The Effects of Mitigation Strategies to Teacher Absenteeism in Public Secondary Schools in Kenya: A Survey of Kajiado North District

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Abstract: The financial cost of teacher absenteeism is significant. Teacher absence often means that students have lost opportunities to learn. Further, teacher absences disrupt the routines and relationships which support the learning process, even with fairer workloads and annual leave provisions, and three school holidays a year for students during which teachers must not be in schools, absenteeism still thrives in schools. It was on this basis that the study sought to assess the effectiveness of the mitigation strategies to absenteeism of teachers, currently in use by the employer, to do a diagnosis why the strategies are not effective. The study was based on the theories of reinforcement and behavior theory. The study employed a descriptive survey design and targeted a population of 326 secondary school teachers. Stratified sampling was used to select a sample size of 98 respondents. Self-administered structured questionnaires were used to collect data. Data was analyzed using correlation analysis. The research findings show that management style, disciplinary action, employee welfare and teacher mobility have varied effect on teacher absenteeism. Management style had a correlation coefficient of -0.4238 indicating a negative relationship with teacher absenteeism. Disciplinary action had a coefficient of -0.5028 indicating that it has negative relationship with teacher absenteeism. Employee welfare and teacher mobility have significant positive relationship with teacher absenteeism as shown with correlation coefficient of 0.9394 and 0.7608 respectively.

Keywords: Teacher Absenteeism, Management Style, Disciplinary Action, Employee Welfare, Teacher Mobility.

INTRODUCTION

For decades business and industry have struggled with the problem of employee absenteeism, a fact that is supported by the vast body of literature that addresses the issue. According to Luthans [1] when satisfaction is high, absenteeism tends to be low and when satisfaction is low, absenteeism tends to be high. This correlation has been found to be moderate; the underlying assumption is that the absence, is at least in part, the result of dissatisfaction on the job [2]. In fact, absenteeism and staff turnover are the two most frequent outcomes studied in organizational research [3].

One of the key pillars of Vision 2030 in Kenya is provision of quality education. School systems have been engaged in a system of educational reforms designed to change school culture and to improve student achievement. The financial cost of teacher absenteeism is significant. Teacher absence often means that students have lost opportunities to learn. Further, teacher absences disrupt the routines and relationships which support the learning process. While research has clearly demonstrated that teacher absence has a negative effect on student achievement [4], the research

has not been very demonstrative about the causes or predictors of teacher absence.

Conflicting evidence exists about the effects of some characteristics to absenteeism, such as gender, age, and experience in teaching, time of week or month, absenteeism of learners, leadership styles and school culture. For instance, some studies have shown that female teachers are absent more frequently than male teachers [], while others have found that men are absent more frequently than women [5].

The results of various studies appear to be contextual in nature, and therefore, are conclusive for the environs in which they were conducted. As a result, there was need to do a study of the teacher absence behaviours in schools, in the Kenyan context. [6], cited chronic absenteeism among school personnel as one of the most neglected problems in public education. While teacher absenteeism is widely recognized as a serious problem, there is surprisingly little systematic data as to the extent of the problem in Kenya.

Considering current economic conditions in the country, and the emphasis of using education to attain the Vision 2030 goals, it is important that

researchers are able to identify true causes of teacher absenteeism, in different schools in order to develop solutions to the problem, or come up with strategies for mitigation, if not for elimination.

This study looked into the effectiveness of the mitigation strategies that are used as solutions to teacher absenteeism, in public secondary schools. There are a large number of factors that affects absenteeism, including legitimate factors such as workplaces being too remote or dangerous to feasibly travel to. This study identified a few notable factors from emerging literature that contribute towards absenteeism, but are yet to be addressed using effective interventions.

In relation to absenteeism in public service, the largest range of literature relates to health and education. Health and education sectors are "plagued by high provider absenteeism". A survey across several countries involving visits to primary schools and health clinics found that, on average 19 per cent of teachers and 35 per cent of health workers were absent [5]. The survey also found that even where providers were present, many were not working, hence functional absenteeism.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM
Despite the support from the national government, adequate staffing, close supervision from school heads and Quality and Assurance Standards officers from the ministry of education department, provision of commuter allowances, hardship allowances to make life fairer in hardship areas, flexible recruitment plans, where schools with vacancies in different subjects advertise for positions, and interviews carried out by schools board of managements, absenteeism still exists. Barsmase & Shukla [7] showed that lower income employees perceive higher absenteeism. The major factors that affect absenteeism are: welfare facilities, salary, leave policies, supervisor behavior, present working condition and transport facilities.

The financial cost of teacher absenteeism is significant. Teacher absence often means that students have lost opportunities to learn. Further, teacher absences disrupt the routines and relationships which support the learning process [8]. Even with fairer workloads and leave provisions for sick teachers, with full pay and benefits for sick teachers up to six months, paternal and maternal leaves, compassionate leave provisions for 14 working days, and annual leave provisions, and three school holidays a year for students during which teachers must not be at the work stations fully, unless required by administrators to be in schools, absenteeism still thrives.

All in all, teacher absences damage the school reputation and induce parallel pupil absenteeism, while simultaneously denying learners the good mentor/role model image of a teacher [9]. It is the long term implications of these on the future of individuals and national development prospects that make teacher absenteeism a particularly pervasive phenomenon. The Management of teacher absences therefore ought to be a major entry point for any meaningful education reforms program [9].

The government of Kenya has intended to educate all Kenyan children through the famous free secondary education for all Kenyan children. In relation to absenteeism in public service, the largest range of literature relates to health and education, Banerjee, & Duflo [10] argue that the health and education sectors are "plagued by high provider absenteeism". This research sought to understand, the most suitable interventions, in trying to mitigate absenteeism; the study also seeks to establish the effectiveness of the current mitigation strategies in place and in use by the teachers' employer, the Teachers Service Commission.

OBJECTIVES
General Objective
The general objective of this study was to establish the effectiveness of the mitigation strategies on teacher absenteeism, in public secondary schools, in Kajiado-North sub- County.

Specific Objectives
i.   To determine the relationship between disciplinary action, and teacher absenteeism in public secondary schools in Kajiado North Sub –county.
ii. To establish the influence of teacher mobility to absenteeism of teachers in public secondary schools in Kajiado North Sub-county.
iii. To find out the influence of employee welfare services, on teacher absenteeism in public secondary schools in Kajiado North sub-county.
iv. To establish the influence of management styles, to teacher absenteeism in public secondary schools, in Kajiado North sub-county.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS
This study was guided by the following research questions
i.   What influence does disciplinary action have on absenteeism, of teachers in public day secondary schools in Kajiado-north sub-county?
ii. What are the influences of teacher mobility, to teacher absenteeism in public secondary schools in Kajiado-north sub-county?
iii. Does employee welfare services, have an influence on teacher absenteeism, in public

secondary schools in Kajiado north sub-county?

iv. What is the influence of management styles to teacher absenteeism in public secondary schools, in Kajiado north sub-county?

JUSTIFICATION

A study conducted by organizational care South Africa revealed that, South African companies are losing millions of Rands every year due to absenteeism in the workplace, [11]. Robins further indicates that South African managers consider absenteeism their most serious discipline problem. If not managed and controlled, absenteeism can "spread like an epidemic, creating a range of disciplinary problems for organizations. The main problem is perhaps that many employees believe sick leave is a benefit like annual leave and they are entitled to take it, irrespective of the condition of their health. However the issue of absenteeism is a multifaceted one and a phenomenon which requires a multiple-approach. The situation of absenteeism is not any different in other work sectors, education sector included, and Kenya included, [12].

Teacher absenteeism is a substantial and growing problem in developing countries [12]. The benefits from the growing success in getting children in school are thus undermined as learning time is reduced. However, there has been little rigorous analysis of the determinants of absenteeism and few impact evaluations of measures and strategies designed specifically to reduce it. This study seeks to establish new information as well as bring into focus, the effectiveness of the traditional approaches documented or already in use, in trying to mitigate teacher absenteeism in schools, in Kenyan context.

The study also sought to establish the different variables and the influence they have in absenteeism of teachers, in schools. In trying to achieve Education for All goals, the essential input is a teacher present in the classroom. This research project is broadly tackling the issue of teacher absence in schools. These research findings will be useful for education policy makers, the TSC discipline department, teacher welfare and counseling unit-with offices at the TSC headquarters, staffing units at county education offices, county directorates of education managers, all human resource officers at sub-county offices, principals and head teachers, school heads of departments, on the way forward towards weeding out absenteeism.
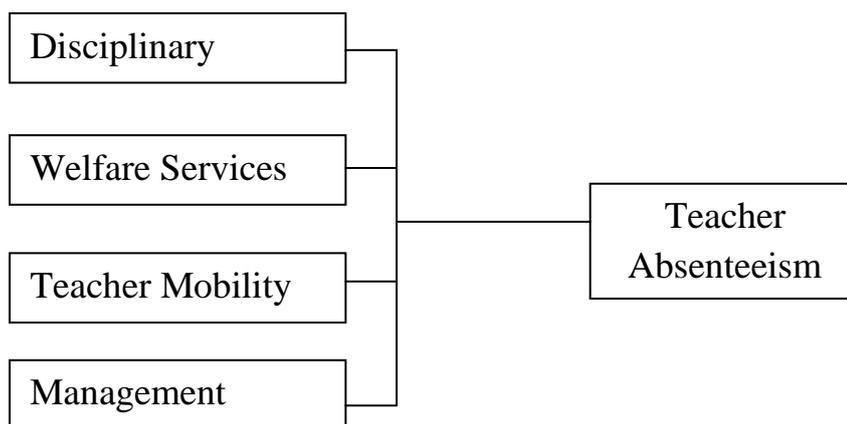
The management styles will also be put to sharp focus as management is a key factor in building, retaining and changing of organization cultures. Culture is the commonly held beliefs, attitudes and values that exist in an organization. Put more simply; culture is 'the way we do things around here', [13]. An open culture is one in which, people contribute out of a sense of commitment to the employer and solidarity, [14] In such an open culture, organizations place a high priority on mutual support, collaboration and creativity, and on constructive relationships. There is no 'quick fix' way in which a closed culture where these priorities do not exist, can be converted into an open culture as long-established cultures are difficult to change[14].

First, this study explored what is known about the extent of the problem and its causes; and second, it lays out the possibility of improving of employee welfare services, to improve presence rates of teachers in schools. The study results will possibly influence decisions making, planning, and strategies for promotion of education structures to improve and influence a better work environment for teachers. The study will be used to articulate other issues that will make teaching friendly to the teachers, and stop both functional and physical teacher absenteeism from their workplaces.

CONCEPTUALIZATION

Onen & Oso[15] noted that, a conceptual framework is a diagrammatic presentation of a theory and that it's presented as a model when research variables and the relationship between them are translated into a visual picture to illustrate the interconnections between the independent, and dependent variables. The conceptual framework is used to organize ideas, in order to achieve research projects purposes and the set objectives of the research project.

For this study, the conceptual framework will be based on the four approaches to mitigating absenteeism currently in use for the Kenyan teacher, by the teachers' employer, the TSC, and tries to analyze the effectiveness of the approaches, and looks into the possibilities of other approaches that could be more effective. The mitigation approaches are; Disciplinary action, welfare of teachers, management styles, and teacher mobility's approaches to mitigate on absenteeism.

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│    Disciplinary     │───┐
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                          │
┌─────────────────────┐   │      ┌─────────────────────┐
│  Welfare Services   │───┤      │      Teacher         │
└─────────────────────┘   ├──────│    Absenteeism       │
                          │      └─────────────────────┘
┌─────────────────────┐   │
│  Teacher Mobility   │───┤
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│    Management       │───┘
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METHODOLOGY

Denscombe [16] outlines a number of ethical issues which practitioners should consider when undertaking action research projects. Denscombe suggests that researchers should be open about their research and that they should ensure that those involved in it give informed consent to what is being proposed[16]. In particular, permission should be sought before researchers engage in any form of observation or examine documentation that may have been produced for purposes of the research project.

Research, is a systematic, critical and self-critical enquiry which aims to contribute to the advancement of knowledge and wisdom, educational research, on the other hand is critical enquiry aimed at informing educational judgements and decisions in order to improve educational actions.

Research Design

The research design used for this study was the descriptive/survey research design, which attempts to describe conditions of the present by using many subjects and questionnaires to fully describe a phenomenon. The research and target population will be made up of teachers from all public secondary schools. The sampling frame was made up of all secondary public school teachers, from Kajiado North Sub-County. An appropriate sample size was estimated from the list of members in sampling frame, according to Mugenda & Mugenda[17] its 30 per cent of the total population. The Simple random sampling was used as it removes bias by researcher, it also produces representative samples, and it's also an equal probability sampling method.

The data was collected, using questionnaires, as it is believed that the general teacher population is elite and capable of handling the questionnaires. Questionnaires were chosen in this survey study because the respondents are elites, it's going to save time and costs for the researcher, all respondents receive uniformity of questions, all questions are standardized, they yield more information for research.

Maxwell [17] who distinguishes between 'internal' and 'external 'generalizability. These refer respectively to the generalizability of conclusions within and outside the setting being researched. As regards the former, unjustifiable selectivity on the part of researchers (for example, in terms of choosing interviewees, or potential respondents to a questionnaire, or particular contexts for observation research) will substantially increase the possibility that their accounts will exhibit bias.

Target Population

The target population is a well-defined group of individuals with similar characteristics, regarding to adult age and sharing commonality of being employed by the same employer and working under similar work conditions to some extent, a similar work culture, i.e. the teachers in secondary schools. According to Mugenda & Mugenda, [17], target population is the members of a real or hypothetical set of people, events or objects the researcher wishes to generalize the results of the research.

The study targeted a population of 326 teachers, from 30 public secondary schools in Kajiado North Sub-county as indicated in the table below.

Table 1: School Category and Staffing Position in Kajiado North Sub-county

School Category	Boys	Girls	Mixed Schools	Total no. of schools
Number of Schools	4	6	20	30
Number of Teachers	56	73	197	326

Source: DSO Kajiado North Sub-county

The teachers in this study were drawn from Kajiado-north sub-county which is largely cosmopolitan. The county neighbors Nairobi County and vastly spreads to embrace the pastoral communities.

All the schools in the study are publicly managed by the principals who are TSC employees, agents of the commissions, Board of managers and Ministry of Education Officials. This study therefore only required respondents from publicly managed and government secondary schools teachers, to have unique results for secondary schools teachers in public schools that can be generalized to all public secondary schools in Kenya.

Sampling Frame

The sampling frame was made up of all secondary public school teachers, 326 in number, from Kajiado North Sub-county. The assumption is that sampling frame is representative of all employees on

sick leave, maternity leave, or on job assignments outside the schools.

Sampling Technique and Sample Size
Sampling Technique

Sampling is the procedure, process or technique of choosing sub-group from a population to participate in the study [23].The researcher employed stratified random sampling to select the sample size. The target total population was categorized into boys' schools, girls and mixed schools and a sample of 30% was selected to be included in the sample as recommended by Mugenda and Mugenda[17] and Borg and Gall [19].

Sample Size

A sample is a smaller or sub- group obtained from the accessible population [4]. This sub-group is carefully selected so as to be representative of the whole population with the relevant characteristics.

Table 2: Sample size for different School Categories

School Category	Boys	Girls	Mixed	Total
Number of Schools	2	2	6	10
Number of Teachers	22	16	60	98

Research instruments

The research instruments for this study, for purposes of data collection will be questionnaires, developing a questionnaire Orodho [20] audit trail (keeping a complete record of the research while carrying it out; this includes raw data such as completed questionnaires. The questionnaires used items on a likert scale.

Data Collection Procedure

The data was collected, using questionnaires, as it is believed that the general teacher population is elite and capable of handling the questionnaires[21].The questionnaire will be in sections to cater for different variables. The questions will range and vary from open ended responses, yes/no questions, to opinions responses.

The likert scale was also used to try and analyze the statements easily in numerical form; this minimizes engaging the respondent by way of writing. Validated questionnaires were issued to a few respondents as pilot to gauge difficulty and understanding; this allowed for corrections to get the right responses.

Confidentiality of respondents was assured, and names were not required and neither was any form of identity necessary. This assurance encouraged true information from respondents. As the respondents were given questionnaires it was encouraged that they respond on the spot where possible, or given some time to respond and give back the questionnaires, this

increased the number of questionnaires filled and returned. Questionnaires were chosen in this survey study because the respondents are elites, it was going to save time and costs for the researcher, all respondents received uniformity of questions, all questions were standardized, they yield more information for research.

Data Processing and Analysis.

Data processing means editing, coding, classification and tabulating so that data can be analyzed. Analysis involves computation of certain measures along with identifications of patterns of relationship, in data. For this study data analysis involved use of correlation analysis.

In analysing research data, Mugenda & Mugenda [17] offers a concise explanation of four key terms: themes, (the consistent ideas which emerged), incidence (how often something occurred, or the number of questionnaire replies which said the same thing), and patterns (the timing of the occurrences, whether they were single or in a cluster), and trends (the frequency of the patterns). These enable researchers to offer explanations for what has taken place, rather than just descriptions of events.

Correlation analysis measures the relationship between the independent variables and the dependable variable. The resulting values called the correlation co-efficient, shows if changes in one item, will result in changes in the other items [22].The goal of this type of analysis, is to see whether changes in the independent variables (in this case management styles, disciplinary

actions, employee welfare, and teacher mobility) had a direct impact on the dependable variable in this case absenteeism.

The correlation co-efficient can range between positive, negative 1.00 (plus 1or minus 1) A co-efficient of +1.00; a perfect correlation means that changes in the independent variables will result will result in perfect change in the dependent variable. A co-efficient of -1.00, a perfect negative correlation, means that changes in the independent variables will result in a change in the dependent variable in the opposite direction. A co-efficient of 0.00 means there is no relationship between the two items and that a change in the independent variables will not have any effect in the dependent item.

Correlation Statistics

Correlation analysis was used to determine the relationship between the independent variables (management style, disciplinary action, and employee welfare and teacher mobility) and the dependent variable (teacher absenteeism). The results as shown in the table below, show that management style had a correlation coefficient of -0.4238 indicating a negative relationship. Disciplinary action had a coefficient of -0.5028 indicating that it has negative relationship with teacher absenteeism. Employee welfare and teacher mobility have significant positive relationship with teacher absenteeism as shown with correlation coefficient of 0.9394 and 0.7608 respectively.

	Teacher Absenteeism	Management Style	Disciplinary Action	Employee Welfare	Teacher Mobility
Teacher Absenteeism	1				
Management Style	-0.428383642	1			
Disciplinary Action	-0.502894846	0.486575861	1		
Employee Welfare	0.93949686	0.459817634	0.92256763	1	
Teacher Mobility	0.760823926	0.448748431	0.855019801	0.967725223	1

DISCUSSION
Influence of disciplinary action on absenteeism of teachers

The findings show that majority of respondents did not think that the strict disciplinary measures by the school administrations had any effect in reducing their absence from schools. This was represented by a mean of 2.9629 and a standard deviation of 3.1894. According to respondents the disciplinary measures by the school administration have neither made the teachers to be less available in school. This result is represented by a mean of 2.1728 and a standard deviation of 2.3934. The majority of respondents 37.8% and 42.68% disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively to the idea that school administrations do not bother much when a teacher is absent from school for one day. Only 2.44% and 6.10% strongly agreed and agreed respectively. These results point to the fact that school administrations in public secondary schools in Kajiado North Sub County are very concerned about teacher absenteeism even if it is for a single day only.

Influence of teacher mobility on teacher absenteeism

The findings show that majority of teachers (63.41%) serving in public secondary schools in Kajiado North Sub County chose to be posted to the school they are currently teaching, while 36.59% of respondents indicated that they were to their current work stations against their will.

On whether they are comfortable in their current workstations, majority of respondents (32.93%) agreed, 7.32% of respondents indicated that they are comfortable, while 14.63% and 7.32% of respondents

indicated that they are uncomfortable in their current work stations.

The movement of teacher's from school to school through transfer by the TSC has an influence on teacher absenteeism. When a teacher is moved to a school that will make him uncomfortable and far away from family, incidences of absenteeism will tend to increase because the teacher will be making visits to his family and may be late in returning to school. Most teachers prefer to teach in schools that are close to their homes or in school that are not far away from where the families are.

Influence of employee welfare services on teacher absenteeism

Welfare services for teachers have an effect on teacher absenteeism. In schools where the welfare of teachers is well catered for cases of absenteeism will be minimal. Majority of respondents (57.32%) indicated that their presence in school will improve if the welfare of teachers is well taken care of. The other 42.68% of respondents indicated that the provision of these items would not change the availability in school.

Teachers often absent themselves from school in order to take care of personal problems and challenges affecting them. This is because they cannot solve their problems while in school or there are no support systems in the school that can help them to solve their problems and continue with the work. If a teacher is facing financial problem and the problem can only be solved by getting money, then the teacher will

be forced to look for the money outside the school and this means being absent from school for several days.

Influence of management style on teacher absenteeism

The style of management adopted by school administration also impacts on teacher availability and absenteeism. According to 14.63% and 43.90% of respondents, their schools principals and democratic and allows them to participate in the management of the school. Their principals allow them to play a key role in the duty allocation in the schools. A democratic and participatory leadership style is likely to improve teacher availability in school and reduce teacher absenteeism. Similarly a school administration that is autocratic and dictatorial is likely to witness increased absenteeism of the teachers.

CONCLUSIONS

The research findings indicate that management style, disciplinary action, welfare services and teacher mobility are factors that influence teacher absenteeism in public secondary school. The type and level of influence these factors have on teacher absenteeism vary from one factor to the other. There are various management styles that school administrators can use while carrying out their managerial duties. School principals and head teachers have a choice of democratic style, transformational style and autocratic style among others. While democratic and transformational leadership styles are likely to contribute to the improvement in teacher availability, the autocratic style of leadership can have negative effects and increase teacher absenteeism in schools. The findings have revealed that management style has a negative correlation with teacher absenteeism, which implies that autocratic style can increase teacher absenteeism and democratic style can reduce teacher absenteeism.

Disciplinary action can also be used by school administration to curb teacher absenteeism, but the findings have revealed that disciplinary action had a negative correlation with teacher absenteeism. The results suggest that strict disciplinary action by the schools administration worsens the absenteeism situation instead of having a corrective effect. This means that very severe disciplinary action can increase absenteeism instead of decreasing it.

Employee welfare refers to the various welfare items or services offered to the teachers. The results have shown that employee welfare has a positive correlation with teacher absenteeism. When teacher are offered welfare system that they are happy with they are less likely to be absent from school. The respondents further indicated that when teachers are not in school, they are attending to various financial and social problems. According to the respondents, if there were

systems that can help teacher attend to the problems while in school there will be no reason why they should be absent.

Teacher mobility affects the availability of teachers in school. Teachers prefer to be posted to school that are close to their homes and families. When teachers are far away form their families they will at times absent themselves from school in order to visit their families

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the research findings, the following recommendations can be used by public secondary schools administration to reduce teacher absenteeism.

i. School heads and principals should adopt a democratic style of leadership that encourages the participation of all teachers in the management of the schools. This will make all teachers to be responsible and avoid being absent from school.

ii. While disciplinary action is necessary, it is advisable that school principals mete out disciplinary action that is moderate and not severe. Severe disciplinary action like salary stoppage of deductions should be avoided as this can worsen the absenteeism situation instead of improving it.

iii. One sure way of curbing absenteeism in school is by developing a welfare system for teachers that ensures that all welfare related items needed by teachers are provided within the school. The school principal should initiate welfare systems based on the common problems and needs of the teachers.

iv. Wherever possible teachers should be posted to schools that are close to or not very far away from their families. This will ensure that teachers are close to their families and do not need to take many days off to visit their families.

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