

# Investigating the relationship between school attendance and academic performance in universal primary education: The case of Uganda

Denis Sekiwu\*, Frederick Ssempala and Naluwemba Frances

Department of Foundations of Education, Faculty of Education, Kabale University, P.O. Box 317 Kabale, Uganda.

Accepted 19 March, 2020

---

## ABSTRACT

This study investigated the relationship between school attendance and academic performance in UPE schools in Rubanda district of Uganda. Using data from a sample of 104 participants, the researchers established that UPE schools perform poorer in internal examinations but better in national examinations. The regular school attendees perform differently from the chronic absentees. There is also a positive relationship between school attendance and academic performance ( $R = 0.365$ ), although school attendance explains only 11.8% variations in academic performance while 88.2% is explained by other factors affecting academic performance. School administrators should identify other factors that are likely to influence pupils' academic performance apart from attendance, as well as strengthening community-school interaction programmes to help improve attendance in UPE schools.

**Keywords:** Academic performance, school attendance, UPE schools, social productivity.

---

\*Corresponding author. Email: dsekiwu@kab.ac.ug.

---

## INTRODUCTION

School attendance is the daily or regular learner participation in school activities (Gottfried, 2010). Through regular school attendance, learners get to access consistent educational support for their academic attainment (Oghuvbu, 2010). When learners attain academically, Honneth (1995) observes that they recognize their identities and intersubjective awareness of their social and individual capabilities. However, Epstein and Sheldon (2002) assert that regular school attendance is a commitment to classroom time and activities right from enrolment to finalization of a full academic programme.

School attendance is an important factor that influences the academic performance of pupils. Roby (2004) School Attendance Hypothesis indicates that regular school attendance could help pupils to achieve academic excellence. Similarly, Fleming (2008) advises that pupils need regular school attendance for them to be highly engaged with classroom activities. Black et al. (2014)

argue that school attendance is reinforced through continuous teacher guidance and parental/guardian encouragement. However, it is legitimate for school teachers to maintain a daily pupil attendance record (Bagaya, 2019). The attendance record is regularly reviewed by the head-teacher and the district inspector of schools as a quality assurance measure (Nsubuga, 2008).

In order to increase educational quality and equity, the government of Uganda introduced the Universal Primary Education (UPE) programme in 1996. Consequently, UPE has boosted pupil enrolment from 3.1 million in 1996 to 2.7 million in 1997; then from 7.4 million in 2004 to 8.2 million in 2009 and 10.5 million in 2017. Despite these steady increases in enrolments, school attendance remains low, highlighting the incongruity between school enrolment and attendance. For example, Twaweza Monitoring Series (2018) study shows that out of 67% children who enrolled in primary one, only 13%

completed primary six. School enrolment alone cannot guarantee educational quality and equity, especially where school attendance is low. With low school attendance, learners can hardly catch up with class work particularly where teachers do not have adequate time to engage absentee-learners in academic activity (Bagaya, 2019). Chronic absentee-pupils may lack time to concentrate on their studies because such pupils often get involved in out-of-school programmes (Gottfried, 2009). Ford and Sutphen (2016) observe that without regular school attendance, learning achievement and growth will stifle. Irregular attendance school attendance renders all global and national efforts towards universalization of education unproductive. This study was conducted in Rubanda district of Uganda and analyzes the following objectives:

- a) To assess the level of academic performance across different UPE schools;
- b) To compare academic performance between school attendees and absentees; and
- c) To examine the relationship between school attendance and academic performance.

### **Theoretical framework: The Solow effect theory**

This study is situated within David Romer's (2001) Solow Effect Theory. The theory assumes that school attendance is one of the major determinants of institutional performance (Burke and Beegle, 2004). According to Orazem and Gunnarsson (2003), the Solow Effect shows the relationship between school attendance, academic performance and social productivity. Bhattarai (2017) supports this idea by arguing that social productivity depends on physical capital, labour, human capital and knowledge that ultimately impacts innovation and growth. Todd and Wolpin (2003) add that the purpose of schools is to develop human capital and knowledge to support the social productivity role of citizens. Ramirez and Boli (1987) also argue that a positive relationship between human capital per worker and the output per worker determines the social productivity function.

Klenow and Rodriguez-Claire (1997) contemplate that the academic achievement variable can be used to measure human capital per worker. According to Rana et al. (2015), academic achievement is measured by the number of school years and the intellectual performance registered. There is conventional wisdom that when a society educates its workers, they will add quality to the stock of human capital produced (Bils and Klenow, 2000; Todaro and Smith, 2015). Finally, school access and regular attendance, satisfactory progress and completion are variables that make a significant impact on educational achievement (Thapa, 2013) and human capital attainment (Dubow et al., 2009). The Solow Effect

Theory was selected for this study because it indicates the significance of educational attainment, school attendance and academic achievement. Academic achievement is the basis for developing a robust human capital that supports social productivity and development.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Dimensions of school attendance**

A growing body of literature categorizes school attendance into school attendees and absentees (Schoeneberger, 2011; Nichols, 2003; Rana et al., 2015). Similarly, the United States Department of Education (2019) categorized school attendees into irregular and regular attendees. Nonetheless, Zubrick (2019) proposes that school absentees can be further categorized into five dimensions: truancy, dropout, mobility, absenteeism and expulsion. Each of these dimensions of school absenteeism embeds varying areas of focus. According to National Audit Office (2005), truancy bears a legal implication and it is common across a certain age group. Truancy is a deliberate and unsanctioned absence from school. With the growing child rights movement today, children have the right to stay home without being questioned or reprimanded by their parents, teachers and schools (Shoenfelt and Huddleston, 2006). Nowadays teachers are forbidden from flogging children or admonishing them harshly for nonattendance at school because child protection laws prohibit any form of torture or harassment (McCluskey et al., 2004; Maynard et al., 2013). Eventually, children keep on skipping school and it becomes chronic truancy (Richardson, 1994; Weiner, 1991). In many societies in Africa, compulsory school attendance is not yet a legal requirement which partly explains the increase in the rate of truancy in these primordial societies (Sekiwu, 2013).

School dropout refers to leaving school in the later years, usually in upper classes before graduation (Gottfredson and Gottfredson, 1989). School dropout is a situation arising out of a gradual lack of educational continuity, poor retention and mild participation (Council of Australian Governments, 2010). It often demonstrates patterns of segregation of learners into academic and vocational streams (Reid, 2012). Further, the patriarchal social order and school system discriminates against and stigmatizes girls which eventually leads to many girls dropping out of school (Gray and Partington, 2012). In the developing world, high poverty levels in families are a major cause of school dropout even in UPE schools where education is free of charge (Morrissey et al., 2014). This argument is similar to the Social Sub-Culture Theory (Sifuna et al., 2006), which proposes that dropout rates may be due to situations where learners under the vocational stream leave school because they cannot cope with intellectual work. Finally, Hancock et al. (2013)

contend that social disadvantage, the lack of community and family supports and social inequity, and inclusion factors explain increased school dropout. Learner mobility factor is also a significant dimension of school attendance. Learner mobility means multiple enrolments in different schools as he/she moves from one community to another or changes guardianship. Evans (2006) observes that learner mobility may be used as a proxy factor to explain increased school dropouts. The work of Dunn et al. (2003) also reveals that there is a negative correlation between mobility and academic achievement. As well, Oghuvbu (2010) observes that when learners repeatedly enroll in different schools, this is likely to affect their concentration levels; hence, their academic performance drops tremendously.

Further absenteeism is one of the most important dimensions of school attendance confronting school organizations today. There are varying attempts to define school absenteeism in the literature. Each definition of absenteeism depends on a particular geographical region's culture and legal system. Chronic school absence is likely to affect pupil achievement negatively. Baltimore Education Research Consortium (2011), for example, find that students who missed two or more school days are chronic absentees who often register low grades. Epstein and Sheldon (2002) define chronic absenteeism as a student missing 20 or more school days within one academic school year. However, Balfanz and Byrnes (2012) defines chronic absentee pupils as those who miss 10% or more of school attendance over the course of one academic school year for any reason, excused or unexcused. Again, Sheldon and Epstein (2002) argue that when learners miss school consistently, they are identified as being chronically absent. Learners who are chronically absent from school are susceptible to tobacco use, alcohol consumption and substance abuse. Balfanz et al. (2007) find that chronic absenteeism is most prevalent among low-income students since these often face economic challenges because of their inability to pay school fees on time. The present study hypothesizes variations in absenteeism which will affect academic performance differently.

Current literature finds that expulsion from school is a significant issue. Enrolment declines if expulsion occurs frequently (Schoneberger, 2011). Expulsions have been rampant among learners who are highly undisciplined and do not respect the school code of conduct (Gottfredson and Gottfredson, 1989). Expulsion is likely to affect pupil academic performance because those expelled waste time looking for alternative schools. Again, pupils who are expelled develop emotional problems and continued misbehavior which might affect their intellectual capabilities (Ready, 2010; Ehrlich et al., 2013). From the dimensions of school attendance reviewed in this portion of the literature, we hypothesize that pupils who are chronically absent from school perform differently from regular school attendees.

### **Connecting school attendance and academic performance**

The debate about the relationship between school attendance and academic performance has preoccupied the attention of many scholars and researchers for decades. For instance, Darling-Hammond (2000) argues that regular school attendance is indispensable in providing pupils with opportunities to achieve learning growth relative to pupils who are chronically absent from school. Similarly, some studies by Ehrenberg et al. (1991) as well as Lamdin (1996) indicate that when learners have better attendance rates, they often have higher passing rates on standardized achievement tests. Looking at prekindergarten and kindergarten schools, a study by Connolly and Olson (2012) further observes that absenteeism relates with future negative learning outcomes such as slower progression and lower achievement in later years. The views of Connolly and Olson are similar to those of Balfanz and Byrnes (2012) who argued that school attendance can influence academic outcome throughout a student's school life.

The views of McCluskey et al. (2004) show that poor school attendance may also have serious implications for the academic growth of learners. This is in consonance with Attendance works (2014) that reiterates that chronic absence and school dropout positively influence slow academic progression and class repetition in high school. This view is not different from that of Alexander et al. (1997) which also state that increased school dropout levels are likely to lead to academic retardation and hinder graduation. In a similar fashion, Zubrick (2019) remarks that poor attendance rates and higher proportions of unexplained absences tend to damage academic success and lead to poor academic achievement. Maynard et al. (2013) perspectives are not different from the previous scholars when they reasoned that low academic achievers quit schooling because they cannot cope with the low esteem arising from their low performance or repeat class for better academic achievement.

Conducting a study in elementary and middle school in the USA, Lehr et al. (2004) have cited lower attendance rates as detrimental to learning and academic achievement. They have argued that chronic absences may be predictive of higher risk factors in both concurrent and future years of education. Balfanz and Byrnes (2006) propose that students who do not attend school frequently receive fewer hours of classroom instruction and consequently register poor academic grades. Neild and Balfanz (2006) as well as Rumberger and Thomas (2000) complement that there is a correlation between low school attendance and higher future academic risks and eventual dropping out of school. Even at a university level, several studies (Marburger, 2001; Rodgers, 2001; Kirby and McElroy, 2003) examine the relationship between student attendance and rate of academic

performance. These studies indicate that attendance is critical to academic attainment, signifying the need for measures designed to encourage student attendance. Coates (2003) as well as Nichols (2003) notes that to increase student attendance, institutions need to make attendance compulsory, take student attendance records seriously, as well as enhancing attendance via coursework, tests, projects and term papers. Finally, King (2000) has deemed attendance to be important in the evaluation of academic outcomes and school success. From the following section in the literature, we hypothesize that there is a positive relationship between school attendance and academic performance in UPE schools.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Sample, participant selection and data analysis

The study sample was composed of pupils, teachers and head teachers, and all these totaled to 104 participants (70 males, 50 females) from four UPE schools (i.e. 1 Catholic, 1 government, 1 Anglican and 1 Muslim school). About 40 participants were pupils and 60 were teachers and 4 were head teachers. About, 46% pupils were from lower classes (i.e. primary 1 to primary 4) and 54 % pupils were from upper primary (i.e. primary 5 to primary 7). Finally, 60% teachers reported having a diploma and 40% had a bachelor's degree.

### Assessments and measures

The researchers validated the questionnaire ( $\alpha = 0.78$ ), tested for reliability ( $\alpha = 0.82$ ). They tapped school attendance data on, completion and expulsion/suspension ratings using the daily classroom attendance register (National Forum for Education Statistics, 2018). In randomized order, the researchers sought the following data. Researchers used a 3-Likert Scale to tap data on attendance, absenteeism and school dropout. For attendance, the percentage of pupils attending daily (*regular* = 3; *moderate* = 2; *low* = 1). For absenteeism, the percentage of pupils absent daily chronic absentees where chronic absenteeism is when a pupil missing for 10 days in a term (*Chronic absenteeism* = 3; *moderate absenteeism* = 2; *slight absenteeism* = 1). Regarding school dropout rate, the percentage of school dropout (*high dropout* = 3; *medium dropout* = 2; *low dropout* = 1). The researchers used a 2-Likert Scale to tap data on completion and expulsion/suspension rates. The percentage of school completion rated as *high completion* = 2; *low completion* = 1. The percentage of suspended/expelled from school was rated as *high* = 2; *low* = 1.

A structured checklist was also used to collect time-

series data on pupils' academic performance (2015 to 2018) from class tests, end-of-term and end-of-year examinations and Primary Leaving Examination results. We grouped pupil performance according to grade one (*Division 1; high performers* = 4), grade two (*Division 2; average performers* = 3), grade 3 (*Division 3; mild performers* = 2) and grade 4 (*Division 4; poor performers* = 1) using the Uganda National Examinations Board (UNEB) Qualifications Framework (Naluwemba et al., 2015). We also collected qualitative information using interviews conducted with head teachers and teachers. We transcribed the qualitative data and using the coding method to deduce themes from the data.

## Recruitment of study participants

### Teachers

Systematic random sampling was then used to select sixty (60) teachers from the four sampled UPE schools because a list of respondents was obtained and participants randomly selected (Kothari, 2004). In this process, four teachers were picked in each of the four UPE schools. The researchers approached the schools and asked the headteachers (after briefings about the study) for names of the teachers. From the list provided, the researchers contacted the teachers individually, briefed them about the study, and invited them to participate. Some teachers declined participation claiming they did not have time. To fill the gaps, the researchers randomly selected other teachers. Those who accepted to participate were given consent forms, which they signed and returned to the researchers. Because some of the identified teachers were not at their duty station on the day the researchers visited, their consent forms were left in the office of the headteachers after a telephone conversation with the researchers in which their consents to participate were first orally sought.

### Pupils

The second set of participants in the study were pupils and these were selected using Simple Random Sampling. Because these are vulnerable members of the community since all were below the age of 18 (*in Uganda, one is considered a child when he/she is below eighteen years old*), the researchers sought consent for their participation from their headteachers. When the headteachers okayed pupils' participation, they were given consent forms to sign on behalf of the pupils. Pupils who participated in the study had their consent forms signed by either their headteacher or deputy headteacher. The objective of the research was then explained to the pupils and they were told that participation is voluntary, and they could leave the study

at any time. In the even that they chose to quit the study, any information they had already provided would be discarded.

### Procedure for data collection

Before going to the field, the researchers sought consent from the Ministry of Education and Sports and Rubanda District education offices to collect data from the schools. We visited the school head teachers to design a data collection plan to cover 14 days. Because we were dealing with human subjects, we kept the participants' names confidential. The researchers also informed the participants that participation in the study was voluntary and whoever wanted to exit the exercise could do so at will.

### Data analysis

For quantitative data analysis, the researchers used descriptive statistics of the mean and standard deviations to assess the level of academic performance across the different UPE schools. The researchers used paired samples statistics to compare academic performance between regular attendants and chronic absentees. Finally, the researchers computed Bivariate Linear Regression to determine the relationship between school attendance and academic performance and to predict the extent to which variations in school attendance explain variations in academic performance. The following simple linear regression model was used:

$$f(Y) = a_0 + \beta(Xi)$$

Where  $Y$  = Academic Performance;  $a_0$  = the constant;  $Xi$  = School attendance composites such as (Attendees ( $x_1$ ), Absentees ( $x_2$ ), completed ( $x_3$ ), Expelled/suspended ( $x_4$ ) and dropouts ( $x_5$ )). The  $\beta$  represents the coefficients of determination of  $X_i$ . For qualitative data analysis, the researchers used interview data as *in-vivo* codes to support the statistical results obtained for each research objective.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Level of academic performance

The level of academic performance in internal examinations between 2015 and 2018 is generally poor. Table 1 shows that most pupils were in grade 4 ( $\mu=48.99$ ) while very few were in grade 1 ( $\mu = 21.74$ ).

On the contrary, most pupils perform better in Primary Leaving Examinations (PLE). Most candidates were in grade 1 ( $\mu = 37.86$ ) while the least number of candidates

were in grade 4 ( $\mu = 19.50$ ). The implication of this is that academic performance is better in national assessments than in internal assessments. The reason could be that, in these schools, national examinations are usually easier to pass than internal examinations in the different UPE schools. This observation is in consonance with what the interviews with the head teacher in a Catholic school revealed. He advanced the reason that internal examinations are tougher than national examinations, when he says:

The aim of giving pupils tougher internal assignments in the form of tests, exercises and exams is to prepare them to do PLE with ease. This is mainly to instill in the learners the confidence to be in a position to excel in PLE (Head teacher in a Catholic School, Interviewed in November 2018).

The above findings are similar to what the National Forum on Education Statistics (2018) notes that differences in school attendance provide differences in educational equity and educational success. Mochi (1993) stated that if the aim of government is to ensure educational equity across the board, we can only achieve this if all schools perform relatively well.

Again, majority of the pupils failed grade 4 school tests and examinations (Table 1) because most of them are chronically absent from school. This observation is further reiterated in the teachers' voices exhibited in an interview held in an Anglican School:

In this school, learners who are irregular school attendants perform miserably. Most of the bright kids in class are regular attendants. Teachers have more time to attend to individual academic problems, which enables the regular attendants to gain from the teacher's input. We have told parents, often, to encourage their kids not to miss classes. This will help them gain better grades (Group Interview with Five Teachers in an Anglican School, October 2019).

The above participants' view is consistent with what Thatcher et al. (2007) states that regular school attendance is a proxy for learner motivation. Learners who 'always' attend classes show statistically significant academic performance advantages over students who 'seldom' or 'never' attend classes. Likewise, an interview with a head teacher in a Moslem School demonstrates reasoned that regular school attendance leads to better academic grades:

When learners attend school regularly, they perform better because they have enough time for adequate teacher-pupil interactions on academic matters. Again, teachers have enough

**Table 1.** Means and standard deviations (Std) of academic performance (2015 to 2018).

Descriptive statistics	Performance in Internal Examinations (2015-2018)				Performance in PLE (2015-2018)			
	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4
Mean	21.74	33.87	22.70	48.99	37.86	31.17	34.13	19.50
Std.	29.24	27.64	28.75	24.71	24.39	29.58	31.06	29.21

**Table 2.** Paired samples statistics comparing performance for regular attendants and absentees.

Category	Mean	N	Std. deviation	Std. error mean	T	df	Sig (2-tailed)
Performance in PLE for regular attendees	2.0667	60	0.94046	0.12141	12.118	59	0.000
Performance in PLE for absentees	1.7833	60	0.79972	0.10324			

time to understudy their pupils — to know their strengths and weaknesses unlike those learners who are chronically absent... (Head teacher in a Moslem School, interviewed in October 2019).

There are remarkable performance variations in the internal tests and examinations (Table 1). These variations are between pupils who scored grade 1 (SD = 29.24) and pupils who scored grade 3 (SD = 24.70). For the PLE results (Table 1), performance differed between pupils in grade 4 (SD = 31.06) and those in grade 1 (SD = 24.39). Statistically, there must be significant performance variations between regular school attendants and those who are chronically absent. This empirical observation is similar to the views of Black et al. (2014) who further observe that chronic absenteeism is the sole barrier to student achievement and it may be a symptom of other issues that hinder student learning, such as socioeconomic distress, health barriers, or cultural and social exclusion. Marburger (2001) further shows that the inadequate teacher supervision could heavily explain child performance variations because children are chronically absent from school.

#### Academic performance for regular attendants and chronic absentees

The study sought to compare academic performance of regular attendants with that of absentees. The purpose was to test research hypothesis 1 *pupils who are chronically absent from school perform differently from regular attendees* (Table 2).

For paired samples statistics in Table 2, there is a significant difference in academic performance between Regular Attendees ( $\mu = 2.0667$ ) and Absentees ( $\mu = 1.7833$ ) given ( $p\text{-value} = 0.000 < 0.05$ ). Academic performance for regular attendants is slightly higher than that of absentees. In the political construction of mass schooling, Ramirez and Boli (1987) examine that there

are those who excel academically and those who are slow learners. If learners get regularly involved in intellectual activities and classwork, there are high chances for them to exhibit good grades because they are consistently available for academic grooming from teachers than learners that are irregular.

#### Relating school attendance and academic performance

To predict the extent to which variations in school attendance explain variations in academic performance in UPE schools, we tested research hypothesis 2 *There is a positive relationship between school attendance and academic performance in UPE schools* (Table 3).

Empirical findings show a statistically significant positive relationship ( $R = 0.365$ ) between school attendance and academic performance at ( $0.004 < 0.05$ ;  $t\text{-value} = 2.981 > 0.004$ ). An increase in school attendance leads to a reciprocal increase in academic performance in UPE schools. This is in conformity with the views of Thatcher et al. (2007) that high performing students regularly attend class than those who are irregular. However, for every one percent increase in school attendance, there is only 0.02 percent increase in academic performance as indicated by the unstandardized coefficient (B or slope) of 0.019 (Table 3). In case of regression results, R-square is 0.118 implying that 11.8% of variations in academic performance depend on variations in school attendance. This finding is in line with the earlier views by McCluskey et al. (2004) which show that poor school attendance may have serious implications for the academic growth of learners, as well as Attendance works (2014) who reiterates that chronic absence and school dropout positively influence slow academic progression and class repetition in high school, and finally Alexander et al. (1997) who also state that increased school dropout levels are likely to lead to academic retardation and hinder graduation.

**Table 3.** Relationship between school attendance and pupils' academic performance.

<b>Coefficients<sup>a</sup></b>								
R=0.365 R <sup>2</sup> =0.133 Adj. R <sup>2</sup> =0.118								
<b>Model</b>	<b>Unstandardized coefficients</b>		<b>Standardized coefficients</b>	<b>T</b>	<b>Sig.</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Sum of Squares</b>	<b>Mean Square</b>
	<b>B</b>	<b>Std. error</b>	<b>Beta</b>					
(Constant)	2.673	3.313		0.807	0.423		Regression	181.7
1 School attendance	0.019	0.006	0.365	2.981	0.004	1	Residual	1185.4
								20.437

a. Dependent Variable: Academic Performance

b. Predictors: (Constant), School Attendance.

**Table 4.** Predicting pupils' academic performance using linear regression coefficients.

<b>Constant (<math>a_0</math>)</b>	<b>Beta (<math>\beta</math>)</b>	<b>Independent variables (<math>X_i</math>)</b>	<b>Predicted variable (<math>Y</math>)</b>
2.673	0.02 (0.019)	20	3.07
2.673	0.02 (0.019)	30	3.27
2.673	0.02 (0.019)	40	3.47
2.673	0.02 (0.019)	50	3.67
2.673	0.02 (0.019)	60	3.87
2.673	0.02 (0.019)	70	4.07
2.673	0.02 (0.019)	80	4.27
2.673	0.02 (0.019)	90	4.47
2.673	0.02 (0.019)	100	4.67
2.673	0.02 (0.019)	110	4.87
2.673	0.02 (0.019)	120	5.07
2.673	0.02 (0.019)	130	5.27

Other factors influencing academic performance contribute 88.2% to the model. Bradley (2015) provided several other factors that influence academic performance and these include family and community support, inequity and social inclusion, multiple enrolments in schools and family mobility. To predict the actual percentage increase in academic performance, we used the model fit  $f(Y) = a_0 + \beta(X_i)$ . The constant or Y intercept ( $a_0$ ) = 2.673,  $\beta$  (B or slope) of 0.02.

If  $X_i$  (School Attendance) is 20%, then Y (Pupil's Academic performance) is  $2.673 + 0.02(20)$  which is 3.073 (Table 4). This implies that a 20% increase in school attendance will only increase academic performance by an insignificant 3.07%. Then a 60%

increase in the school attendance variable would increase academic performance by an insignificant 3.87 percent. More so, a 100% increase in school attendance increases academic performance by only 4.67%. When school attendance increases from 20 to 60%, the difference in an increase in pupils' academic performance in the sampled schools is only 0.80% (that is 3.87 percent minus 3.07 percent). Therefore, a 20 percent school attendance is only 3.07 percent academic performance and a 60 percent school attendance is only 3.87 percent academic performance. This implies that a 40 percent improvement in school attendance is only 0.8 percent increase in academic performance in UPE schools.

Therefore, an increase in school attendance alone cannot influence remarkable improvement in academic

performance in UPE schools, unless complemented by other causal factors (88.2%) such as quality teaching, parent support and commitment, developing an academic culture in schools, ensuring learner discipline among others. For example, a 40% increase in school attendance explains only 0.8% increase in academic performance while a 100% difference in school attendance (20 to 120%) would register only 2% increase in academic performance (3.07 to 5.07%).

## CONCLUSION

The study makes an importantly positive linkage between school attendance and academic performance, although the school attendance variable contributes little to academic performance. There is need to consider other factors that influence academic performance apart from school attendance. Moreover, there is generally poor academic performance in UPE schools. There are also performance variations between regular school attendees and chronic absentees whereby performance declines with increased absenteeism.

The researchers recommend community-school interaction programmes, free-lunch, subsidies or free uniform, enriched curriculum and pedagogies, and one-on-one tutoring programme to help improve attendance in UPE schools. The study had some limitations. Since part of the data was time-series data, it was at times difficult to get records on pupil attendance and academic performance between 2015 and 2018. Where records were not available in the school records, the researchers visited the district headquarters for this information. It was also difficult to get the study participants according to the timelines set. Consequently, the researchers continued re-scheduling meetings to meet deadlines.

## REFERENCES

- Alexander, K. L., Entwisle, D. R., and Horsey, C.S. (1997). From first grade forward: Early foundations of high school dropout. *Sociology of Education*, 70: 87-107.
- Attendance Works (2014). The Attendance Imperative: How States Can Advance Achievement by Reducing Chronic Absence. Retrieved August 24, 2016, from <http://www.attendanceworks.org/policy-advocacy/state-policy-brief-the-attendance-imperative/>.
- Bagaya, J. (2019). Secondary School Inspection Practices in Western Uganda: Implications on Pedagogy. Unpublished PhD Thesis. Makerere University, Kampala.
- Balfanz, R., and Byrnes, V. (2006). Closing the mathematics achievement gap in high poverty middle schools: Enablers and constraints. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk*, 11: 143.
- Balfanz, R., and Byrnes, V. (2012). The Importance of Being in School: A Report on Absenteeism in the Nation's Public Schools. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Center for Social Organization of Schools. Retrieved August 19, 2016, from <http://new.every1graduates.org/the-importance-of-being-in-school/>.
- Balfanz, R., Herzog, L., and MacIver D. (2007). Preventing student disengagement and keeping students on the graduation path in urban middle grade schools: Early identification and effective interventions. *Educational Psychologist*, 42(4): 223-235.
- Baltimore Education Research Consortium (2011). Destination graduation: Sixth grade early warning indicators for Baltimore city schools: Their prevalence and impact. Baltimore, MD: BERC. <https://www.baltimore-berc.org>.
- Bhattarai, N. K. (2017). What factors affect School Attendance. Quantitative and Qualitative Study of Evidence from Nepal. Unpublished PhD dissertation. Colorado State University. Fort Collins, Colorado. USA. <https://mountainscholar.org/handle>.
- Bils, M., and Klenow, P. J. (2000). Does schooling cause growth? *American Economic Review*, 90(5): 1160-1183.
- Black, A. T., Seder, R. C., and Kekahio, W. (2014). Review of Research on Student Non-enrollment and Chronic Absenteeism: A Report for the Pacific Region (REL 2015-054). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Pacific. Retrieved August 23, 2016, from <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/projects/project.asp?projectId=2458>.
- Bradley, R. R. (2015). *A Comprehensive Approach to Improving Student Attendance*. Unpublished Doctor of Education Thesis. St. John Fisher College. [https://fisherpub.sjfc.edu/education\\_etd/225](https://fisherpub.sjfc.edu/education_etd/225).
- Burke, K., and Beegle, K. (2004). Why children aren't attending school: The case of Northwestern Tanzania. *Journal of African Economies*, 13(2): 333-355.
- Coates, D. (2003). Education production functions using instructional time as an input. *Education Economics*, 11(3): 273-292.
- Connolly, F., and Olson, L. S. (2012). Early Elementary Performance and Attendance in Baltimore City Schools' Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten. Baltimore, MD: Baltimore Education Research Consortium. Retrieved November 28, 2016 from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED535768.pdf>.
- Darling-Hammond, L. (2000). Teacher quality and student achievement: A review of state policy evidence. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 8(1): 89-113.
- Dubow, E. F., Boxer, P., and Huesmann, L. R. (2009). Long-term effects of parents' education and occupational success: Mediation by family interactions, child aggression and teenage aspirations. *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly*, 55(3): 224-249.
- Dunn, M., Kadane, J. B., and Garrow, J. R. (2003). Comparing harm done by mobility and class absence: Missing students and missing data. *Journal of Education and Behavioral Statistics*, 28(3): 269-288.
- Ehrenberg, R. G., Ehrenberg, R. A., Rees, D. I., and Ehrenberg, E. L. (1991). School district leave policies, teacher absenteeism, and student achievement. *The Journal of Human Resources*, 26: 72-105.
- Ehrlich, S. B., Gwynne, J. A., Stitzel Pareja, A., and Allensworth, E. M. (2013). Preschool attendance in Chicago public schools: Relationships with learning outcomes and reasons for absences. <https://ccsr.uchicago.edu/sites/default/files/publications/PreK%20Attendance%20Research%20Summary.pdf>.
- Epstein, J. L., and Sheldon, S. B. (2002). Present and accounted for: Improving student attendance through family and community involvement. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 95(5): 308-317.
- Evans, G. W. (2006). Child development and the physical environment. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 57: 423-451.
- Fleming, T. (2008). A secure base for adult learning: Attachment theory and adult education. *The Adult Learner: The Journal of Adult and Community Education in Ireland*, 25: 33-53.
- Ford, J., and Sutphen, R. D. (2016). Early intervention to improve attendance in elementary school for at-risk children: A pilot program. *Social Work in Education*, 18(2): 95-102.
- Gottfredson, G. D., and Gottfredson, D. C. (1989). School climate, academic performance, attendance, and dropout. Charleston County School District, North Charleston, Office of Educational Research and Improvement. Washington, DC. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED308>.
- Gottfried, M. A. (2009). Excused versus unexcused: How student absences in elementary school affect academic achievement. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 31(4): 392-415.
- Gottfried, M. A. (2010). Evaluating the relationship between student attendance and achievement in urban elementary and middle schools: An instrumental variables approach. *American Educational Research Journal*, 47(2): 434-465.
- Gray, J., and Partington, G. (2012). Attendance and nonattendance at school. In Q. Beresford, G. Partington & G. Gower (Eds.), *Reform*



- and resistance in Aboriginal education (Revised edition) (pp. 261–303). Crawley, WA: UWA Publishing. <https://ro.ecu.edu.au/ecuworks2012>.
- Hancock, K. J., Shepherd, C. C. J., Lawrence, D., and Zubrick, S. R. (2013).** Student attendance and educational outcomes: Every day counts. Canberra: Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. <https://search-repository.uwa.edu.au>.
- Honneth, A. (1995).** The struggle for recognition: the moral grammar of social conflicts. Cambridge, Polity. <https://philpapers.org>.
- King, A. R. (2000).** Relationships between CATI personality disorder variables and measures of academic performance. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 29: 177-190.
- Kirby, A., and McElroy, B. (2003).** The effect of attendance on grade for first year economics students in University College Cork. *The Economic and Social Review*, 34(3): 311–326.
- Klenow, P. J., and Rodriguez-Claire, A. (1997).** The Neoclassical revival in growth economics: Has it gone too far? *NBER Macro Economics*, 12: 73-103.
- Kothari, C. (2004).** *Research Methodology: Methods and Techniques* (2nd ed.). New Delhi: New Age International.
- Lamdin, D. J. (1996).** Evidence of student attendance as an independent variable in education production functions. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 89(3): 155-162.
- Lehr, C. A., Sinclair, M. F., and Christenson, S. L. (2004).** Addressing student engagement and truancy prevention during the elementary school years: A replication study of the Check & Connect model. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk*, 9: 279-301.
- Marburger, D. R. (2001).** Absenteeism and undergraduate exam performance. *Journal of Economic Education*, 32: 99–110.
- Maynard, B. R., McCrear, K. T., Pigott, T. D., and Kelly, M. S. (2013).** Indicated truancy interventions for chronic truant students: A Campbell systematic review. *Research on Social Work Practice*, 23(1): 5–21.
- McCluskey, C., Bynum, T. S., and Patchin, J. W. (2004).** Reducing chronic absenteeism: An assessment of an early truancy initiative. *Crime and Delinquency*, 50(2): 214-234.
- Mochi, C. (1993).** A study of Factors Affecting Attendance at Adult Education Short Courses in China. [en@fed.cuhk.edu.hk](mailto:en@fed.cuhk.edu.hk) (Retrieved November 18, 2019).
- Morrissey, T. W., Hutchison, L., and Winsler, A. (2014).** Family income, school attendance, and academic achievement in elementary school. *Developmental psychology*, 50(3): 741-768.
- Naluwemba, F., Sekiwu, D., and Kagwa, V. T. (2015).** School heads' leadership traits and learners' academic attainment in Uganda's high schools. *Donnish Journal of Educational Research and Reviews*, 2(3): 39-47.
- National Audit Office (2005).** Improving school attendance in England. Report by the Comptroller and Audit General, HC 212 Session 2004–2005. London: The Stationery Office. <https://www.nao.org.uk/report/i>.
- National Forum on Education Statistics (2018).** Forum Guide to Collecting and Using Attendance Data (NFES 2017-007). U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2017>.
- Neild, R. C., and Balfanz, R. (2006).** An extreme degree of difficulty: The educational demographics of urban neighborhood schools. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk*, 11: 123-141.
- Nichols, J. D. (2003).** Prediction indicators for students failing the state of Indiana high school graduation exam. *Preventing School Failure*, 47: 112-120.
- Nsubuga, Y. (2008).** Analysis of Leadership Styles on Students' Academic Performance in Sciences in Secondary Schools in Uganda. Unpublished PhD Thesis. Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University. Summerstrand South Africa. <https://www.academia.edu/>.
- Oghuvbu, E. P. (2010).** Attendance and academic performance of students in secondary schools: A correlational approach. *Studies on Home and Community Science*, 4(1): 21-25.
- Orazem, P. F., and Gunnarsson, V. (2003).** Child labour, school attendance and academic performance: A review. International Labour Office, International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC). ILO working papers 993665413402676.
- Ramirez, F. O., and Boli, J. (1987).** The political construction of mass schooling: European origins and worldwide institutionalization. *Sociology of Education*, 60(1): 2–17.
- Rana, M. A. K., Iqbal, N., and Tasneem, S. (2015).** The influence of parents' educational level on secondary school academic achievement in Rajanpur District. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 6(16): 76-79.
- Ready, D. D. (2010).** Socioeconomic disadvantage, school attendance, and early cognitive development: The differential effects of school exposure. *Sociology of Education*, 83(4): 271-286.
- Reid, K. (2012).** The strategic management of truancy and school absenteeism: Finding solutions from a national perspective. *Educational Review*, 64(2): 211–222.
- Richardson, J. G. (1994).** Common, delinquent, and special: On the formalization of common schooling in the American States. *American Educational Research Journal*, 31: 695–723.
- Roby, D. E. (2004).** Research on school attendance and student achievement: A study of Ohio schools. *Educational Research Quarterly*, 28(1): 3-16.
- Rodgers, J. R. (2001).** Encouraging tutorial attendance at university did not improve performance. *Australian Economic Papers*, 41(3): 255–266.
- Romer, D. (2001).** *Advanced Macro Economics*. Berkeley, CA: McGraw-Hill.
- Rumberger, R. W., and Thomas, S. L. (2000).** The distribution of dropout and turnover rates among urban and suburban high schools. *Sociology of Education*, 73: 39-67.
- Schoeneberger, J. (2011).** Longitudinal attendance patterns: Developing high school dropouts. *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas*, 85(1): 7-14.
- Sekiwu, D. (2013).** Integration of Values into School Discipline in Uganda. Unpublished PhD Thesis. Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University. Port Elizabeth, South Africa. <https://www.academia.edu/integration>.
- Shoenfelt, E. L., and Huddleston, M. R. (2006).** The truancy court diversion program of the family court, Warren Circuit Court Division III, Bowling Green, Kentucky: An evaluation of impact on attendance and academic performance. *Family Court Review*, 44(4): 683-695.
- Sifuna, D. N., Chege, F. N., and Oanda, I. O. (2006).** Themes in the study of the foundations of Education. Nairobi: The Jomo Kenyatta Foundation.
- Thapa, S. B. (2013).** Relationship between education and poverty in Nepal. *Economic Journal of Development Issues*, 15 & 16(1): 148-161.
- Thatcher, A., Fridjhon, P., and Cockcroft, K. (2007).** The Relationship between lecturer attendance and academic performance in an undergraduate psychology class. *South African Journal of Psychology*, 37(3): 656-660.
- Today, M., and Smith, S. C. (2015).** *Economic Development*. New York, NY: Pearson.
- Todd, P., and Wolpin, K. (2003).** On the specification and estimation of the production function for cognitive achievement. *Economic Journal*, 113: F3–F33.
- Twaweza Monitoring Series (2018).** Brief No. 2. [www.twaweza.org](http://www.twaweza.org).
- United States Department of Education (2019).** Every School Day Counts: The Forum Guide to Collecting and Using Attendance Data. National Center for Education Statistics / Nation Forum on Education Statistics. <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2018>.
- Weiner, M. (1991).** The child and the state in India: Child labour and educational policy in comparative perspective. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. <https://press.princeton.edu/b>.
- Zubrick, S. R. (2019).** School Attendance: Equities and Inequities in growth trajectories of academic performance. University of West Australia and Telethon Kids Institute. [https://research.acer.edu.au/research\\_conference/RC2014/4august/7](https://research.acer.edu.au/research_conference/RC2014/4august/7).

---

**Citation:** Sekiwu, D., Ssempala, F., and Frances, N. (2020). Investigating the relationship between school attendance and academic performance in universal primary education: The case of Uganda. *African Educational Research Journal*, 8(2): 152-160.

---