministry of Education, District Education Board offices, school managers, teachers, parents, community leaders, non-governmental organisations, and development partners to design more realistic and responsive attendance interventions.

For policymakers, the study provides evidence on the practical gaps between national policy and school-level implementation. For school managers, it highlights strategies that can be strengthened through improved support, training, and community collaboration. For parents and community leaders, the study underscores the importance of shared responsibility in promoting regular school attendance. For researchers, the study contributes to the literature on rural education leadership, absenteeism, and learner retention in Zambia.

Scope of the Study

The study focused on challenges faced by school managers in addressing pupil absenteeism in selected primary and secondary schools in Lunte District, Northern Province. It examined causes of absenteeism, school-based strategies, stakeholder support, and institutional constraints. The study did not investigate all districts in Zambia; therefore, its findings are context-specific and should be interpreted in relation to the rural characteristics of Lunte District.

Delimitations of the Study

The study was delimited to selected schools in Lunte District and to stakeholders directly involved in school attendance management, including school managers, teachers, District Education Board officials, parents, and community leaders. It did not include all learners in the district, although learner attendance patterns were



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considered through school records and stakeholder accounts.

Limitations of the Study

The study may have been limited by the availability and accuracy of school attendance records, especially where registers were incomplete or inconsistently maintained. Some respondents may also have provided socially desirable responses, particularly on issues involving parental responsibility, early marriage, or school management practices. In addition, the sample was limited to selected schools, which may affect the generalisability of the findings to other districts.

Operational Definitions of Key Terms

Term	Operational meaning in this study
Absenteeism	The failure of a pupil to attend school regularly, whether for authorised or unauthorised reasons.
Chronic absenteeism	A pattern of frequent absence that significantly reduces instructional time and places a learner at risk of poor performance or dropout.
School manager	A headteacher, deputy headteacher, senior teacher, or school administrator involved in school leadership and attendance management.
Attendance management	The processes used by schools to monitor attendance, identify absent learners, follow up cases, and implement interventions.
Stakeholders	Individuals or institutions that influence pupil attendance, including parents, teachers, community leaders, education officials, and development partners.

1.11 Theoretical Framework

The study was guided by Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory and Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory. These theories provide complementary explanations of the factors influencing absenteeism and the conditions under which school managers can respond effectively.

1.11.1 Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory

Bronfenbrenner's theory explains human development as a product of interactions between individuals and multiple layers of their environment. In this study, the theory is useful because pupil absenteeism is shaped by the home, school, community, and wider policy environment. The microsystem includes the learner's immediate contexts, such as the home and school. The mesosystem concerns the relationship between the home and the school, including communication between parents and school managers. The exosystem includes district education offices and local institutions that indirectly influence attendance through support or resource allocation. The

macrosystem includes cultural values, laws, policies, and socio-economic conditions. The chronosystem captures changes over time, such as seasonal farming, family transitions, and policy reforms.

1.11.2 Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory

Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory distinguishes between motivators and hygiene factors. In this study, motivators include recognition, professional responsibility, and achievement, which may encourage school managers to take initiative in addressing absenteeism. Hygiene factors include working conditions, policies, transport, staffing, funding, and support from education authorities. When these conditions are inadequate, school managers may experience frustration and reduced capacity to implement effective attendance interventions.

Conceptual Framework

The study conceptualises pupil absenteeism as the outcome of interrelated learner, household, school, community, and system-level factors. School managers operate at the centre of these influences. Their effectiveness is shaped by their leadership capacity, available resources, stakeholder support, policy guidance, and motivation. Effective strategies such as attendance monitoring, home visits, counselling, parent engagement, and community collaboration are expected to reduce chronic absenteeism and improve learner retention.

Level of influence	Examples of factors	Expected implication for attendance
Learner/household	Poverty, illness, chores, lack of school materials, food insecurity	Increased risk of irregular attendance
School	Leadership capacity, teacher availability, registers, school climate, sanitation	Improved or weakened ability to monitor and support learners
Community	Cultural rites, early marriage, parental attitudes, seasonal labour	May either support or undermine schooling
System/policy	Funding, transport, supervision, training, national guidelines	Determines the level of support available to school managers
Management response	Home visits, counselling, parent meetings, collaboration with leaders	Potential reduction in chronic absenteeism and dropout

II. LITERATURE REVIEW



This chapter reviews literature on pupil absenteeism, its causes, consequences, and the role of school managers in attendance management. The review considers global, Sub-Saharan African, and Zambian perspectives, with particular attention to rural education contexts. It also identifies gaps that justify the present study.

Concept of Pupil Absenteeism

In education, absenteeism refers to the repeated failure of learners to attend school as expected. It may be authorised, such as absence due to illness or family emergencies, or unauthorised, such as truancy or absence without valid explanation. Chronic absenteeism is especially harmful because it reduces instructional time and may lead to learning gaps, poor academic performance, repetition, and dropout.

Absenteeism is not merely an individual learner problem. It reflects broader household, school, community, and system-level conditions. In rural contexts, pupils may be absent because of poverty, long walking distances, seasonal farming, inadequate sanitation, illness, or limited parental commitment to schooling. Effective management therefore requires both school-based and community-based responses.

Types of Absenteeism

Type	Description	Educational implication
Authorised absenteeism	Absence approved by the school, usually due to illness, bereavement, or official activities.	May be unavoidable but still affects learning if frequent.
Unauthorised absenteeism	Absence without acceptable reason or without school approval.	Requires follow-up with learners and parents.
Chronic absenteeism	Frequent absence over a sustained period.	Places the learner at high risk of poor performance and dropout.
Intermittent absenteeism	Irregular absence occurring at different times, often due to seasonal or household factors.	May appear minor but can accumulate into serious learning loss.

Causes of Pupil Absenteeism

The causes of absenteeism are diverse and interrelated. Poverty remains one of the most common drivers because it limits access to uniforms, shoes, food, transport, and learning materials. In many rural households, children may also be required to contribute to farming, trading, domestic work, or sibling care. Distance to school is another major

barrier, particularly where pupils walk long distances through unsafe or seasonally impassable routes.

Health-related factors also contribute to absenteeism. Common illnesses such as malaria, respiratory infections, diarrhoeal diseases, and inadequate access to health services can lead to repeated absence. For girls, menstruation-related challenges, lack of sanitary products, inadequate privacy, early marriage, pregnancy, and gendered domestic responsibilities can reduce attendance. Cultural practices and traditional ceremonies may also conflict with school calendars, resulting in extended absences.

School-level factors may further contribute to absenteeism. These include overcrowded classrooms, teacher absenteeism, poor school climate, corporal punishment, weak counselling services, inadequate sanitation, and limited learner motivation. Therefore, while school managers are expected to address absenteeism, they must often respond to causes that extend beyond their direct control.

Effects of Absenteeism

Absenteeism has serious consequences for learners, schools, and the wider education system. At learner level, it results in missed lessons, poor academic performance, reduced confidence, social isolation, grade repetition, and increased risk of dropout. At school level, absenteeism affects classroom continuity, teacher planning, school performance indicators, and the efficient use of educational resources. At system level, high absenteeism undermines national goals related to equitable access, retention, and quality education.

Global Evidence on Absenteeism and School Leadership

Globally, research shows that regular school attendance is strongly associated with academic success and long-term educational outcomes. Education systems that reduce absenteeism often combine reliable attendance data, early warning systems, family engagement, counselling support, and targeted interventions for vulnerable learners. School leadership is central to these efforts because headteachers and other managers coordinate attendance monitoring, identify at-risk learners, and mobilise stakeholders.

International experience also shows that leadership-based interventions are more effective when school managers have adequate autonomy, training, data systems, and resources. Where school managers lack support, absenteeism interventions may be inconsistent, reactive, or dependent on individual commitment rather than institutional systems.

Absenteeism in Sub-Saharan Africa

Across Sub-Saharan Africa, pupil absenteeism is associated with poverty, household labour, long distances



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to school, illness, food insecurity, poor sanitation, early marriage, and gender inequality. Rural pupils are often more vulnerable because schools may be far from home, roads may be poor, and household livelihoods may depend heavily on children's labour during planting and harvesting seasons.

Studies across the region suggest that multi-component interventions are more effective than single interventions. For example, school feeding, girl-friendly sanitation, parental engagement, flexible support for vulnerable learners, and collaboration with community leaders can collectively improve attendance. However, these interventions require strong local leadership and consistent institutional support.

Absenteeism in the Zambian Context

In Zambia, absenteeism remains a barrier to educational participation, especially in rural districts. Although free education has reduced direct cost barriers, indirect costs such as uniforms, shoes, learning materials, transport, and food continue to affect attendance. Rural learners may also miss school due to agricultural labour, long walking distances, illness, and household responsibilities.

Zambian literature further highlights gender-specific attendance barriers. Girls may miss school due to menstruation, inadequate sanitation, pregnancy, early marriage, and cultural expectations. The school re-entry policy is intended to protect girls' right to return to school after pregnancy, but implementation may be affected by stigma, limited counselling, and weak community support. The Education Act of 2011, free education policy, school re-entry guidelines, and Ministry of Education strategic priorities create a policy environment that supports access and retention. However, implementation depends heavily on the resources and capacity available at school level.

Role of School Managers in Attendance Management

School managers play a pivotal role in addressing absenteeism. Their responsibilities include implementing policy, maintaining attendance records, supervising teachers, identifying absent learners, communicating with parents, organising school-community meetings, coordinating counselling, and reporting serious cases to district education authorities.

Effective attendance management requires accurate record-keeping and regular analysis of attendance patterns. School managers must distinguish between occasional and chronic absenteeism, identify seasonal trends, and follow up learners at risk of dropping out. They must also work with teachers, parents, Parent-Teacher Associations, School Management Committees, traditional leaders, churches, health workers, and social welfare agencies where applicable.

However, school managers often face constraints that reduce their effectiveness. These include inadequate transport for home visits, lack of operational funds,

shortage of teachers, limited training in data use, weak policy enforcement mechanisms, and insufficient feedback from higher offices. In rural districts, these challenges are intensified by distance, poor roads, dispersed settlements, and poverty.

Strategies for Reducing Absenteeism

The literature identifies several strategies for reducing absenteeism. These include daily attendance monitoring, early warning systems, home visits, parent meetings, counselling and mentorship, collaboration with community leaders, school feeding, provision of sanitary pads, improvement of sanitation facilities, flexible support for vulnerable learners, and community sensitisation on the importance of education. Evidence suggests that strategies are more effective when they are coordinated, adequately resourced, and adapted to local realities.

Policy and Legal Framework in Zambia

The Education Act of 2011 establishes legal obligations relating to schooling and provides a framework for the governance of education in Zambia. Zambia's free education policy, implemented from 2022, aims to remove user fees and expand access to primary and secondary education. The Ministry of Education's strategic direction emphasises equitable access to quality and relevant education. The school re-entry policy, initially introduced in 1997 and later revised through updated guidelines, is designed to protect the educational rights of pregnant and parenting girls.

While these policies are important, their impact depends on local implementation. Rural schools may still face indirect cost barriers, inadequate infrastructure, limited staffing, and weak mechanisms for enforcing attendance. Therefore, school managers require clear guidelines, resources, and support to translate policy into practice.

Empirical and Methodological Gaps

The reviewed literature shows that absenteeism has been widely studied, but several gaps remain. First, few studies focus specifically on the experiences and constraints of school managers in rural Zambia.

Second, there is limited district-specific evidence on Lunte District. Third, many studies focus on learner and household factors while giving less attention to leadership capacity, institutional support, and policy implementation at school level. Fourth, limited research integrates quantitative attendance patterns with qualitative perspectives from school managers, teachers, parents, and community leaders. This study addresses these gaps by focusing on school managers' experiences in selected schools in Lunte District.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY



This chapter presents the methodology used in the study. It describes the research design, research approach, study area, target population, sample size, sampling techniques, data collection methods, data analysis procedures, validity and reliability measures, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations.

Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive survey design. This design was appropriate because it enabled the researcher to describe existing conditions, identify patterns of absenteeism, and examine the challenges faced by school managers in addressing the problem. The design allowed the collection of both numerical and narrative data from different categories of respondents.

Research Approach

A mixed-methods approach was used. Quantitative data were collected through structured questionnaires and attendance records, while qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. The mixed-methods approach was appropriate because absenteeism is a complex issue that requires both measurable trends and deeper explanations from stakeholders.

Study Area

The study was conducted in Lunte District, Northern Province, Zambia. Lunte is predominantly rural, with dispersed settlements, subsistence farming, limited transport infrastructure, and socio-economic challenges that affect school attendance. These characteristics made the district suitable for examining the challenges school managers face in addressing absenteeism.

Target Population

The target population consisted of school managers, teachers, District Education Board officials, parents or guardians, and community leaders from selected school catchment areas in Lunte District. These respondents were selected because they are directly or indirectly involved in pupil attendance, school management, and community-level educational support.

Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

The study used a sample of thirty-seven participants. Purposive sampling was used to select respondents with relevant knowledge and experience of attendance management. Schools were selected based on their location within Lunte District and their relevance to the study objectives.

Category of respondents	Number selected	Sampling technique	Rationale
School managers	10	Purposive	Direct responsibility for attendance management

			and school leadership
Teachers	10	Purposive	Daily interaction with learners and attendance registers
DEBS officials	2	Purposive	Policy supervision and district-level education support
Parents/guardians	10	Purposive	Household-level perspectives on absenteeism
Community leaders	5	Purposive	Community influence on schooling, cultural practices, and mobilization
Total	37		

Data Collection Methods

Four data collection methods were used to enhance triangulation:

- Structured questionnaires were administered to school managers and teachers to collect quantitative information on perceived causes of absenteeism, strategies used, and management challenges.
- Semi-structured interviews were conducted with school managers, DEBS officials, and community leaders to obtain deeper insights into school-level and systemic challenges.
- Focus group discussions were held with parents or guardians to understand household and community perspectives on pupil absenteeism.
- Document review involved examining attendance registers, school reports, and relevant policy documents where available.

Research Instruments

The study used questionnaires, interview guides, focus group discussion guides, and a document review checklist. The questionnaire contained both closed and open-ended items. Interview and focus group guides were designed to allow respondents to explain their experiences and perceptions in detail.

Data Analysis Procedures

Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, and means. The results were presented in tables and narrative summaries. Qualitative data from interviews and focus group discussions were analysed thematically. Responses were



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coded, grouped into categories, and interpreted according to recurring themes such as poverty, distance, seasonal labour, gender-related barriers, parental attitudes, and institutional support.

Validity and Reliability

Validity was enhanced through expert review of the research instruments and pilot testing in two schools that were not part of the final sample. The pilot helped refine questions for clarity and relevance. Reliability was strengthened by using consistent data collection procedures and by comparing information from different respondent categories.

Trustworthiness of Qualitative Data

Trustworthiness was enhanced through triangulation, member checking, and careful documentation of emerging themes. Triangulation was achieved by comparing information from questionnaires, interviews, focus group discussions, and document review. Member checking involved confirming key interpretations with selected participants where possible.

Ethical Considerations

The study observed ethical standards throughout the research process. Permission was sought from relevant education authorities and school leadership before data collection. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, and participation was voluntary. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by avoiding the use of names or identifying information in the report. Participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any stage without penalty.

IV. PRESENTATION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings of the study according to the research objectives. The findings are drawn from questionnaires, interviews, focus group discussions, and document review. Quantitative findings are presented in summary tables, while qualitative findings are presented thematically.

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Respondent category	Frequency	Percentage
School managers	10	27.0%
Teachers	10	27.0%
DEBS officials	2	5.4%
Parents/guardians	10	27.0%
Community leaders	5	13.5%
Total	37	100%

Causes of Pupil Absenteeism

The findings show that pupil absenteeism in the selected schools is influenced by socio-economic, geographical, cultural, health-related, and gender-specific factors. Respondents identified poverty, lack of school requirements, food insecurity, long distances to school,

farming responsibilities, illness, early marriage, teenage pregnancy, inadequate menstrual hygiene facilities, and weak parental involvement as common causes.

Cause of absenteeism	Summary of evidence from respondents	Interpretation
Poverty and food insecurity	Many learners lacked uniforms, shoes, meals, and learning materials.	Economic hardship reduces regular attendance.
Long distances to school	Some learners walked long distances, especially from remote villages.	Distance contributes to fatigue, lateness, and irregular attendance.
Seasonal farming labour	Attendance declined during planting and harvesting seasons.	Household labour demands compete with schooling.
Health-related challenges	Illness and poor access to health services contributed to absence.	Health barriers reduce consistent participation.
Gender-related barriers	Girls faced challenges linked to menstruation, early marriage, pregnancy, and household duties.	Gender norms and inadequate facilities affect girls' attendance.
Parental attitudes	Some parents gave low priority to schooling, especially during farming periods.	Weak parental support limits school-level interventions.

Strategies Used by School Managers

School managers used several strategies to reduce absenteeism. These included maintaining attendance registers, reviewing absentee patterns, following up learners through home visits, counselling pupils, conducting parent meetings, involving traditional and religious leaders, and reporting chronic cases to the DEBS office. However, the implementation of these strategies varied across schools depending on resources, staff capacity, and community cooperation.

Strategy	How it was used	Reported limitation
Attendance monitoring	Registers were used to identify absent learners.	Manual records were sometimes incomplete or not analysed systematically.
Home visits	School managers and teachers visited homes of chronic	Long distances and lack of transport limited coverage.



	absentees.	
Counselling	Learners were counselled on the importance of attendance.	Limited trained counselling personnel in some schools.
Parent meetings	Schools engaged parents through meetings and PTA structures.	Attendance at meetings was often low.
Community collaboration	Traditional and religious leaders were involved in sensitisation.	Impact depended on the commitment of local leaders.
School feeding support	Where available, feeding helped attract vulnerable learners.	Coverage was limited and often dependent on external support.

Challenges Faced by School Managers

The findings indicate that school managers are committed to reducing absenteeism but face several structural and operational challenges. These include lack of transport, inadequate funding, insufficient staffing, weak parental cooperation, limited feedback from education authorities, absence of clear procedures for chronic absenteeism, and inadequate facilities for vulnerable learners.

Challenge Effect on attendance management

Lack of transport Limits home visits and follow-up in distant communities.

Challenge	Effect on attendance management
Lack of transport	Limits home visits and follow-up in distant communities.
Inadequate funding	Restricts outreach, feeding support, counselling activities, and material assistance.
Staff shortages	Reduces capacity for monitoring, mentoring, and individual learner support.
Weak parental involvement	Makes it difficult to sustain attendance interventions beyond the school.
Limited district-level feedback	Weakens school managers' confidence in reporting chronic cases.
Inadequate sanitation and menstrual hygiene	Contributes to absenteeism among adolescent girls.

support	
No clear operational procedure for chronic absenteeism	Leads to inconsistent responses across schools.

Stakeholder Support

Stakeholder support was found to be important but inconsistent. Some parents, PTAs, traditional leaders, churches, and community members supported school attendance through sensitisation and follow-up. However, many schools reported weak parental attendance at meetings, limited material support, and inadequate coordination with district authorities.

The findings suggest that effective attendance management requires stronger collaboration between schools, families, communities, health services, social welfare structures, and education authorities.

Qualitative Themes from Interviews and Focus Group Discussions

Poverty and Household Survival

Participants frequently identified poverty as the underlying cause of absenteeism. Some learners stayed away from school because they lacked uniforms, shoes, books, or food. Others were expected to help with income-generating activities or household work. This suggests that absenteeism is strongly linked to household survival strategies.

Distance and Unsafe Routes

Long walking distances were reported as a major barrier, especially during the rainy season. Girls were said to face additional safety concerns when walking long distances. In the absence of boarding facilities or transport support, distance remained a persistent challenge.

Cultural Norms, Early Marriage, and Gender Roles

Cultural expectations and gender roles were reported to affect attendance, particularly for girls. Some families were said to prioritise marriage or domestic responsibilities over continued schooling. This finding indicates the need for sustained community sensitisation and stronger local protection mechanisms.

Seasonal Farming Labour

During planting and harvesting seasons, many pupils were absent because they were required to help their families in the fields. School managers reported that this pattern was predictable but difficult to prevent because it was linked to household livelihoods.

Menstrual Hygiene and Sanitation

Inadequate menstrual hygiene support and poor sanitation facilities contributed to girls' absenteeism. Where toilets lacked privacy or sanitary materials were unavailable, girls were more likely to miss school. This finding highlights the importance of gender-responsive school infrastructure.



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Weak Institutional Support

School managers expressed concern that chronic absenteeism cases were often reported without timely feedback or practical support. This created a sense that schools were left to handle complex social and economic problems without sufficient institutional backing.

V. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This chapter discusses the findings in relation to the study objectives, theoretical framework, and reviewed literature. The discussion shows that absenteeism in Lunte District is a multidimensional problem that requires integrated interventions.

Socio-Economic Hardship as a Root Cause

The findings show that poverty, food insecurity, and lack of school requirements are major causes of absenteeism. This confirms the view that school attendance is influenced by household economic conditions. When families struggle to meet basic needs, education may be treated as secondary to immediate survival. Learners may miss school because they are hungry, lack materials, or are required to assist with income-generating activities.

This finding is consistent with Bronfenbrenner's theory, which emphasises that learners are influenced by their immediate family environment. It also suggests that school-based interventions alone may not be sufficient unless they are supported by social protection, feeding programmes, and community-level poverty reduction initiatives.

Distance, Infrastructure, and Rurality

Long distances to school emerged as a major barrier to regular attendance. In rural districts, schools are often far from learners' homes, and roads may be poor or impassable during the rainy season. Distance affects younger learners and girls in particular because of fatigue and safety concerns. This shows that infrastructure planning is central to attendance improvement.

The finding implies that reducing absenteeism requires investment in nearby schools, safe routes, boarding facilities, bicycles, or community-based transport support. Without addressing distance, school managers will continue to face limitations in improving attendance.

Seasonal Labour and Household Responsibilities

The findings indicate that absenteeism increases during farming periods. This reflects the agrarian nature of Lunte District, where children may be viewed as part of the household labour force. School managers may sensitise parents, but their influence is limited when household survival depends on children's labour. This suggests the need for community-specific interventions that consider agricultural calendars and household economic realities.

Gender-Specific Barriers

The study found that early marriage, teenage pregnancy, menstruation-related challenges, and gendered household roles affect girls' attendance. These findings align with literature showing that girls in rural areas face multiple barriers to regular attendance. Although Zambia's re-entry policy supports pregnant and parenting girls, implementation requires counselling, community acceptance, and school-level support.

Improving girls' attendance therefore requires gender-responsive sanitation, menstrual hygiene support, mentorship, enforcement of child protection laws, and community sensitisation against early marriage.

Parental and Community Attitudes

The findings show that parental attitudes significantly influence attendance. Some parents support schooling, while others prioritise farming, household chores, or cultural practices. This confirms the importance of the mesosystem in Bronfenbrenner's theory, where the relationship between home and school affects learner outcomes. Strengthening parent-school communication is therefore essential.

Community leaders can play a powerful role in changing attitudes toward education. When traditional and religious leaders support school attendance, parents may be more likely to cooperate with school managers.

5.6 Institutional Constraints Faced by School Managers

School managers reported lack of transport, inadequate funding, limited staffing, weak district-level feedback, and unclear procedures for chronic absenteeism. These constraints reflect Herzberg's hygiene factors. Even when managers are motivated to address absenteeism, poor working conditions and limited institutional support reduce their effectiveness.

This finding shows that school managers should not be judged solely by attendance outcomes without considering the resources and conditions under which they work. Strengthening their capacity requires practical support, including training, transport, data tools, guidance and counselling resources, and clear escalation procedures.

Implications of the Findings

The findings imply that pupil absenteeism in Lunte District cannot be solved through punishment or school-level monitoring alone. It requires a holistic approach that addresses poverty, distance, gender, health, culture, parental engagement, and institutional support. School managers are important agents of change, but their effectiveness depends on stronger partnerships with parents, communities, district education offices, health services, social welfare agencies, NGOs, and traditional leadership structures.

VI. CONCLUSION



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This chapter presents the conclusion and recommendations of the study. The recommendations are based on the findings and are directed to the Ministry of Education, school managers, parents, community leaders, NGOs, and development partners.

The study investigated the challenges faced by school managers in addressing pupil absenteeism in selected schools in Lunte District, Northern Province, Zambia. The findings show that absenteeism is a persistent and multidimensional challenge influenced by poverty, long distances to school, seasonal farming labour, illness, gender-specific barriers, weak parental involvement, and cultural practices.

School managers used several strategies, including attendance monitoring, home visits, counselling, parent meetings, community sensitisation, and collaboration with local leaders. However, their efforts were constrained by inadequate transport, limited funding, staff shortages, weak institutional support, inadequate sanitation facilities, and the absence of clear operational guidelines for chronic absenteeism.

The study concludes that reducing pupil absenteeism in Lunte District requires an integrated approach that combines school leadership, household support, community participation, infrastructure development, gender-responsive interventions, and stronger district-level support. School managers remain central to the process, but they must be empowered with resources, training, and clear policy guidance.

Recommendations

Recommendations to the Ministry of Education and Government Agencies

- Develop and disseminate clear operational guidelines for identifying, reporting, and responding to chronic absenteeism.
- Provide rural schools with logistical support such as bicycles, transport allowances, or outreach funds for home visits.
- Strengthen school feeding programmes in vulnerable rural communities to reduce hunger-related absenteeism.
- Improve rural school infrastructure by constructing additional schools, classrooms, hostels, and safe sanitation facilities.
- Provide training to school managers and teachers on attendance data management, counselling, community engagement, and child protection.
- Strengthen monitoring and feedback systems between schools and district education offices.
- Recommendations to School Managers
- Maintain accurate attendance records and review them regularly to identify chronic absenteeism early.
- Establish school-based attendance committees involving teachers, PTA representatives, and community leaders.

- Strengthen counselling and mentorship programmes for vulnerable learners, especially girls and learners from poor households.
- Use parent meetings, home visits, and community forums to sensitise families on the importance of regular attendance.
- Develop school-level action plans that respond to seasonal absenteeism patterns.
- Recommendations to Parents and Community Leaders
- Prioritise children's regular attendance and avoid withdrawing learners from school for avoidable household labour.
- Work with schools to discourage early marriage, child labour, and practices that interfere with schooling.
- Support local attendance monitoring efforts through PTAs, School Management Committees, and traditional leadership structures.
- Promote positive attitudes toward girls' education and support pregnant or parenting learners to return to school.
- Recommendations to NGOs and Development Partners
- Support menstrual hygiene programmes, including the provision of sanitary materials and construction of gender-friendly toilets.
- Collaborate with schools to provide bicycles, scholarships, school materials, and counselling support for vulnerable learners.
- Support community sensitisation programmes on the value of education and the dangers of early marriage and child labour.
- Partner with district education authorities to improve attendance data systems and evidence-based interventions.
- Suggestions for Further Research
- Further research should be conducted on learner perspectives regarding absenteeism in Lunte District. Future studies may also examine the effectiveness of specific interventions such as school feeding, bicycles, boarding facilities, menstrual hygiene support, and community-based attendance monitoring. Longitudinal studies are recommended to capture seasonal attendance patterns across the school year.

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