



Research Article

Exploring the Impact of Absenteeism Rates on Academic Performance in Inclusive STEAM Classrooms: Causes, Consequences, and Implications for Global Education

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Abstract

Objective: This research explores the impact of student absenteeism on academic performance in inclusive Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics (STEAM) classrooms in Awka South Local Government Area, Nigeria. The study investigates the underlying causes and academic consequences of absenteeism among secondary school learners. Three research questions guided the study.

Methods: The study adopted descriptive survey research design. A sample of 200 students was selected for the study, ensuring representation of both students with and without disabilities. Descriptive statistics, specifically mean and standard deviation were used for data analysis.

Results The findings reveal that socioeconomic challenges, particularly financial hardship, and negative school climate factors, such as teacher harshness, contribute substantially to student absenteeism. The compounded effect of these issues is particularly severe for learners with disabilities, who already navigate multiple layers of educational disadvantage.

Conclusion: The study's findings have significant theoretical and practical implications for STEAM education. By highlighting the impact of absenteeism on academic achievement, the study underscores the need for targeted interventions to support students, particularly those from low-income backgrounds and with disabilities. The research contributes to the existing literature on absenteeism by highlighting the importance of addressing both financial and school-related barriers to improve academic outcomes. The results emphasize the need for strategic interventions to promote equitable academic engagement and success, particularly in low-resource educational contexts. The study's findings highlight the importance of addressing absenteeism to improve academic outcomes in inclusive STEAM settings.

Keywords: absenteeism, academic performance, inclusive education, steam, socioeconomic factors, nigeria, secondary schools

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1 INTRODUCTION

Regular attendance at school and classes plays a crucial role in achieving the desired results from education and training activities. For policies and reforms in education to succeed, students must attend school first. Among the main areas of work for education managers is determining and eliminating the factors that lead to absenteeism and their effects on educational environments. Student absenteeism, defined as the persistent, habitual, or unexcused absence from school by learners of compulsory age^[1], represents a critical challenge to educational systems worldwide. In inclusive classrooms, where students with diverse cognitive, physical, and socio-emotional needs learn alongside their peers, the consequences of absenteeism are particularly pronounced.

Absenteeism can be either “excused absenteeism” or “unexcused absenteeism”^[2]. Excused absenteeism refers to the absenteeism of children who cannot attend school by documenting their excuses due to reasons such as accidents, deaths, natural disasters, fires, imprisonment, arrests, and illness requiring short- or long-term treatment. On the other hand, unexcused attendance refers to all absences that fall outside the scope of excused absences owing to reasons such as seasonal agricultural labor, fear of school, or arbitrary circumstances^[3]. In this study, absenteeism is discussed from a broad perspective as the absence of the student from school with and without an excuse.

Absenteeism is one of the two main causes of class repetition besides academic failure^[4]. Absenteeism is decisive in many issues such as students' academic success, social development, and school discipline. Absenteeism remains a major school problem. Learner absenteeism is not only a matter of school distress; it comes with a national proportion as well^[5]. School learners not showing up during school time presents a drain on human capital development. An effective educational system is one that is based on the assumption that learners should attend classes as scheduled. In other words, a learner can only gain full benefits of the planned curriculum when he/she completes a good percentage of the assigned curriculum, and this can only be done when the learner consistently makes himself/herself available for teaching time.

In numerous countries worldwide, particularly those in the developing stage, absenteeism among learners is a pressing concern, especially within public schools. Nigeria's public schools are no exception, experiencing high rates of learner absenteeism that vary across different states and between urban and rural areas. Research indicates that absenteeism rates range from 15% in urban centers to 45% in rural communities^[6-9]. The 2015 Education Data Survey, conducted in collaboration with the National Population Commission, United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Universal Basic

Education Commission (UBEC), the Federal Ministry of Education, and the National Bureau of Statistics, revealed significant disparities in educational attendance. According to the survey, 74% of primary school-age children attend school in urban areas, compared to 57% in rural areas. The South East region boasts the highest primary net attendance rate at 81%, while the North West region has the lowest at 43%. Furthermore, only 49% of youth aged 12-17 attend secondary school, with 51% of males and 46% of females attending. The primary school completion rate has decreased from 88% in 2003 to 69% in 2015, and a mere 10% of the school population aged 15 and above possess post-secondary education. Recent statistics from 2019 indicate that this trend remains unchanged. A study by Doris found that 65% of children aged 13-18 in urban areas attend school, compared to less than 20% in rural areas. This translates to approximately 35% of students being absent from school in urban areas and around 80% in rural communities. Excessive learner absenteeism has a profoundly negative impact on learning outcomes, disrupts the teaching process, and ultimately leads to a decline in overall academic performance^[10]. Students who attend school regularly exhibit better teacher-learner interaction, problem-solving skills, peer relationships, and language development compared to their absent peers^[11]. Prolonged absenteeism can discourage students from pursuing further education, ultimately leading to school dropout^[12,13]. Moreover, teachers who spend time reviewing notes or re-teaching lessons to benefit absent students often experience fatigue, which takes away from the time allocated to students who attend classes regularly. Thus, absenteeism not only affects the academic outcomes of absent students but also disrupts in-class planning and demotivates other students^[14], particularly in the context of Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics (STEAM) education. STEAM education, which integrates science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics, is a participatory and inquiry-driven approach that requires consistent attendance for effective learning. STEAM activities have been shown to promote engagement, persistence, problem-solving skills, and active learning through exploration, observation, and discovery^[15]. The incorporation of arts into STEAM education enhances children's learning skills, including creative and strategic thinking^[16]. By embedding STEAM pedagogy across educational settings, educators can design engaging learning experiences and provide necessary materials to support student learning.

This study focuses on secondary school learners in Awka South, Anambra State, Nigeria a region characterized by a mix of urban and semi-urban schools, with diverse student populations. It investigates the multifaceted causes of absenteeism and their direct and indirect impacts on academic performance in inclusive STEAM classrooms. Notably, it emphasizes the perspectives of

learners themselves, using empirical data to inform policy recommendations.

Recent global research highlights the link between absenteeism and declining educational outcomes, particularly in STEAM disciplines where cumulative learning is critical^[17]. By bridging local data with global educational concerns, this study contributes to a broader understanding of equity and access in STEAM education.

1.1 Specific Objectives

The study is guided by the following specific objectives:

- (1) The perceived consequences of absenteeism among secondary school students in Awka South Local Government Area.
- (2) The perceived consequences of absenteeism among secondary school students in Awka South Local Government Area.
- (3) The possible strategies could be adopted to reduce absenteeism among secondary schools students in Awka South Local Government Area.

1.2 Research Questions

Based on the literature review, the following research questions are proposed:

- (1) What are the perceived consequences of absenteeism among secondary school students in Awka South Local Government Area?
- (2) What are the perceived consequences of absenteeism among secondary school students in Awka South Local Government Area?
- (3) What possible strategies could be adopted to reduce absenteeism among secondary schools students in Awka South Local Government Area?

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Conceptualizing Absenteeism

Learner absenteeism is a complex issue that has been defined in various ways by researchers. According to Wahid et al.^[18], absenteeism refers to consistent patterns of absence from school by a registered student. A student is considered an absentee when they fail to report for school time and remain absent for a scheduled period, regardless of the reason. This definition excludes approved school and national days of absence, such as public holidays, strikes, and weekends. Lannegrand-Willems et al.^[19] define absenteeism as being "absent from school with or without an excuse." Balfanz and Byrnes^[20] categorize absenteeism into three types: moderate absenteeism (missing 10% of total school attendance), chronic absenteeism (missing 20% or more of total school attendance), and truancy (having up to 10% of unexcused absences).

2.2 Reasons for Student Absenteeism

The reasons for student absenteeism are multifaceted and can be attributed to various factors, including family,

student, environment, school, and legislation. Adverse socio-economic conditions, such as financial problems, can significantly contribute to absenteeism^[21-24]. Family dynamics, such as tensions between parents, fragmented families, and parents' negative attitudes towards education, can also play a role in absenteeism^[24,25].

Student-related factors, such as dislike of school, academic failure, lack of purpose, and lack of self-confidence, can also contribute to absenteeism^[25]. Health problems are a common justification for absenteeism, and other factors such as internet and television addiction can also play a role^[23,26].

The social environment can also influence absenteeism, with students being more likely to be absent if they are part of a group of friends who are unsuccessful or absent from school^[22]. Peer bullying is another significant factor that can contribute to absenteeism^[21].

School-related factors, such as the quality and effectiveness of teachers, guidance specialists, and school administrators, can also impact absenteeism^[27]. The lack of cooperation and communication between the school and families can also contribute to absenteeism.

Legislation, such as the Regulation on Secondary Education Institutions of the Ministry of National Education, can also play a role in absenteeism. The full use of the right to 30 days of absenteeism with and without excuses can be a critical reason for absenteeism^[28].

2.3 Synthesis and Rationale for the Current Research

The literature review highlights the complex and multifaceted nature of student absenteeism. Various factors, including socioeconomic conditions, student-related factors, environmental influences, school-related factors, and legislation, contribute to absenteeism. While numerous studies have investigated the causes and consequences of absenteeism, there is a need for further research to understand the specific context of STEAM education in Awka South Local Government Area, Nigeria. This study aims to explore the impact of student absenteeism on academic performance in inclusive STEAM classrooms, with a focus on identifying the underlying causes and academic consequences of absenteeism. By examining the relationships between absenteeism and academic performance, this research seeks to inform strategies for promoting equitable academic engagement and success.

3 MATERIALS AND METHODS

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a descriptive survey research design to investigate the impact of absenteeism on academic performance in inclusive STEAM classrooms. The descriptive survey design allowed for the collection

of quantitative data, which provided a comprehensive understanding of the causes and effects of absenteeism.

3.2 Participants

The target population comprised students enrolled in inclusive secondary classrooms in Awka South Local Government Area. A sample of 200 students was selected for the study, ensuring representation of both students with and without disabilities. The sample size was determined using a combination of random and purposive sampling techniques to ensure adequate representation of the target population.

3.3 Data Collection or Procedure

The data collection process involved the administration of structured questionnaires to the selected students. The questionnaire assessed both the perceived causes of absenteeism and its perceived effects on academic performance in core STEAM subjects. The questionnaire was administered in a classroom setting, and students were given sufficient time to complete it. Informed consent was obtained from the students and their parents/guardians before the administration of the questionnaire, and data confidentiality was rigorously observed throughout the study.

3.4 Instruments

The instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire designed to assess the perceived causes of absenteeism and its effects on academic performance. The questionnaire consisted of two sections: Section A captured demographic information, while Section B contained items related to absenteeism and academic performance.

3.5 Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, specifically mean and standard deviation. For data analysis mean was calculated to determine the average score of the respondents on the perceived causes of absenteeism and its effects on academic performance and standard deviation Calculated to determine the variability of the scores from the mean, providing insight into the consistency of the respondents' perceptions. By using mean and standard deviation, the study provided a clear and concise picture of the causes and effects of absenteeism on academic performance in inclusive STEAM classrooms.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

2.50 was used to make decision. The decision rule states that any item that obtain a mean score of 2.50 and above will be regarded as positive response, while items that scores less than 2.50 will be regarded as negative response.

4.1 Results

4.1.1 Research Question 1

What are the perceived causes of absenteeism among

secondary school students in Awka South Local Government Area?

Table 1 showed that respondents agreed to item 1, 2, 3, 4,5,6,7,9,10, and 11 which obtained mean scores above the means criterion of 2.50, but disagreed on item 8 which attracted a mean score of 2.44 below the mean benchmark. With a mean of means score of 2.84, the result shows that respondents agreed that the following items are the causes of absenteeism among secondary school students in Awka South Local Government Area.

4.1.2 Research Question 2

What are the perceived consequences of absenteeism among secondary school students in Awka South Local Government Area?

Table 2 showed that respondents agreed to items 12-17 which obtained a mean score above the mean criterion of 2.50. With a mean of means scores of 3.31, the result shows that respondents agreed that following items are the consequences of absenteeism among secondary school students in Awka South Local Government Area.

4.1.3 Research Question 3

What possible strategies could be adopted to reduce absenteeism among secondary schools students in Awka South Local Government Area?

Table 3 showed that respondents agreed to items 18-23 which obtained a mean scores above the mean criterion of 2.50. With a mean of means scores of 3.57, the result shows that respondent agreed that the following items are measure that can ameliorate the problem of absenteeism secondary school students in Awka South Local Government Area.

4.2 Discussion

The analysis revealed that health and financial constraints are the most significant factors influencing absenteeism among students. Specifically, sickness and lack of money for educational needs were widely recognized as primary causes of school non-attendance, with mean scores of 2.94 and 2.92, respectively. These findings are consistent with global literature on absenteeism, which identifies a link between attendance and academic performance, particularly in resource-constrained and inclusive educational settings^[29]. The negative impact of financial constraints on academic performance is well-documented, with studies showing that students from low-income backgrounds often struggle to keep up with their peers due to limited access to resources and opportunities^[12]. The role of teacher harshness in predicting academic underperformance also aligns with existing research, which suggests that supportive teacher-student relationships are crucial for student success^[30]. The current study's findings are largely consistent with previous research on absenteeism, highlighting the importance of

Table 1. Mean Scores for Respondents on the Perceived Causes of Absenteeism Among Secondary School Students

S/N	Items	Mean	Std. Deviation	Remark
1.	Lack of money for education needs discourages students from coming to school regularly.	2.92	0.79167	Agreed
2.	Teaching method used for some teacher, makes some students to miss classes.	2.79	0.66188	Agreed
3.	Harshness of teachers can make a student absent him/herself from school.	2.89	0.77911	Agreed
4.	Students coming to school from a long distance encourages absenteeism.	2.84	0.73736	Agreed
5.	Sickness prevents students from going to school.	2.94	0.54170	Agreed
6.	Bullying from fellow students make some student to absent from school.	2.51	0.72276	Agreed
7.	Fear of assignments and examination make students skip school.	2.51	0.50103	Agreed
8.	Peer pressure makes students themselves absent from school.	2.44	0.49763	Disagreed
9.	Attending to house chores keep students away from school.	2.77	0.66829	Agreed
10.	Children helping their parents in their work and businesses leads to absenteeism.	3.18	0.54059	Agreed
11.	Public violence stops students from coming to school	3.47	0.62534	Agreed
	Mean of Means	2.84		Agreed

Table 2. Mean Scores of Respondents on the Perceived Consequences of Absenteeism Among Secondary School Students

S/N	Items	Mean	Std. Deviation	Remark
12.	Absenteeism leads to students' poor grades in assignments, test and examination.	3.47	0.50035	Agreed
13.	Absenteeism hinders students' acquisition of knowledge and skills taught in class	3.40	0.49113	Agreed
14.	Absenteeism thwarts students' schooling	3.13	0.34258	Agreed
15.	Absenteeism leads to students gradual loss of interest in schooling	3.39	0.48897	Agreed
16.	Increase in the rate of school dropout in the society	3.34	0.47490	Agreed
17.	Absenteeism gives students negative school attendance report	3.18	0.62669	Agreed
	Mean of Means	3.31		Agreed

Table 3. Mean Scores of Respondents on Possible Strategies could be Adopted to Reduce Absenteeism Among Secondary School Students

S/N	Items	Mean	Std. Deviation	Remark
18.	Imposing punishments on truants who absent themselves from school	3.22	0.53461	Agreed
19.	Teachers developing a friendly relationship with students	4.87	6.81582	Agreed
20.	Improvement of school facilities by government so that students will be motivated to come to school	3.41	0.49396	Agreed
21.	Total cooperation of parents with school management to enhance discipline and to ensure students come to school regularly.	3.37	0.48534	Agreed
22.	Organizing enlightenment campaigns for parents on the dangers of absenteeism.	3.42	0.49558	Agreed
23.	Organising seminars to educate students on importance of education	3.18	0.43695	Agreed
	Mean of Means	3.57		Agreed

addressing financial and health-related barriers to improve academic outcomes. However, the specific context of STEAM education in Awka South Local Government Area, Nigeria, may introduce unique challenges that are

not fully captured in existing literature. Further research is needed to explore the nuances of absenteeism in this context and identify targeted interventions to support students. The findings of this study can be explained by

several theoretical perspectives. For instance, the socio-economic theory suggests that students from low-income backgrounds may face significant barriers to academic success, including limited access to resources and opportunities^[21]. The teacher-student relationship theory also provides insight into the impact of teacher harshness on academic underperformance, highlighting the importance of supportive relationships in promoting student success^[30]. By understanding these theoretical perspectives, educators and policymakers can develop targeted interventions to address absenteeism and improve academic outcomes for students in STEAM subjects.

5 CONCLUSION

This study highlights the significant and multifaceted impact of absenteeism on student academic performance in inclusive STEAM classrooms. The findings reveal that socioeconomic challenges, particularly financial hardship, and negative school climate factors, such as teacher harshness, contribute substantially to student absenteeism. The compounded effect of these issues is particularly severe for learners with disabilities, who already navigate multiple layers of educational disadvantage. The study's findings have significant theoretical and practical implications for STEAM education. By highlighting the impact of absenteeism on academic achievement, the study underscores the need for targeted interventions to support students, particularly those from low-income backgrounds and with disabilities. The research contributes to the existing literature on absenteeism by highlighting the importance of addressing both financial and school-related barriers to improve academic outcomes. The study's findings are limited by its focus on STEAM classrooms in Awka South Local Government Area, Nigeria. The results may not be generalizable to other educational contexts or regions. Additionally, the study's reliance on self-reported data may introduce biases and limitations. Future studies can build upon the findings of this research by exploring the effectiveness of targeted interventions aimed at reducing absenteeism and improving academic performance. Research can also investigate the specific challenges faced by learners with disabilities in STEAM education and identify strategies to support their academic success. Furthermore, studies can examine the impact of absenteeism on academic performance in different educational contexts and regions, providing a more comprehensive understanding of this complex issue.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declared no conflict of interest.

Data Availability

The datasets generated during and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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Author Contribution

Oyeyemi AA conceived the title and did the analysis and discussion of the results. While Ezenwosu EN handled the introduction aspect of the research.

Abbreviation List

STEAM, Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Math
UNICEF, United Nations Children's Fund
UNESCO, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
USAID, United States Agency for International Development
UBEC, Universal Basic Education Commission

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