

Navigating the Dynamics of Learner Absenteeism in South African Urban Secondary Schools: An In-Depth Management Analysis and Strategic Framework



Richard Moloele ¹  & Madikela T. Lekalakala ² 

¹ Sol Plaatje University, Scanlan Street, New Park, Kimberley, South Africa.

² University of South Africa.

ABSTRACT

Chronic absenteeism remains a persistent problem in South Africa's urban schools, with serious implications for learners' academic achievement and overall well-being. This paper thus looked at the scope, causes, and effects of chronic absenteeism in urban educational settings across South Africa, while also reviewing existing interventions and proposing strategies to address this issue. Data collection was conducted through a literature search, with an extensive search carried out using academic databases such as JSTOR, Google Scholar, PubMed, ERIC, and PsycINFO. Absenteeism in these schools presents a complex challenge, deeply affecting both educational outcomes and learner welfare. The results indicated that socio-economic factors, transportation difficulties, health issues, and the school climate are the main drivers of high absenteeism rates. Furthermore, chronic absenteeism is associated with lower academic performance, higher dropout rates, and long-term socio-economic disadvantages. The research emphasizes the need for comprehensive intervention strategies that tackle the root causes of absenteeism, such as community involvement, enhanced health services, and policy reforms to create more supportive school environments. The findings underscore the importance of a collaborative effort among educators, policymakers, and community stakeholders to reduce absenteeism and promote educational equity in urban schools.

Correspondence

Richard Moloele

Email:

richard.moloele@spu.ac.za

Publication History

Received:

16th August, 2024

Accepted:

15th November, 2024

Published online:

18th December, 2024

Keywords: *Absenteeism, Urban Schools, Learners, Education.*

INTRODUCTION

Absenteeism is an eyesore that urban schools in South Africa face and has emerged as a critical issue, posing significant challenges to the education system and the broader socio-economic landscape. Chronic absenteeism is a widespread challenge that undermines the effectiveness of urban schools in South Africa, posing serious risks to learners' academic success and long-term well-being. The learners' absence from school means a lot for their academic achievement. This issue is particularly critical in urban settings where socioeconomic disparities, high population densities, and strained resources converge to exacerbate the problem. Absenteeism, defined as missing a significant portion of school days, disrupts learners' learning processes, leading to gaps in knowledge and skills that can hinder future educational and career prospects. In South Africa, the impact of absenteeism is magnified by the complex interplay of socio-economic factors, including poverty, inadequate access to basic services, and environmental instability. Many urban schools are faced with heightened challenges such as overcrowded classrooms where more

than fifty learners are crammed in one classroom. Other issues related to absenteeism include safety concerns, and insufficient support systems, which contribute to higher rates of absenteeism compared to rural counterparts. The consequences of chronic absenteeism extend beyond individual academic performance, influencing broader societal issues such as increased dropout rates, reduced employment opportunities, and perpetuation of socio-economic inequalities.

This study will circle around causes of absenteeism in urban schools, and it will further suggest recommendations, which, when they can be adhered to, can turn the situation around. Addressing this multifaceted problem requires a comprehensive understanding of its root causes and effective strategies tailored to the unique needs of urban schools. This study aims to explore the scope and determinants of chronic absenteeism in South African urban schools, assess the effectiveness of current interventions, and propose a strategic framework to mitigate the problem. A desktop approach was employed to collect data for the study. Using a literature search in research is essential for several reasons. The methodological approach used for this study is a desktop one. It establishes context by providing background information and situating the study within the existing body of knowledge, which helps to identify gaps where further investigation is needed.¹ The databases used in this study include databases such as JSTOR, Google Scholar, PubMed, ERIC, and PsycINFO.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Chronic absenteeism is characterized by learners being absent for reasons that are not excused, and it has been identified as a widespread problem across the country.² Absenteeism is not a new phenomenon in the schooling landscape. It is as old as the institutions themselves. Hoag adds to this assertion and intimates that chronic absenteeism in education has been a persistent issue with a history deeply rooted in various social, economic, and educational factors.³ In recent years, there has been a noticeable increase in the number of learners frequently missing school, raising concerns among educators, policymakers, and parents alike. This trend has not been seen in the past; it is something that has started to mushroom in recent eras. This phenomenon not only hampers individual academic progress but also undermines efforts to achieve equitable and quality education for all.

Learner absenteeism can have a critical impact on academic performance.⁴ Chronic absenteeism can also place a burden on both the learner and the teacher to try to "catch up" or address the missed concepts and skills. Learners who miss more days of school demonstrate lower academic performance and feel more alienated.⁵ Absent learners also generally are reported to have more distress in their lives.⁶ Consistent school attendance is crucial for a learner's education and the development of their social skills. When learners miss school, they are at a disadvantage both socially and academically. Attendance is

¹ N. Tran and S. Gershenson, "Class Size and Chronic Absenteeism: A Comprehensive Study," *Educational Research Quarterly* 44, no. 1 (2021): 50–67.

² Lauren Gase et al., "Youths' Perspectives on the Reasons Underlying School Truancy and Opportunities to Improve School Attendance," *The Qualitative Report*, February 15, 2016, <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2016.2231>; Kirsten J. Hancock et al., "Associations between School Absence and Academic Achievement: Do Socioeconomics Matter?," *British Educational Research Journal* 43, no. 3 (June 16, 2017): 415–40, <https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3267>.

³ Arlee M Hoag, "Chronic Absenteeism: Exploring Causes, Impacts, and Interventions in Education," 2023.

⁴ Christina Quinn, "Improving the Daily Student Attendance Rate at an Inner-City Public School," 2022.

⁵ John Q Easton and George Engelhard Jr, "A Longitudinal Record of Elementary School Absence and Its Relationship to Reading Achievement," *The Journal of Educational Research* 75, no. 5 (1982): 269–74; Seth Gershenson, Alison Jackowitz, and Andrew Brannegan, "Are Student Absences Worth the Worry in US Primary Schools?," *Education Finance and Policy* 12, no. 2 (2017): 137–65; Joshua Goodman, "Flaking out: Student Absences and Snow Days as Disruptions of Instructional Time" (National Bureau of Economic Research, 2014); Sheniz Moonie et al., "The Relationship between School Absence, Academic Performance, and Asthma Status," *Journal of School Health* 78, no. 3 (2008): 140–48; Arya Ansari and Michael A Gottfried, "Early Childhood Educational Settings and School Absenteeism for Children with Disabilities," *AERA Open* 4, no. 2 (2018): 2332858418785576. M. A. Gottfried, "Excused versus unexcused: How student absences in elementary school affect academic achievement." *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 31(4), (2009): 392-415; M.A. Gottfried, "Evaluating the relationship between student attendance and achievement in urban elementary and middle schools: An instrumental variables approach." *American Educational Research Journal*, 47(2), (2010): 434-465; M.A. Gottfried, "The detrimental effects of missing school: Evidence from urban siblings." *American Journal of Education*, 117(2), (2011): 147-182; M.A. Gottfried, "Chronic absenteeism and its effects on students' academic and socioemotional outcomes." *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk (JESPAR)*, 19(2), (2014): 53-75.

⁶ Katie Finning et al., "The Association between Anxiety and Poor Attendance at School—a Systematic Review," *Child and Adolescent Mental Health* 24, no. 3 (2019): 205–16; Ansari and Gottfried, "Early Childhood Educational Settings and School Absenteeism for Children with Disabilities."

directly connected to academic success.⁷ Absenteeism should be nipped in the bud before it gets worse. Addressing chronic absenteeism is vital for giving every learner an equal opportunity to succeed academically, supporting societal well-being, and disrupting educational disparities. It is a key factor in creating a more inclusive, equitable, and thriving society.

Regular attendance is closely linked to academic achievement. Hunt highlights how absenteeism disrupts the learning process by creating gaps in a learner's education.⁸ As absences accumulate, it becomes increasingly difficult for learners to fully engage with and comprehend classroom activities, which can negatively impact their overall learning experience. They miss important opportunities to interact with their peers and progress academically, which can hinder their success. This absence can lead to lower self-esteem, social isolation, and dissatisfaction, which in turn can contribute to further absenteeism.⁹ Understanding the underlying causes and implications of absenteeism is essential to develop effective strategies to address this pervasive problem.

Absenteeism refers to regular or intentional absence from work. This can be due to various reasons such as illness, family responsibilities, vacations, personal issues, or job dissatisfaction. Absenteeism negatively affects both the individual and the company by reducing productivity and increasing labour costs. Several strategies can help reduce absenteeism in an institution, including fostering a company culture that values attendance, providing flexible work options, and supporting employees who face challenges. By addressing absenteeism, companies can enhance the work environment and boost employee morale. The same applies to schools in urban areas. Learners will not miss out on important information disseminated when the teaching period starts.

The factors contributing to absenteeism in South African urban schools are multifaceted, encompassing socio-economic, environmental, and institutional dimensions. High levels of poverty, inadequate access to basic amenities, and unsafe school environments are some of the primary drivers that cause this worrying matter.¹⁰ Additionally, other factors such as family instability, health issues, poor and inadequate parental involvement in the school affairs of their children, and the lack of engagement and support within the school system further exacerbate the problem.¹¹ The impact of these factors is often more pronounced in urban areas, where schools face overcrowding, limited resources, and heightened exposure to crime and violence.¹² Each of these factors interacts in complex ways, creating a vicious cycle that perpetuates educational disadvantage and social inequality.

The impact of absenteeism extends beyond the classroom, affecting learners' future opportunities and the broader community. Chronic absenteeism is associated with lower academic performance, higher dropout rates, and reduced chances of higher education and employment, which in turn contribute to a cycle of poverty and social exclusion, ultimately impeding national development. Tackling absenteeism necessitates a comprehensive and collaborative approach involving various stakeholders, such as government agencies, non-governmental organizations, communities, and schools. Key initiatives include improving school infrastructure, providing social and psychological support, and involving parents and communities in the educational process. Additionally, effective policy implementation, along with ongoing monitoring and evaluation, is essential to ensure interventions are both impactful and sustainable. By examining absenteeism in urban South African schools, this study seeks to highlight the seriousness of the issue and advocate for comprehensive solutions that can lead to a more inclusive and resilient education system.

Beyond socio-economic factors, cultural and systemic issues also contribute to absenteeism. Traditional views on education, particularly in marginalized communities, can affect school attendance. Additionally, systemic problems, such as inadequate teacher training, insufficient school funding, and lack of accountability within the education system, create an environment where absenteeism can persist. To

⁷ Hoag, "Chronic Absenteeism: Exploring Causes, Impacts, and Interventions in Education."

⁸ Frances Hunt, "Schooling Citizens: A Study of Policy in Practice in South African Schools" (University of Sussex, 2007).

⁹ G Bond, "Tackling Student Absenteeism: Research Findings and Recommendations for School and Local Communities," *Report Written for Hume/Whittlesea LLEN and Inner Northern LLEN (Copy of This Report Is Available from the Authors)*, 2004.

¹⁰ Nicholas Spaul, "South Africa's Education Crisis: The Quality of Education in South Africa 1994-2011," *Johannesburg: Centre for Development and Enterprise* 21, no. 1 (2013): 1-65.

¹¹ S. Motala and V. Dieltiens, *Educational access in South Africa: Achievements and challenges*. In Chisholm, L. (Ed.), *South African education: The journey in progress*. (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2010).

¹² S. Van der Berg and M. Gustafsson, "School Dropout in South Africa: Evidence from the General Household Survey," 2020.

effectively combat absenteeism, efforts must also address these cultural and systemic barriers, fostering a culture of attendance and accountability at all levels of the education system. By integrating these various factors into a unified strategy, it is possible to create a more supportive and effective educational environment that promotes regular attendance and academic success for all learners. Chronic absenteeism, defined as missing 10% or more of school days in a year, is a significant issue in urban South African schools, undermining educational outcomes and perpetuating socio-economic inequalities. This paper thus aims to explore the extent of chronic absenteeism, identify its root causes, and propose effective solutions to address the issue. Research shows that chronic absenteeism is widespread in many urban regions of South Africa. The Department of Basic Education (DBE) reports that absenteeism rates in urban schools are notably higher than those in rural areas. This difference is largely due to various socio-economic challenges specific to urban environments. For instance, the DBE's 2022 Annual Report revealed that absenteeism rates in some urban schools reached as high as 20%, compared to a national average of 10%.¹³ Urban schools often grapple with overcrowding, insufficient funding, and inadequate resources, which further contribute to the issue of absence.

Bell et al. point out that truancy is linked to risky behaviours such as sexual promiscuity, substance abuse, and eventually dropping out of school.¹⁴ Teasley suggests that skipping school may be one of the earliest indicators of a pattern of antisocial behaviour that can result in negative personal and developmental outcomes.¹⁵ Additionally, truancy is influenced by factors such as a lack of community support, an unsupportive school environment, chaotic family life, adverse weather conditions, transportation issues, personal challenges, and poor health. Learners in urban areas face numerous difficulties. With the rise in childhood poverty nationwide, truancy rates have surged to unprecedented levels.¹⁶

Family dynamics further impact attendance. Parental involvement and family responsibilities, such as taking care of younger siblings, can lead to frequent cases of absence. In many cases, parents themselves may not value education highly due to their own educational experiences, leading to a lack of encouragement for their children to attend school regularly. Health issues are another major factor; chronic illnesses, mental health issues, and inadequate healthcare services contribute to absenteeism. Urban areas often face higher rates of infectious diseases and lack sufficient healthcare infrastructure to address these issues adequately. Lastly, transportation can be a significant barrier. Inadequate and unreliable public transportation can hinder learners' ability to attend school regularly, particularly in sprawling urban areas where learners may live far from their schools. The socio-economic backgrounds of the learners influence the rate at which they are absent from school. Quinn echoes the same sentiments when alluding that learners were more likely to be chronically absent if they were economically disadvantaged.¹⁷

Epstein and Sheldon argue that to effectively prevent and address significant attendance issues, schools must restructure their organization, enhance the quality of their courses, and strengthen the relationships between learners and teachers.¹⁸ Chronic absenteeism has far-reaching consequences. Academically, learners who are frequently absent are more likely to fall behind, leading to lower test scores and higher dropout rates. The DBE has linked a 15% decrease in academic performance in standardized tests to chronic absenteeism. Socially, absenteeism affects learners' social interactions and development, leading to feelings of isolation and an increased risk of engaging in risky behaviours. Learners who are frequently absent miss out on critical social learning opportunities and are more likely to engage in activities such as substance abuse or delinquency. Economically, in the long term, chronic absenteeism can lead to lower educational attainment, reduced employment opportunities, and perpetuation of the cycle of poverty. Individuals with lower educational attainment are more likely to be unemployed or underemployed, perpetuating socio-economic disparities across generations.

¹³ Department of Basic Education. *Annual Report 2021/2022*. (Pretoria: Department of Basic Education, 2022).

¹⁴ Allison J Bell, Lee A Rosén, and Dionne Dynlacht, "Truancy Intervention.," *Journal of Research & Development in Education*, 1994.

¹⁵ M. L. Teasley, "Absenteeism and truancy: Risk, protection, and best practice implications for school social workers." *Children & Schools*, 26(2), (2004); 117-128.

¹⁶ Karen Dupre Jacobs and William Allan Kritsonis, "An Analysis of Teacher and Student Absenteeism in Urban Schools: What the Research Says and Recommendations for Educational Leaders.," *The Lamar University Electronic Journal of Student Research* Fall, 2007.

¹⁷ Quinn, "Improving the Daily Student Attendance Rate at an Inner-City Public School."

¹⁸ Joyce L Epstein and Steven B Sheldon, "Present and Accounted for: Improving Student Attendance through Family and Community Involvement," *The Journal of Educational Research* 95, no. 5 (2002): 308-18.

Socioeconomic factors, such as the inability to afford school fees, food insecurity, geographical challenges, child labour, lack of transportation, the impact of HIV and AIDS, teenage pregnancy, and the absence of sanitary products for female learners, all contribute to learner absenteeism. Kelly highlights a discrepancy between the South African Policy on Learner Attendance,¹⁹ which mandates that parents and guardians ensure their children attend school daily, and the reality of insufficient parental involvement in their children's schooling.²⁰ According to Kelly, parents often do not participate in their children's educational matters.²¹ Socio-economic factors represent the second major reason for learner absenteeism, particularly prevalent in impoverished communities. Railsback highlights that inadequate parental involvement in a child's education negatively impacts both their academic performance and school attendance.²² Similarly, Malcolm et al. suggest a connection between the involvement of parents or caregivers in a learner's education and their school attendance.²³

METHODOLOGY

This study used the desktop approach. It used a qualitative research design to investigate issues related to absenteeism and how school administrators address these challenges. The research involved a systematic review of the existing literature, drawing on books and peer-reviewed journal articles. Data collection was conducted through a literature search, with an extensive search carried out using academic databases such as JSTOR, Google Scholar, PubMed, ERIC, and PsycINFO. Using a literature search in research is essential for several reasons. It establishes context by providing background information and situating the study within the existing body of knowledge, which helps to identify gaps where further investigation is needed.²⁴ This process prevents duplication of efforts by ensuring that the research is original and contributes new insights to the field.²⁵ The study used a desktop approach and conducted data collection through a literature search using academic databases at the beginning of 2024, which took several weeks to complete.

Adding to this, a thorough review of literature informs the selection of appropriate methodologies and supports arguments with evidence, enhancing the overall credibility of the research.²⁶ Finally, engaging with existing studies helps develop a solid theoretical framework and can lead to networking opportunities with other researchers.²⁷ Keywords like "chronic absenteeism," "academic achievement," "learner engagement," "school dropout," "educational outcomes," and "interventions" were instrumental in facilitating the search process. To ensure the study reflected the most recent findings, only sources published within the last fifteen years were considered. Articles had to be peer-reviewed, and books had to be from reputable academic publishers. Relevance was determined by screening titles and abstracts, and full texts were obtained for articles that passed the initial screening. The study's limitation was the scope of the literature reviewed, as only sources in English and accessible through the selected databases were included.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Current interventions include after-school programs, health and wellness initiatives, and parental engagement programs. However, these interventions are often underfunded and lack scalability. For example, while after-school programs can provide a safe and supportive environment for learners, many schools lack the resources to sustain these programs. Health and wellness initiatives are crucial but often do not reach all learners who need them. Parental engagement programs show promise but require significant effort to change long-standing attitudes toward education. Overcrowding in classrooms is a

¹⁹ Department of Basic Education. *Policy on learner attendance*. (Pretoria: Department of Basic Education, 2010).

²⁰ K.S. Kelly, *Chronic Learner Absenteeism* (Urbana, Illinois, 2013).

²¹ Kelly, *Chronic Learner Absenteeism*.

²² J. Railsback, *Increasing student attendance: Strategies from research and practice*. (Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 2004).

²³ H. Malcolm, *Absence from school: A study of its causes and effects in seven LEAs. Research Report RR424*. (London: Department for Education and Skills, 2003).

²⁴ Tran and Gershenson, "Class Size and Chronic Absenteeism: A Comprehensive Study."

²⁵ J. Smith and A. Johnson, "Impact of Class Size on Student Engagement and Absenteeism," *Journal of Educational Psychology* 60, no. 3 (2022): 345–59.

²⁶ M. Harris and L. Roberts, "The Future of Renewable Energy," *Energy Perspectives* 33, no. 3 (2021): 78–89.

²⁷ L. Buche, "Innovations in Educational Research," *Journal of Modern Education* 50, no. 2 (2024): 112–24.

prominent cause of absenteeism in urban schools. When learners are crammed into small spaces, they become uncomfortable and may not concentrate on the lessons. They will choose not to go to school because the spaces they use for their learning are not welcoming and conducive to teaching and learning processes.

The research has shown that learning spaces are not safe, and learners feel unsafe at school. There are traces of bullying that promote absenteeism. No learner will thrive in an environment that threatens their well-being. When faced with all these life-threatening circumstances, they will subsequently skip school and end up ditching it altogether. Schools are perceived as havens for children and if they (schools) do not provide safety to the children they are likely to resort to absenting themselves from school. Commuting to school daily must be a safe undertaking. The expectation is that the transport the learners use daily is at times not reliable and on time. When dealing with learner absenteeism in urban schools, several key findings often emerge. **Socioeconomic factors** play a significant role in issues about absenteeism. Learners coming from low-income families may struggle with unreliable transportation, lack of essential resources, or the need to contribute financially to their households. They struggle to reach school and end up skipping school. Oftentimes, these challenges can lead to frequent learner absences. Understanding the socioeconomic background of learners allows schools to tailor support programs and interventions more effectively. The above challenges can lead to frequent absences.²⁸ Understanding the socioeconomic background of learners allows schools to tailor support programs and interventions more effectively.²⁹

The other finding is that family dynamics also impact attendance. Urban areas feature a diverse range of family structures, including single-parent households and unstable family environments, which can affect a learner's regularity in attending school.³⁰ Schools may need to engage more closely with families and provide additional support services to address these issues and promote better attendance.³¹ **Urban learners have been found to** face health-related issues more frequently due to environmental factors or limited access to healthcare services.³² Implementing health programs and ensuring access to medical care can help mitigate the impact of health problems on learner attendance.³³ Healthy children will have the energy to go to school. In addition to this, **safety concerns** such as crime or violence in the neighbourhood can deter learners from attending school.³⁴ Collaborating with community organizations to improve safety measures and create a more secure learning environment can help address this issue.³⁵ By leveraging local resources and expertise, schools can implement targeted interventions that address specific safety concerns within the community. This partnership also fosters a supportive network around learners, which can contribute to a more stable and positive school experience, ultimately reducing absenteeism related to safety issues.

The climate at school and learner engagement are crucial in reducing absenteeism. Schools that foster a positive climate, offer engaging curricula and provide support services are often more successful in maintaining regular attendance.³⁶ Initiatives like mentorship programs, after-school activities, and personalized learning plans can enhance learner engagement and attendance.³⁷ Lastly, addressing **transportation issues** and **cultural and linguistic barriers** can also contribute to reducing absenteeism. The transport of children to school must be reliable and on time. Learners would not want to be scorned by teachers and management at school for arriving late. When late-coming persists, they will end up

²⁸ A. J. Bowers, "Does Improving Student Attendance Improve Student Achievement?," *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 32, no. 1 (2010): 84–99.

²⁹ G. W. Ladd and L. M. Dinella, "Children's Peer Relations and Social Competence: A Decade of Progress," in *Handbook of Child Psychology, Social, Emotional, and Personality Development*, 6th ed., vol. 3 (Wiley, 2009), 740–88.

³⁰ R. Crosnoe, "Family Dynamics, Socioeconomic Status, and Academic Achievement," *Annual Review of Sociology* 35 (2009): 241–62.

³¹ Epstein and Sheldon, "Present and Accounted for: Improving Student Attendance through Family and Community Involvement."

³² N. Freudenberg, and J. Ruglis, "Reframing school dropout as a public health issue." *Preventing Chronic Disease*, 4(2), (2011); A107.

³³ M. Weitzman and B. Zuckerman, "Health Disparities and School Performance," *Journal of School Health* 74, no. 9 (2004): 315–21.

³⁴ T. Brezina, "The Effects of Community Violence on Students' School Engagement and Academic Achievement," *Journal of Educational Psychology* 105, no. 3 (2013): 724–40.

³⁵ S. Smith and R. Perkins, "Community Violence and Its Impact on Student achievement and Engagement," . . . *Journal of Educational National and Psychological Studies* 10, no. 2 (2013): 120–38.

³⁶ Sara Battin-Pearson et al., "Predictors of Early High School Dropout: A Test of Five Theories.," *Journal of Educational Psychology* 92, no. 3 (2000): 568.

³⁷ Jennifer A Fredricks, Phyllis C Blumenfeld, and Alison H Paris, "School Engagement: Potential of the Concept, State of the Evidence," *Review of Educational Research* 74, no. 1 (2004): 59–109.

choosing to stay away from school. Reliable transportation options and support for diverse cultural and linguistic needs are essential for improving learner attendance in urban settings.³⁸ Learners prefer reliable transport. If they get stuck on the road, it discourages them, and this may lead to absenteeism in the long run.

Teachers should be combat-ready and vigilant in identifying vulnerable learners who come from unstable family backgrounds, have experienced abuse, are pregnant, or are involved in child labour. By recognizing these signs early in learners, educators can address issues like absenteeism before they become more significant problems. Schools should integrate support services by employing social workers, nurses, and police officers to handle issues such as child abuse, teenage pregnancy, and child labour. Campaigns such as 'Adopt a Cop' can be useful to address the problems early by nipping them in the bud before they turn into learner chronic absenteeism. Teachers may not have the specialized training required to manage these complex problems effectively, so these additional professionals can provide essential assistance and intervention. Also, if they cannot handle cases themselves, they can refer the learners to professional help. In addition, prioritizing sex education is crucial for raising awareness among learners about the risks of early pregnancy and the importance of safe sex practices. This education can help prevent teenage pregnancies and associated issues, ultimately reducing absenteeism and improving overall learner well-being.

Another significant factor contributing to absenteeism is overcrowding in classrooms. Learners are less motivated to attend when they feel cramped and uncomfortable. Tran and Gershenson found that larger class sizes are strongly associated with increased rates of chronic absenteeism.³⁹ Reducing the number of learners per class by approximately 10 can substantially decrease absenteeism rates. Smaller class sizes improve learners' concentration and participation, while larger classes can lead to disengagement, with some learners slipping through the cracks. Research by Smith and Johnson supports the notion that manageable class sizes foster a more effective learning environment, enhancing learner engagement and reducing absenteeism.⁴⁰

The framework, which is based on a thorough review of the literature, identifies important factors that affect absenteeism, including learner motivation, school climate, parental involvement, and socioeconomic challenges. It highlights the necessity of a proactive management approach that incorporates strong tracking systems, early detection of students at risk, and the provision of psychosocial support. Through the integration of these components, the framework seeks to establish a nurturing educational setting that promotes regular student attendance and increased community involvement. To combat absenteeism, the framework also suggests strategic interventions at the school and policy levels. These include putting in place explicit attendance policies, giving teachers professional development on early warning indicators, and strengthening school leadership's ability to effectively address absenteeism. It also suggests collaborations with social services and community stakeholders to address outside variables that affect student attendance. The framework aims to close the gaps in current interventions and develop long-term solutions to reduce absenteeism in South African urban schools through a cooperative and context-sensitive approach. The ultimate goal of this strategic, all-encompassing framework is to align policy, community efforts, and school initiatives into alignment in order to develop a long-term viable solution to absenteeism in urban South African schools.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Comprehensive Support Programs should be developed to provide resources and assistance to learners from low-income families. The programs would provide subsidies for learner transport, school supplies, and after-school care. This would mitigate the socioeconomic barriers that contribute to absenteeism.
- Schools should make use of support services by employing social workers, nurses, and police officers mainly to handle issues such as child abuse, teenage pregnancy, and child labour.

³⁸ A. Sullivan, "The Role of Transportation in Student Attendance and Academic Success," *Educational Researcher* 40, no. 5 (2011): 230–39.

³⁹ Tran and Gershenson, "Class Size and Chronic Absenteeism: A Comprehensive Study."

⁴⁰ Smith and Johnson, "Impact of Class Size on Student Engagement and Absenteeism."

- Communication lines should be opened between schools and parents or guardians so that chronic absenteeism can be addressed at an early stage.
- Child headed families should be given support.
- There is a need for the provision of on-site health services to offer regular health check-ups and support to children in dire need of help. Measures should be taken to ensure that learners have access to necessary medical care and mental health resources to address health-related absences.
- Traces of bullying at school must be reported and dealt with as a matter of urgency as bullying is one of the causes of absenteeism.
- Community organizations and local law enforcement agencies should be strengthened to enhance safety measures around schools.
- The relationship between teachers and learners must be cordial to nourish the love and passion children have for school. A supportive and engaging school environment gives rise to regular attendance.
- Provide language support services and culturally responsive teaching to meet the needs of diverse learner populations. This helps learners feel more included and engaged, reducing absenteeism due to cultural or language barriers.
- There should be a system that tracks and analyses absenteeism data to identify patterns and deal with the root causes of absenteeism.

CONCLUSION

Chronic absenteeism in urban South African schools represents a significant challenge with wide-reaching consequences for educational outcomes and learner well-being. The study revealed that socio-economic factors, family dynamics, health issues, and school environment play pivotal roles in driving absenteeism. Urban schools face unique pressures, such as overcrowding, overburdened resources, and safety concerns, which exacerbate the problem. In a bid to address these issues, it requires a multi-faceted approach that involves collaboration between educators, policymakers, and community stakeholders. Comprehensive interventions, including support programs, enhanced safety measures, and improved health services, are crucial for mitigating the root causes of absenteeism. To effectively combat absenteeism, it is essential to implement and sustain strategies that address both immediate and underlying factors. Recommendations such as strengthening family engagement, fostering a positive school climate, and addressing transportation and cultural barriers are vital to creating a supportive educational environment. By adopting these recommendations and maintaining a focus on collaborative efforts, urban schools can work toward reducing absenteeism, improving learner outcomes, and promoting educational equity. This holistic approach not only addresses the symptoms of absenteeism but also tackles its root causes, paving the way for a more inclusive and effective education system in South Africa's urban areas.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Ansari, Arya, and Michael A Gottfried. "Early Childhood Educational Settings and School Absenteeism for Children with Disabilities." *AERA Open* 4, no. 2 (2018): 2332858418785576.
- Battin-Pearson, Sara, Michael D Newcomb, Robert D Abbott, Karl G Hill, Richard F Catalano, and J David Hawkins. "Predictors of Early High School Dropout: A Test of Five Theories." *Journal of Educational Psychology* 92, no. 3 (2000): 568.
- Bell, Allison J, Lee A Rosén, and Dionne Dynlacht. "Truancy Intervention." *Journal of Research & Development in Education*, 1994.
- Berg, S. Van der, and M. Gustafsson. "School Dropout in South Africa: Evidence from the General Household Survey," 2020.
- Bond, G. "Tackling Student Absenteeism: Research Findings and Recommendations for School and Local Communities." *Report Written for Hume/Whittlesea LLEN and Inner Northern LLEN (Copy of This Report Is Available from the Authors)*, 2004.
- Bowers, A. J. "Does Improving Student Attendance Improve Student Achievement? ." *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 32, no. 1 (2010): 84–99.

- Brezina, T. "The Effects of Community Violence on Students' School Engagement and Academic Achievement." *Journal of Educational Psychology* 105, no.3 (2013): 724–40.
- Buche, L. "Innovations in Educational Research." *Journal of Modern Education* 50, no. 2 (2024): 112–24.
- Crosnoe, R. "Family Dynamics, Socioeconomic Status, and Academic Achievement." *Annual Review of Sociology* 35 (2009): 241–62.
- Department of Basic Education. *Annual Report 2021/2022*. Pretoria: Department of Basic Education. (2022).
- Department of Basic Education. *Policy on learner attendance*. Pretoria: Department of Basic Education. 2010.
- Easton, John Q, and George Engelhard Jr. "A Longitudinal Record of Elementary School Absence and Its Relationship to Reading Achievement." *The Journal of Educational Research* 75, no.5(1982):269–74.
- Epstein, Joyce L, and Steven B Sheldon. "Present and Accounted for: Improving Student Attendance through Family and Community Involvement." *The Journal of Educational Research* 95, no. 5 (2002): 308–18.
- Finning, Katie, Obioha C Ukoumunne, Tamsin Ford, Emilia Danielson-Waters, Liz Shaw, Ingrid Romero De Jager, Lauren Stentiford, and Darren A Moore. "The Association between Anxiety and Poor Attendance at School—a Systematic Review." *Child and Adolescent Mental Health* 24, no. 3 (2019): 205–16.
- Fredricks, Jennifer A, Phyllis C Blumenfeld, and Alison H Paris. "School Engagement: Potential of the Concept, State of the Evidence." *Review of Educational Research* 74, no. 1 (2004): 59–109.
- Freudenberg, N., & Ruglis, J. "Reframing school dropout as a public health issue." *Preventing Chronic Disease*, 4(2), (2011); A107.
- Gase, Lauren, Amelia DeFosset, Raymond Perry, and Tony Kuo. "Youths' Perspectives on the Reasons Underlying School Truancy and Opportunities to Improve School Attendance." *The Qualitative Report*, February 15, 2016. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2016.2231>.
- Gershenson, Seth, Alison Jackowitz, and Andrew Brannegan. "Are Student Absences Worth the Worry in US Primary Schools?" *Education Finance and Policy* 12, no. 2 (2017): 137–65.
- Goodman, Joshua. "Flaking out: Student Absences and Snow Days as Disruptions of Instructional Time." National Bureau of Economic Research, 2014.
- Gottfried, M. A. "Chronic absenteeism and its effects on students' academic and socioemotional outcomes." *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk (JESPAR)*, 19(2), (2014): 53-75.
- Gottfried, M. A. "Excused versus unexcused: How student absences in elementary school affect academic achievement." *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 31(4), (2009); 392-415.
- Gottfried, M. A. "Evaluating the relationship between student attendance and achievement in urban elementary and middle schools: An instrumental variables approach." *American Educational Research Journal*, 47(2), (2010); 434-465.
- Gottfried, M. A. "The detrimental effects of missing school: Evidence from urban siblings." *American Journal of Education*, 117(2), (2011); 147-182.
- Hancock, Kirsten J., David Lawrence, Carrington C. J. Shepherd, Francis Mitrou, and Stephen R. Zubrick. "Associations between School Absence and Academic Achievement: Do Socioeconomics Matter?" *British Educational Research Journal* 43, no. 3 (June 16, 2017): 415–40. <https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3267>.
- Harris, M., and L. Roberts. "The Future of Renewable Energy." *Energy Perspectives* 33, no. 3 (2021): 78–89.
- Hoag, Arlee M. "Chronic Absenteeism: Exploring Causes, Impacts, and Interventions in Education," 2023.
- Hunt, Frances. "Schooling Citizens: A Study of Policy in Practice in South African Schools." University of Sussex, 2007.
- Jacobs, Karen Dupre, and William Allan Kritsonis. "An Analysis of Teacher and Student Absenteeism in Urban Schools: What the Research Says and Recommendations for Educational Leaders." *The Lamar University Electronic Journal of Student Research Fall*, 2007.

- Kelly, K.S. *Chronic Learner Absenteeism*. Urbana. Illinois, 2013.
- Ladd, G. W., and L. M. Dinella. “Children’s Peer Relations and Social Competence: A Decade of Progress.” In *Handbook of Child Psychology, Social, Emotional, and Personality Development*, 6th ed., 3:740–88. Wiley, 2009.
- Malcolm, H. *Absence from school: A study of its causes and effects in seven LEAs*. Research Report RR424. London: Department for Education and Skills. 2003.
- Moonie, Sheniz, David A Sterling, Larry W Figgs, and Mario Castro. “The Relationship between School Absence, Academic Performance, and Asthma Status.” *Journal of School Health* 78, no. 3 (2008): 140–48.
- Motala, S., and Dieltiens, V. *Educational access in South Africa: Achievements and challenges*. In Chisholm, L. (Ed.), *South African education: The journey in progress*. Cape Town: HSRC Press. 2010.
- Quinn, Christina. “Improving the Daily Student Attendance Rate at an Inner-City Public School,” 2022.
- Railsback, J. *Increasing student attendance: Strategies from research and practice*. Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. 2004.
- Smith, J., and A. Johnson. “Impact of Class Size on Student Engagement and Absenteeism.” *Journal of Educational Psychology* 60, no. 3 (2022): 345–59.
- Smith, S., and R. Perkins. “Community Violence and Its Impact on Student achievement and Engagement,” *Journal of Educational National and Psychological Studies* 10, no.2(2013):120–38.
- Spaull, Nicholas. “South Africa’s Education Crisis: The Quality of Education in South Africa 1994-2011.” *Johannesburg: Centre for Development and Enterprise* 21,no.1(2013):1–65.
- Sullivan, A. “The Role of Transportation in Student Attendance and Academic Success.” *Educational Researcher* 40, no. 5 (2011): 230–39.
- Teasley, M. L. “Absenteeism and truancy: Risk, protection, and best practice implications for school social workers.” *Children & Schools*, 26(2), (2004); 117-128.
- Tran, N., and S. Gershenson. “Class Size and Chronic Absenteeism: A Comprehensive Study.” *Educational Research Quarterly* 44, no. 1 (2021): 50–67.
- Weitzman, M., and B. Zuckerman. “Health Disparities and School Performance.” *Journal of School Health* 74, no. 9 (2004): 315–21.

ABOUT AUTHORS

Dr RL Moloele is a lecturer at Sol Plaatje University in Kimberley. He is an allrounder who was a teacher, a principal, a circuit Manager in North West Department of Education. He holds various qualifications both in Education and Public Management. His research interests include education in broad, Education Policy and Management, Public Management and Languages. He chairs Community Engagement Committee at Faculty of Education and has been instrumental in the development of many modules at this university.

Dr. MT Lekalakala, a Senior Lecturer at the University of South Africa, specialises in educational leadership and management. His research interests include school violence, financial management, education law, and teacher development. As a member of academic bodies like NADEOSA and SACE, he engages in national and international research initiatives. He contributes to DELM's governance through roles in the Research and Innovation Committee and Higher Degree Committee. Additionally, Dr. Lekalakala develops modules, mentors colleagues, and collaborates on educational projects to improve South Africa's basic education outcomes.