

# Absenteeism: the Role of Guidance and Counseling in Early Grade Schools in Ghana

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## Abstract:

The purpose of the study was to examine the causes and effects of absenteeism in the early grades schools in Ghana. The research design used for this study was a descriptive design and the type of research is action research. The population of the study covered the class teacher of basic two (2) and some of the pupils in the class. Purposive and random sampling techniques were used to select the respondents for the study. The main instruments for data collection in the study were observation, questionnaires, and interviews. The results were presented using percentages and frequencies. The study revealed that absenteeism has serious academic set backs on the performance of both the pupils and the teacher. The study also concluded that the inability of some parents to provide their children with their basic needs normally pushes them to engage in various forms of activities to raise money to fend for themselves. The economic background of the parents also contributes to the pupils' frequent absence, as well as their frequent absenteeism. It is recommended that the District Assembly and the Traditional Council team up and pass a bye-law to retrain children out of school hours on trading during school hours on market days as well as other activities such as farming, film and video shows that are carried out at the expense of their schooling. It is also recommended that guidance and counseling coordinators should therefore collaborate with teachers in basic schools for the purpose of counseling the pupils as well as parents and guardians.

## Keywords:

Absenteeism, Guidance and Counseling, Early Grade Schools, Ghana

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## 1. Introduction

Education lays the foundation for the political, social and economic development of any country. A viable education system enables the nation to achieve its national goals [1]. It helps countries and their workforces adapt to the significant worldwide changes in social and market economies [2]. When good education can only be

accessed by families with money, it undermines social mobility; it ensures that if you are born poor, you and your children will die poor, no matter how hard you work. It also undermines our societies, as the children of the wealthy are segregated from the children of ordinary families from an early age [3]. In an effort to make education available to all people in the country, there appear to be some setbacks that collapse industries, lower citizens' living standards, and regress a country's economic growth; this is absenteeism. Absenteeism is a very bad habit among officials in government, those working in our manufacturing industries and also our little pupils in the basic schools. Its associated implications render the academic performance in our schools extremely low. Student absenteeism is a major problem faced by schools across the globe. Although the problem is pervasive in nation-state schools, the attention focused on this issue has been inadequate. Poor student attendance has far-reaching consequences for individuals, schools, and society as a whole [4].

Since there are many negative individual outcomes associated with chronic absenteeism, this is a problem that deserves further consideration. A combination of community-based and school-based programs may be the most effective way to address this issue over the long term. With limited resources, however, the most direct and efficient methods available appear to be behavioural school-based interventions [4]. Absenteeism has rendered academic performance very low in Ghanaian schools and also workplaces, especially in the public sector. When absenteeism is identified as a significant problem, institutions need to take a hard look at the cause of the problem and begin to consider strategies to deal with it. The more issues of absenteeism are identified in schools; the more successful institutional leaders will be in a position to implement strategies to reduce students' absenteeism in schools to improve their academic work [5].

During the supported teaching in schools' assessment at Domiabra Roman Catholic Basic School in the Ahafo Ano South West District in the Ashanti Region of Ghana, the researchers observed and discovered that there was a high rate of absenteeism among the basic two (2) pupils, particularly on Wednesday and Friday. This was identified through attending classes and the marking of the attendance register punctually and regularly. There is, therefore, a need to conduct a study into basic school pupils' absenteeism in Ghana. The purpose of the study was to identify the causes of the absenteeism among Domiabra Roman Catholic Basic School's basic two (2) pupils. Identify the ways of avoiding absenteeism on the stated days among them. The study sought to answer these research questions – (1) What are the causes of absenteeism? (2) How does absenteeism affect the performance of pupils in school?

## **2. Materials and Methods**

The research design used for this study was a descriptive design and the type of research is action research. To obtain a true and clear picture of the guidance and counseling to reduce absenteeism among pupils of Domiabra Roman Catholic Basic School, basic two (2). This design was used to enable the researcher to find out why absenteeism in Domiabra Roman Catholic Basic School, basic two (2) and the need to reduce it. The study's population included basic two (2) class teachers and some of the pupils in the class. Purposive and random sampling techniques were used to select the respondents for the study. According to Cohen and Manion in purposive sampling, the researcher handpicked the subject to be included in his sample on the basis of his judgments to build up a sample that is satisfactory to his specific needs [6].

The main instruments for data collection for the study were questionnaire and interviews. Parents were interviewed because they know their children's problems better. This was done to solicit information from them to support the study. Each questionnaire was divided into two main units; the first unit consisted of the demographic data about the respondents, while the second unit dealt with the general information about causes and effects of absenteeism on pupils' academic performance.

Because the researcher desired a specific response, a questionnaire was used. pupils to help him carry out the study successfully. It enabled the respondents to answer various questions confidently and without fear. It enabled the respondents to answer various questions confidently and without fear. This meant that it gave the respondents courage to answer the set questions since their privacy was secured.

Procedure: A letter was sent to the headmaster of the school by the researchers to seek permission to carry out the study. Researchers listed questions for the selected pupils, and met them for a brief discussion on how to proceed with the exercise. The questions were then distributed to them to respond to and were collected on the same day. Another instrument used in the collection was observation. The researcher observed that pupils were not regular in school due to the register marking and the high rate of farming in the community. With this parent, the child does not pay attention to the child's education. Moreover, another instrument used in the data collection and handling was the interview. The researcher used an interview due to the educational background of the parents. Most of them were illiterate and could not answer questionnaires.

Procedure: The researchers used three days to interview the parents concerned to solicit reliable information about their children to support the study. The demographic data of the respondents and other effects of absenteeism on their children's performance were sought for. Parents were contacted because they are the best people to tell the problems of their children. With their support, the study will also be successful. Although the researchers encountered some problems during their interview, they later succeeded in getting their support and co-operation.

### ***2.1. Pre Intervention***

Using guidance and counseling to minimize absenteeism among the pupils of Domiabra Roman Catholic Basic School, two (2) pupils. This was planned and implemented to solve a specific problem or reform an educational practice located in an immediate situation. The researchers planned so that she could improve upon the Domiabra Roman Catholic Basic School's basic two (2) pupils' attendance in the school where she carried out the study.

### ***2.2. Intervention***

The researchers planned and implemented a set of strategies to solve it or reduce students' attendance in class. The researchers called on the counselor and he met with the pupils face-to-face and discussed the reason why they keep on absenting themselves from school despite the interesting activities their school performs in school. After contact with the pupils, they came up with the cause of their absence. The counselor also met with the teacher to discuss the causes of the pupils' absenteeism. The teachers came up with a strategy that could be measured to minimize the problem. With this, the causes were analyzed. The researchers, with the help of some counselors, taught pupils to perform a drama on two groups of pupils.

One group was always present at school while the other group members were always absent and the researchers found that they suffered several adversities in life while those present were achievers. With this, the counselor advised them after the drama to always be at school for their own better future.

Also, the researchers invited a resource person to advise pupils and share his experience of life and how being regular at school has benefited him in all aspects of life. The counselor also ends by advising them to expect a lot in the near future. Moreover, the researchers, with the help of counselors, met the parents of the pupils in questioning and discussing the reasons behind their wards' absenteeism. The researchers, with the help of the other teachers, advised the parents on the need for their wards to attend school. They agree that they will always make sure that their wards are in school before every activity. In addition, the researchers, with the help of the other teachers, advised the parents on the need for their wards to attend. They agree that they will always make sure that their wards are in school before every activity. In addition, the researchers, with the help of some members of staff, met and suggested that some positions in the school should be given to them to enable them to always be punctual in school. The committee implemented this to keep them on their toes.

Lastly, the researchers, with the help of the school authorities, organized a PTA meeting that was compulsory so that they could educate the parents on the effects of absenteeism on the school, their wards, families and even their communities as a whole. The parents assured the authorities that they would do everything possible to make sure that their wards attend school regularly, even if it takes any punishment before they come to school.

### ***2.3. Post Intervention***

After the above intervention had been implemented, the researchers realized that there had been an improvement in the pupils' school attendance. The researcher also found out the pupils' academic performance. The researchers testified that the pupils did not absent themselves from school as they were marked, with 42 pupils being present out of 47 pupils, three pupils with permission and two pupils without permission.

## **3. Results and Discussion**

This section presents results and discussion on the causes and effects of absenteeism on pupils' academic performance. Interventions were applied to improve the attendance of the pupils.

### ***3.1. Analysis of Demographer Data***

Analysis of Demographer data of pupils' sex distribution. Equal distribution of male and female respondent was very vital in this study.

*Table 1. Sex distribution of pupils.*

<b>Sex</b>	<b>Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Male	25	53
Female	22	47
<b>Total</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 1 shows the sex distribution of students. Out of 47 students selected, 25 out of the respondents (53%) on the table were males. The remaining 22 people, or 47%, were women. This shows that the fair distribution of gender respondents was taken into consideration in the ratio of 3:2 respectively. On age distribution, the question of the ages of pupils and also the level of deviation between age and class.

*Table 2. Age distribution of pupils.*

Sex	Respondents	Percentage
Below 12	0	0
12 – 15	43	91
Over 15	4	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>100</b>

From Table 2, the age distribution of pupils shows the pupils do not differ in age as compared to others in different schools in Ghana. The reason is that, out of the total respondents, 43 of them, representing 91%, were above 12 years of age, whilst none of the respondents was below 12 years of age. On the distribution of pupils living with parents or guardians, basically, most pupils engage in several social vices such as absenteeism, truancy and running away from class when they have been given exercise. This is common with pupils who, according to some parents, are not staying with both parents. The item on which pupils stay with parents or guardians was asked to find out the number of students who were affected by this problem.

*Table 3. Distribution of pupils staying with parents, guardians or single parents.*

Type of Parent	Frequency	Percentage
Father	5	10
Mother	12	26
Both	23	49
Guardian	7	15
<b>Total</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>100</b>

According to the data gathered 23 respondents representing 49% were found to those staying with both parents. 12 respondents representing 26% on the table stayed with their mother. 7 of them making 15 percent stay with guardian, while the remaining 5 representing 10% stayed with their father. It is believed that most parents engage their children to assist them at their workplace during school hours. This behaviour of parents contributes to pupils' absenteeism. The question of parent occupation is therefore asked to find out the occupational background of the parents.

*Table 4. Distribution of parent or guardians' occupation.*

Parent/guardian	Farming	Percentage	trading	Percentage	Driving	Percentage	Nursing	Percentage	Teaching	Percentage	Not working	Percentage	Total	Percentage
	Father	25	53	9	19	5	11	-	-	5	11	3	6	47
Mother	12	25	22	47	-	-	6	13	5	11	2	4	47	100
Guardians	20	43	15	32	7	10	1	2	2	4	2	4	47	100

Table 4 shows that 25 (53%) of the pupils' fathers were farmers. 9 (19%) were traders. 5 (11%) were drivers, teachers were 5 (11%) whilst 3 (6%) were not working at all. From the table, the dominating jobs in the community were farming, followed by trading and others. This showed clearly that parents normally asked their children to assist them at their work places during school hours. This behaviour by the parents

normally keeps their children away from school. Table 5 below shows the demographic data of parents.

*Table 5. Sex distribution of parent.*

Sex	Respondents	Percentage
Male	16	62
Female	10	38
<b>Total</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>100</b>

Provision of a pupil's basic needs is the responsibility of both parents. Hence the question of sex distribution to see if both sexes have been given equal chances to express their views. Also, whether both sexes were willing to respond to the researcher's questions was not known.

Table 5 reveals that 16 parents, representing 62 percent, were male, whilst the remaining 10, representing 38 percent, were female. The difference in sex distribution shows how the males were more willing to be interviewed than their female counterparts.

The inability of most parents to pay their children's school fees and other basic responsibilities has been attributed to a lack of employment opportunities. Table 6 shows the various occupations of the parents and those without jobs.

*Table 6. Occupation distribution of parents.*

Occupation	Respondents	Percentage
Farming	10	39
Trading	3	12
Teaching	2	8
Nursing	1	4
Driving	5	19
Not working	5	19
<b>Total</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>100</b>

From Table 6, 10 people, representing 39%, were farmers, and 3 of them, representing 12%, were traders. Only 2 (representing 8%) were teachers. There were five drivers, representing 19%. Only one respondent, representing 4%, was a nurse, whilst about five of them, representing 19%, were not working at all. This shows that most of the parents were farmers, drivers, and a few traders. Even the percentages of those who are not working were higher than those of government workers in the community. This proves that the occupational background of the parents is one of the causes of the pupils' absenteeism.

### **3.2. Analysis and Discussion of general Information on Absenteeism**

The study was aimed at investigating the cause of absenteeism and intervening with causes of absenteeism and finding possible solutions to it. Having analyzed the demographic data for the respondents, this section will deal with the analysis and discussion of general information gathered from the date. In quest of this fact, an attempt was made to answer the following research questions: Does pupils' absenteeism have any effect on pupils' academic performance? Students' non-attendance is also a major source of concern, as it contributes to their poor academic performance. Table 7 below shows the relationship between pupils' absence from school and their academic performance.

**Table 7.** *Distribution of pupils, school attendance on their academic performance.*

Description of item	Responses					
	Yes	(%)	No	(%)	Total	(%)
Are you always regular in school?	7	15	40	85	47	100
Would you say your absences have effect on your performance	42	89%	5	11%	47	100
Would the use of guidance and counseling help minimize the problem	45	90%	2	4%	47	100

Table 7 shows a summary of pupils' regularity at school. 7 out of 7, representing 15% of the pupils, said they were always regular at school. As many as 40, representing 85%, said they were not regular. Secondly, the item of whether pupils' absence from school has many effects on their academic performance indicated that 42 (89%) of the views that it has a negative effect on them. The remaining five (11%) said absenteeism had no effect on their academic performance. Others also view that guidance and counseling of absenteeism, which was 45 (96%), were on the view of yes, and the remaining 2 (44%) disagreed with that view. The data on table 7 obviously proved that pupils' absence from school had a negative effect on their academic performance and therefore something must be done about it. The study's findings were supported by previous studies that found truancy and absenteeism to be the root causes of poor student performance and attributed the zero percent results recorded in the 1999 BECE by pupils in Ahanta Adwokwa Agogo [7]. Absenteeism and truancy have been known to directly arise from certain adverse conditions in the home [8]. The home, according to Hurlock, is charged with basic needs. If, for any reason, this is not done, the child seeks approval elsewhere and does not find it necessary to go to school. The newsletter also points out that children assist their families in their businesses and farms during farming seasons and these are some of the causes of absenteeism [9]. Also, some parents withdraw their children from school to help with fishing, farming and other activities. Also, parents withdraw their children from school due to a lack of interest in the child's schooling. The reason the research question seeks to find out from parents is that to what extent have parents influenced their pupils' absenteeism?

**Table 8.** *Distribution of parents' influence on pupils' absenteeism.*

Description of item	Responses						Total	percentage
	Yes	percents	No	Percentage	Sometime	Percentage		
Do you provide your children with their basic needs	19	43	5	11	2	4	26	100
Are your children always in school	6	23	20	77	-	-	26	100

From Table 8, parents representing 73 percent responded "yes", which means they provided their children with their basic needs. 5 parents, representing 19 percent, responded "no". They do not provide basic needs for their children. About 2 of them, representing 8 percent, said that they provided their children with their basic needs sometimes but not always. The percentage difference between the two items proved that parents influenced their children's absenteeism. On the part of whether their

children were always in school, only 6 parents, representing 23 percent, responded yes. About 20, representing 77 percent, responded “No”. From Table 8, most of the parents did not care whether their wards went to school or not. This agreed with the points raised by the writers about parents’ influence on their pupils’ absenteeism. From Table 8, the parents needed to be careful about how they took their children to assist them at their workplace during school hours. The other used to further prove their question was to find out the other possible causes of why pupils absent themselves from school.

**Table 9.** *Distribution of other caused that lead to pupils’ absenteeism.*

Causes	Respondents	Percentage
Absent with permission	2	8
Absent without permission	4	15
No fees	12	46
Engages him/her on farm and business	8	31
<b>Total</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>100</b>

As to why pupils absent themselves from school, 2 parents, representing 8 percent, said that their children absent themselves from school with permission from the school authorities. 4 percent, or 15%, also stated that they had skipped school for no apparent reason. Twelve parents, or 46 percent of all parents, also stated that they were absent when they were driven away by school officials to collect their fees. They stayed at home until they were able to raise that amount. 8% said they employed them on their farms or in other businesses. These answers to the question buttressed the point that some parents engage their children to help in fishing, farming and other businesses at the expense of schooling [9,10]. Based on this, it can therefore be concluded from the data analyzed that pupils’ absenteeism from school was greatly influenced by parents. (Table 9).

#### 4. Conclusions and Recommendations

The study discovered that absenteeism has serious academic consequences for both students and teachers. The study also concluded that the inability of some parents to provide their children with their basic needs normally pushes them to engage in various forms of activities to raise money to fend for themselves. The economic background of the parents also contributes to the pupils' frequent absence, as well as their frequent absenteeism.

It is recommended that the District Assembly and the Traditional Council team up and pass a bye-law to retrain children out of school hours on trading during school hours on market days as well as other activities such as farming, film and video shows that are carried out at the expense of their schooling. It is also recommended that there is also a need to strengthen the school-community relationship to foster mutual co-operation. When this is done, the activities of the child could be monitored both at school and at home. Provisions should be made for recreational facilities to engage children during leisure hours in school. It is also recommended that teachers create a conducive atmosphere that will make the school environment very interesting and attractive to pupils. Teachers should also adopt an appropriate strategy to motivate pupils to take an interest in school rather than give them unnecessary punishment for being late or absent. Again, guidance and counseling at a basic level is often preventive and children’s problems are not as complex as those of adults, so it is easier to counsel them before they get out of hand. It is recommended that guidance

and counseling coordinators should therefore collaborate with teachers in basic schools for the purpose of counseling the pupils as well as parents and guardians.

### **Conflicts of Interest**

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

### **Implication for Counseling**

There is a need to intensify guidance and counseling programme most especially at the basic level of education.

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