

**CAUSES OF STUDENT ABSENTEEISM: A SURVEY OF FOUR LOBATSE
JUNIOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN BOTSWANA**

**A Research Project Presented to the Faculty of Education
University of Botswana in partial fulfilment for the requirements of the degree of
MASTER OF EDUCATION**

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DEDICATIONS

This piece of work is dedicated to my Dad, the late Mr. Anthony Kefithile Masogo, who was affectionately known as 'Find The Ball'. I know how proud of me you would have been, when you got to see this. I miss that hearty laugh of yours.

May your soul rest in eternal peace Monkey!

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ABSTRACT

The more absences a student accumulates, the less he or she can be expected to adequately partake in and comprehend classroom activities. It is apparent that high rates of student absenteeism are a problem that extends much further than the school. When asked for reasons behind it, the students normally give reasons that would be plausible and be taken as the truth by those in authority. Nevertheless the purpose of the research essay was to establish the causes of absenteeism in Junior Secondary School students in Lobatse. The sample included 120 Junior Secondary School students in the age range 12 to 18, from four secondary schools, Guidance and Counselling teachers, Heads of Departments, Deputy School Heads and School Heads.

A survey research design was used as the operational framework, where data was gathered through questionnaires given to students and to the teaching authorities in lower ranks and oral interviews conducted with the School Heads and their deputies. Data analysis involved the use of descriptive and inferential statistics. The findings revealed that the teachers had considerable knowledge of the characteristics of students who habitually absented themselves as well as the reasons behind the behaviour since they dealt directly with the respondents. The officers in high posts tackle the issue from a managerial level and normally delegate lower ranking teachers to deal with the problems of absenteeism. The age and gender of the students did not in any way reveal any correlation with absenteeism, nor did the use of drugs like alcohol and tobacco, but the students cited trouble at home as the major cause for their absenteeism. This research essay contributes to our understanding of the influence of different social factors towards student absenteeism and would better the authorities' address of unscheduled absences. The study recommends that school authorities should enforce policies on absenteeism and make thorough awareness of the repercussions of absenteeism, to both the students and their parents or guardians.

Approved by:

Supervisor

Chapter 1

1.0 Background information

1.1 Introduction

It is an assumption that all public schools strive for a common goal, provided that they are in the same country and they are catered for in a similar manner by the national government. That common goal is to produce students of a high calibre and to have outstanding academic results. Educational institutions are therefore supposed to mould the students, to cultivate in them a sense of ownership of their learning in order to yield better results. Lefrancois (2000) augments this by saying that the great purpose of the school is to develop decent, worthwhile citizens. However, the practicality and the outcome are not as expected. As there is always a preamble to the ultimate result, there are serious underlying discrepancies that make the differences in achievement of this common goal. The calibres of students who come in from feeder primary schools as well as the type of leadership that manages the school create these differences.

Students often display defiant behaviour. This behaviour has made me develop keen interest on it and hence the intention to find out what the core of the problem is. From discussions with teachers in different schools as well as my own observations, I gathered in particular that there is extensive absenteeism amongst students in Botswana. This is done by skipping some lessons during the day, skipping a whole day or not showing up at school for several days. This problem dilutes the role of teaching since one cannot teach those who are absent. When students are absent from school, arrive late, or cut class, they reduce their opportunities to learn and miss on critical content planned for the time. Absences are also highest in the earliest years of school most critical for developing foundational skills like reading (California Department of Justice, 2014). This is further emphasised by Taylor and Ryan (2005) that regular attendance at school is essential if pupils are to learn and keep up with lessons. Absenteeism is a concern as it leads to the academic performance of the child going down, ultimately leading to the decline in the overall school performance.

Absenteeism is one of the indiscipline aspects in schools. Abosi and Kandjii-Murangi (1995) say the state of indiscipline in a school may be confined to some undesirable and aberrant behaviour such as disobedience, drug abuse, absenteeism, cheating especially in examinations, continual lateness and so on. As I consider absenteeism to be an aspect of indiscipline but also being withdrawal behaviour in students, there is need to explore the situation as well as the personal factors that compel junior secondary

school students to display this behaviour.

1.2 Statement of the problem

Across the country, the Botswana Ministry of Education provides attendance registers to be recorded for every student each morning by the teachers designated as class teachers or form teachers. For each lesson, attendance is also recorded in small booklets kept by the class prefect or the class monitor. These booklets are tools designed for internal policies within schools, and are not necessarily from the Ministry of Education, but they assist the school register as they reflect attendance during lessons. Provided these two tools are recorded diligently and accurately, they give a true picture of each student's attendance to school and throughout the day during lessons. One other policy employed is to have students report to the Head of House (HOH) if they require permission for absence. Despite all these measures in place, students continue to unlawfully absent themselves from school.

The prevalence of this problem is shown by extensive dodging of lessons, truancy and chronic absenteeism. Truancy refers to students who have repeated, unexcused absences; chronic absenteeism refers to students who repeatedly miss school for any reason (Child Trends Databank, 2014). The magnitude of this problem is quite serious, mainly from a perspective whereby the students habitually absent themselves without proper approval of appropriate school authorities. In Botswana Public Schools attendance is compulsory but students rebel against the set rules nevertheless. They are supposed to be marked off the register when they go for twenty one consecutive days without attending. The students are well aware of this requirement such that they keep their absenteeism below twenty one days so that they are not deregistered for absconding. Again the students know about the conflicting rule from the pastoral policy that says they have to be brought back from the streets when they abscond from school. This pastoral policy rule called 'circles of support', disregards the number of days the students have stayed without attending. This means students can absent themselves indefinitely and still be kept in the school records being free to return to school whenever they choose.

Absenteeism is one of the serious issues that prevail in the country nowadays since this problem does not isolate gender; both boys and girls do it. It is also rampant across the streams, that is, it affects all forms (from form one all the way to form three). Since these students are of different ages, it means absenteeism covers all age groups at Junior Secondary School level.

There are school rules in place, but the students defy them, bringing disorder to classrooms and to schools. ‘Without order and discipline, learning cannot take place’ Taylor and Ryan (2005), go on further to say tackling indiscipline and poor behaviour are the essential steps in restoring order to any school. Absenteeism is a problem because it is against the school policies; it is considered some form of indiscipline students can be very difficult to control. They would tell whoever tries to put them in line that they are not their parent and hence they cannot tell them what to do and what not to do. At the same time, some parents come to schools on occasion to plead with teachers to instil discipline in their children.

Despite the effort the government is doing to provide basic education for everybody and contrary to what the Revised National Policy on Education says that ‘a significant achievement has been made in the provision of educational opportunity at the junior secondary education level’(1994), the students do not utilise this opportunity. When one is truant she/he cannot be as productive as someone who did not miss any lesson. After failing in their studies, the students loiter around in the streets, ultimately becoming social problems like bearing children at early ages or engaging in criminal activities such as thieving and substance abuse. This goes against one of the core pillars of the nation’s vision 2016 of ‘an educated and informed nation’. The pillar states that ‘by 2016 Botswana will have a system of quality education that will meet the demands of the changing world’ (Vision 2016). Absent students deny themselves the quality education that the nation strives to achieve. Since in the end it affects the country, it shows that the magnitude of this problem is quite large and it has bearings on the future. The students fail the government whose core drive is to ‘focus the education system on mainly providing programmes that will lead to higher quality of human capacity and productivity, leading to a better quality life and prosperity for all’ (Botswana Federation of Trade Unions, 2007)

If no solutions to the problem of absenteeism are sought for the school, authorities will no longer have a say in the goings on in schools, the students will rule the roost and drive educational institutions to disarray. The quality of education obtained in schools will also lose value, making it very difficult for the country’s people to compete globally. Individuals who engage in the practice will grow up to be irresponsible and rebellious and without regard for order or authority.

1.3 Purpose of the study

With the full knowledge that this is no panacea, this study’s first and foremost purpose is to give insight to stakeholders in education (parents, teachers and Education Officers) of the causes and extent of

truancy in students. Just as Taylor and Ryan (2005) purport, with any school you have to diagnose carefully what the problems are before you can tackle them, it will therefore put these stakeholders, particularly teachers, on a pedestal above the students, so as to curb absenteeism in its infancy and to be able to deal with it as a problem when it occurs. The study will get to the bottom of the problem and give answers as to why the students absent themselves. In other words, its aim is to give the reasons behind student absenteeism. This research project serves to give an insight of the problem from the learners' point of view. The other purpose is to give the readers a true picture of how large the problem of absenteeism in our schools is. It explores the extent to which absenteeism is prevalent in some schools in Botswana.

This research critically explores dimensions on absenteeism so as to come up with numerous ways of its reduction, and this will be through giving answers to questions of exactly what factors lead to absenteeism and how established it is. Truancy is not just a problem for the students who miss vital lessons, it is also a sign that the school is not succeeding in its purpose. Those who will benefit as well are the schools' pastoral systems as they will be empowered with awareness of the causes eminent in the affected individuals; hence they will be on a better position to identify potential cases and to manage students well, more especially those who are stubborn. In this case the teachers and the schools' administrative authorities will be given a chance to focus on matters pertaining to their job description instead of wasting some of their time chasing after truant students. Often enough teachers are held to blame for not producing good results, yet little attempt is made to understand the problems which face the schools. As this study will give answers to that, those in authority will better understand the real reasons behind this problem and act towards its resolution.

The long term result to be yielded by this study is that the school system will improve; this includes the way the students conduct themselves, the running of the school and overall results in academics as well, Kerr (2011) adds on further to this by saying 'chronic early school absence is associated with school failure'. Ultimately this will offer a better livelihood to the students themselves and create a more knowledgeable and informed society better equipped to run the nation's economy to a more worthy level. In effect it will be aimed at improving the education system we have, since schools still need to keep an eye on their main purpose. This purpose is to build well educated, rounded and active citizens who can support themselves and their families during the course of their lives. On scanning the available literature, the realisation is that there is not much done in Botswana on this issue and so this research project seeks to provide information that will help other schools facing the same problem elsewhere. It

will also extend the boundaries of existing knowledge on this issue in the country. The study will fill in the gaps that have been left by other researchers in dealing with absenteeism. This research project seeks to add to the limited data base the country has on absenteeism.

Since absenteeism can be viewed from a very large angle, the focus will be on the type of absenteeism that is not authorised. The researcher will also isolate the kind of students who engage in this type of behaviour. People are diverse in nature, and every individual is unique, but there are certain things that pull them together and make them act in similar ways. If at all there is another category that can explain the truants' behaviour, a look into the psychological aspects of students' behaviour will be dealt with by this piece of writing.

If absenteeism is not stopped or controlled, it will continue from year in to year out, this kind of behaviour will therefore perpetuate itself through to different students who will be coming into junior secondary schools from primary schools. The students will continuously miss out on instruction that could help them in doing well academically hence finding better positions in the world of work. Class attendance, I believe is the necessary pre-requisite to preparation for joining the national production lines. This is where one is able to sustain his/her life through earning a salary or generating income that will help them and their families. This also reduces the crime that is in the country as one will be self-reliant.

Objectives of the Study

- To establish the extent to which absenteeism is prevalent in junior secondary schools in Lobatse
- To investigate the causes of students absenteeism in junior secondary schools in Lobatse
- To investigate perceptions of teachers and school administration on possible solutions to the problem of absenteeism

Research Questions

The study therefore seeks to address the following broad research questions:

- To what extent is absenteeism prevalent in Junior Secondary Schools in Lobatse?
- What are the causes of absenteeism in students at Junior Secondary School level?
- What do the teachers and the schools' administrative authorities view as possible solutions to the problem of absenteeism?

1.4 Significance of the study

The contributions this study will make are to the guidance and counselling department in schools as they will be able to better deal with the truants from a more knowledgeable perspective. The management will also be made aware of the ways to discipline existing culprits. As it is usually the case, students who play truant are reprimanded somehow, and in some instances several forms of punishment, including corporal punishment, is even administered. The important thing is to have the school administrators understand the reasons behind the students' indiscipline before issuing out punishment. The administrators could pick up leadership styles that could actually work with adolescents and in view of the other problems that are sociological. That is why my study is based on absenteeism, which is a great contributor to other problems. When absenteeism is addressed, it will definitely reduce some other problem issues.

When those in charge of the school are the ones dealing with this problem, it will ease the burden off teachers and they will give more attention to the core business in their designated job. It is very taxing to have teachers pulled out of class just to solve cases of indiscipline. The teacher is required to produce documents of evidence of planning for lessons. These lesson plans are made with reference to class and time. If the teacher leaves the class or takes time from class to address issues, the plan is disrupted. Chronic unexcused absences do not only affect a school's academic performance, but they also affect the ability of teachers to improve the academic achievement of students in their classes. The solution to the problem would greatly influence educational practices. Diminishing the problem will make a huge difference in classes as well as in the development of policies and their subsequent implementation. At home, the parents will be rest assured that the children they raise will be responsible people during their school years and after.

1.5 Limitations to the study

There are some challenges that the study could face once permission by the regional education office and the School Head, to have the documents be accessed for the purpose of the study is granted.

1. Locating the students who are prone to absenteeism.

There is no guarantee that when the researcher arrives at their institution, they will be present. The time the students decide to attend is totally dependent on the students themselves therefore prior to consultation with them; another person may not know when to expect their attendance.

2. Relying on word of mouth alone may not give a true picture.

The students are very well aware that they are not supposed to absent themselves unlawfully therefore when questioned about their absenteeism they may give answers that are on the defence of their behaviour or they could try to justify themselves.

3. Cooperation of the students who will be interviewed.

The students could not be willing to share information or to trust that the information they give will be treated confidentially.

4. Students' ability to communicate

There is also the assumption that the students will be able to fully express themselves, if that is not the case, relevant information will be left out. This could be a challenge since some students are able to move to junior certificate level with dyslexia and lack of reading and writing skills.

5. The programmes of the different institutions under study

There may be difficulty in accessing the students to be studied because the schools do not always run at similar times and are sometimes disrupted by extracurricular activities. Each school makes its own timetable, as long as the working hours of the staff fall within the eight hours of work that has been set by the Government of Botswana to cover all its employees. Policies made by different schools are entirely internal, for instance, the times each school decides to administer their monthly tests often differs except in cases where the schools have clustered themselves to have common testing and common schedules. Even in the case of clustering there may be issues affecting adherence to the set standards like currently there is an acute shortage of water that compels the schools to allow the students to go home after the last lesson of the day and not to attend afternoon studies as was done in the past. For most Junior Secondary Schools in Botswana lessons end before lunch time, it is assumed that those in Lobatse have also followed suit.

Nevertheless, if proper records are kept in the form of registers (provided by the Ministry of Education, South Region), information on those students who have absenteeism tendencies is bound to be evident.

1.6 Delimitations

The self-imposed limitation to this study, were time constraints. As a part time student, having the freedom to allow total time to the study was impounded on by work demands. This narrowed down the chances of carrying out further follow ups when needed. It was not always a guarantee that leave of absence from work (for prolonged durations) will be authorized. This study was hence done under very challenging circumstances.

Without a sponsor to take care of the financial needs, scraping for materials such as stationary and transport was also a constraint. In comparison, this was not the case with full time students or government sponsored students or those given financial aid by private companies.

Gaining access to the school registers also proved to be a challenge as the leaders of institutions felt they could not trust the researcher with the information contained. Quite often the schools' time schedules differed, making it difficult to adhere to schedule. Some schools use afternoons for study while others engage students in remedial lessons, sporting activities as well as writing tests. Getting in contact with the students was at times a difficult task when their schedule was too tight. Break time is time allocated for meals, and it is also limited; on average it is thirty minutes for tea break and an hour for lunch. With the eight hours of work set in schools nowadays, the utilisation of the eight hours varies according to schools. Some schools go up to eight periods (with each period having duration of forty minutes) before their lunch break, whilst others prefer to break off for lunch at period six and have the last two periods after lunch.

Chapter 2

2.0 Literature review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter seeks to review the literature as it relates to the selected junior secondary school students' background factors. It seeks to establish what relationships exist between these variables and the subsequent behaviour of students absenting themselves.

2.2 Review of literature per research question

The study was carried out by Baker, Sigmon and Nugent in the United States of America in 2001 relates to the three research questions in this study about the rate, the causes and solutions to the problem of absenteeism. The researchers' main focus was more experimental though, as their emphasis was to include disciplinary measures on absenteeism, by using the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP).

The study they carried out was on truancy defined as 'unexcused absences from school or class without proper approval of appropriate school officials' (Baker, *et al* 2001). They carried out descriptive long-term studies in schools in three cities for more than ten years. The data they collected was from authorities who monitor attendance in schools, namely, the school attendance clerks and other school authorities. These were deemed the programme implementers. One aspect of the research study that struck as uncanny is the variables that have been brought into consideration are almost similar to the ones pertaining to the Botswana situation. These variables are family factors, school factors, economic influences and student factors all encompassed in the community factors. What the researchers found out was that high rates of absences were in public schools in the inner city and that the rates of absenteeism related with poverty. They got to the conclusion that poverty was a factor, from the premise that in public schools the students are fed as opposed to bringing their own lunch. The study found out that absenteeism was not gender stereotyped though, as both the boys and the girls, more especially around the age of fifteen, occasionally played truant. In the conclusion they came up with, they viewed truancy as leading to juvenile delinquency, hence the role of the OJJDP. The juvenile system served in cases where the truancy is chronic or persistent by making "sanctions for parents and youth for continued truancy or failure to complete the diversion programmes successfully" (Baker, *et al*, 2001).

A study called ‘Increasing Student Attendance’ was conducted in 2004 by Jennifer Railsback. Ideally, as would this study, Railsback employed interviews and surveys administered to students to obtain answers. The school staff also engaged in action research and had focus groups with the concerned students. The idea of action research would not be ideal in this case as there are several schools under survey. In the Railsback study there was the use of external organisations for conducting surveys. Data was obtained from the records kept by the School Success Profile (SSP). The SSP is an organisation that is government based, endorsed by the National Dropout Prevention Centre in America. Since such centres do not exist in Botswana, only individual based research can be done to conduct this study. The SSP gives information on the feelings and attitudes of students towards their schools, school authorities, rules that govern them and most importantly about their attendance.

On dealing with issues that relate to the research question at hand that says “What are the causes of absenteeism in students at Junior Secondary School level?” Railsback (2004) puts forward the idea that before deciding what strategies to use to increase attendance, it could be beneficial to look at the reasons why students do not attend school as well as why it is difficult to retain them in school. In the study she identified several factors as family background and relationships, past school performance, personal characteristics and neighbourhood characteristics as causes of absenteeism/failure to attend school.

Issues on family background reasons included impoverished home conditions, where the students lived in squalor with their guardians or parents; who could not care less whether the students attended school or not. On a large extent this included lack of child supervision or parental involvement in the child’s studies, frequent home relocations due to lack of proper care by the guardians or with the parents moving from time to time because of job related matter. The students’ perceptions included being academically challenged, hence lacking the motivation to attend. In the study, students also had negative things to say about their teachers, where it was mentioned that they needed teachers ‘who will be patient and persevere with their individual rates of learning’ (Railsback, 2004). Some students viewed lessons as boring, did not find classes challenging enough and could not work and go to school at the same time, so they preferred to earn money instead of go to school.

For the study to address the question “What do the teachers and the schools’ administrative authorities view as possible solutions to the problem of absenteeism?” the author cited ensuring who was to blame for the students’ truancy and dealing with whoever was to blame. If the students were the culprits then ample counselling be given to the students so as to change their attitudes and ultimately their behaviour

and if it was the school that was to blame for the students' absenteeism then have a welcoming, safe, academically challenging and personalised environment that will support the students' learning. The ways in which to carry this out were mentioned as having counselling sessions with the students to allow them to verbalise their feelings and concerns, and to identify aspects of school that they enjoyed. Subsequently the school would reward the students for good attendance. The school would also cultivate caring relationships and mentoring which would make the student feel good about attending school.

2.3 Summary of the reviewed literature

The Baker and others' study was carried out over a very long period as compared to this study. Discrepancies are bound to be present when there is extended monitoring and when there is only a short time given for research. Although having covered a lot of factors that relate to the Botswana situation their study has a part that is arguable; the researchers cite a number of consequent behaviours that they purport to be resulting from absenteeism in schools. They alluded to reasons such as substance abuse, teenage pregnancy, marital problems, adult criminality and incarceration. My point of view is that the above mentioned problems are too far-fetched as they include so many factors leading to them. For instance a girl's pregnancy could depend on her attitude towards the opposite sex, her lack of information regarding sexual matters, her recklessness, peer pressure, lack of parental control; just to mention a few. I therefore fail to see the correlation with school absenteeism.

In the Railsback study, the author noted that 'although the importance of attendance is well understood, effective strategies for increasing it are not so definitive' (Railsback, 2004). In agreement with my study, Railsback pointed out that the first step for the schools to deal with this issue was to determine the reasons for absenteeism. On the overall she identified several strategies that are used or can be used, but she was against the idea that they be used in isolation, rather apply a combination of them to be able to curb absenteeism. My view is that utilising too many strategies all at once needs a lot of time and lots of personnel employed just for that, with the current layout of the schools in our country where the economy cannot sustain even the teachers themselves, such interventions are still implausible. The Railsback study also focussed on the students alone to give the entire information, all the stakeholders must have a chance to air their views, which is why the study at hand would include the teachers, Head of Houses, Deputy School Heads as well as the School Heads.

Chapter 3

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

Out of several ways of carrying out a research study and bearing in mind that there is no single or prescribed format, the researcher has to ensure that the method selected for collecting data is the one suitable for the study. This enables the researcher to identify and explain relevant relationships between facts. Quantitative methods are appropriate when variables to be used and/or examined are clearly defined and numerical data is present whereas qualitative approaches probe beneath the surface of events to elicit the meanings, interpretations and explanations deeply buried.

3.2 Research design

A descriptive survey was chosen as the design for this study; this design takes into account both qualitative and quantitative data collection strategies. “Not only is it perfectly possible to combine approaches within the same piece of research, but it is often advantageous to do so” (Saunders *et al*, 2003).

According to Cohen and Manion (1994) descriptive surveys aim to describe the nature of a situation at a particular time. A survey attempts to critically analyse the objectives to be achieved and reflects on the type of knowledge to be obtained, that is to describe, explain and understand the phenomena in the frame of the perspective chosen. In this design interviews are conducted on a sample of people selected to accurately represent the entire population being studied. Everyone interviewed is asked the same series of questions, then the responses are organised so as to draw conclusions from them. Interviewing gives people a voice through the research process itself, hence the method is quite inclusive. Bryman and Burgess (1994) maintain that a survey allows flexibility in choosing research methods so as to utilize a wide range of methods to answer various questions in the process. He further argues that strict and rigid adherence to any method for the researcher becomes like confinement in a cage. In this evaluation a survey approach allows the researcher to triangulate various qualitative and quantitative data during evaluation in trying to understand the perspectives of both the students and those in authority, namely the different cadres of teachers. Mixed methods encourage thinking ‘outside the box’. Qualitative data often needs to be supplemented with quantitative methods, and vice versa, in order to reveal different learning from the research (Ulmer & Wilson, 2003). There is a need for both quantitative and qualitative research to be combined as one’s strengths complement the weaknesses of the other.

The use of multiple data collection instruments in this study is deemed appropriate as it enquires broadly on the area of interest (Creswell, 2003). Both qualitative and quantitative data collection instruments will help in triangulation and it brings representative responses from the participants and this assists in making proper recommendations about the causes and solutions to absenteeism in Lobatse Junior Secondary Schools in Botswana. As it is done in surveys, the information sought is the only one that should be obtained. This, according to Saunders *et al* (2003), ensures reliability of research findings and allows generalization. For this research study there was document analysis to identify students to provide the data. Questionnaires were administered as well as oral interviews.

3.3 Population and Sample frame

A population is a group of people from which the sample is drawn. In this study the population was the four schools in Lobatse comprising of students, guidance and counselling teachers and the school administration personnel in all schools to be involved in this study, making a total count of one thousand nine hundred and eighty eight (1988). The sample for this study was characterised by the students involved in absenteeism, all Guidance and Counselling teachers, the Head of Houses, the Deputy School Heads and the School Heads who deal with absenteeism cases over a period of time, in the aforementioned Junior Secondary Schools. The sampled subjects possess rich knowledge in the processes and activities that involve absenteeism in schools. The total sample for this study is one hundred and thirty eight (138) participants; comprising of one hundred and twenty (120) students, four (4) Guidance and counselling teachers, six (6) Head of Houses, four (4) Deputy School Heads, and four (4) School Heads as indicated in **table 1**.

Table 1: Study participants

Participants		Population	Sample
Form 1 Students		685	40
Pitikwe Junior Secondary School	202		
Letsopa Junior Secondary School	172		
Itireleng Junior Secondary School	164		
Ipelegeng Junior Secondary School	147		
Form 2 Students		671	40
Pitikwe Junior Secondary School	167		
Letsopa Junior Secondary School	160		
Itireleng Junior Secondary School	150		
Ipelegeng Junior Secondary School	194		
Form 3 Students		614	40
Pitikwe Junior Secondary School	181		
Letsopa Junior Secondary School	155		
Itireleng Junior Secondary School	125		
Ipelegeng Junior Secondary School	153		
Guidance and Counselling Teachers		4	4
Heads of Houses		6	6
Deputy School Heads		4	4
Schools Heads		4	4
Totals		1988	138

Teachers and Senior Management Team

Purposive sampling is used to select the Guidance and Counselling teachers, Head of Houses, the Deputy School Heads and the School Heads to participate in this study. (Refer to table 1, above). Convenience sampling is used in exploratory research, where the researcher is getting an inexpensive approximation of the truth. As the name implies, the sample is selected because they are convenient and they possess ample knowledge about absenteeism, which is being studied here. In this case, normal random sampling is not

quite appropriate because with students, it is not the entire population that engages in absenteeism. With regards to teachers, there are certain teachers who are specifically designated to deal with such issues as the one in the study. In most instances one finds that teachers in lower ranks can deal with absenteeism as class teachers, who will be the first to notice the absence of the student in the morning at registration, and subsequently, so will the subject teachers the student is due to meet for that day. Teachers in low ranks would just record students' absenteeism and refer the recurring cases of absenteeism to the guidance office or to senior management.

Students

The sampling procedure used in selecting students is stratified random sampling. The first stage of sampling is to get information from inadvertent sources, in the name of school registers, from all streams (form one, form two and form three). Bell (1999) defines inadvertent sources as those used by the researcher for some purpose other than that for which they were originally intended. After a list of students has been sorted out, considering that it is not the entire population of students who can take part in this study. The researcher will identify those who habitually miss school and place them according to streams. From each stream, students will be randomly selected (simple random sampling) to pick a total sample of one hundred and twenty (120) students, that is, thirty (30) students from each school, to participate in the study.

3.4 Validity and reliability

For validation, the logistics on sampling as well as the instruments to be used for data collection were discussed by the researcher and the supervisor, with recommendations on how big the sample size to use being the core of the discussion considering the amount of time there was left to complete the work and the resources needed to be used in the study. All these were looked at bearing in mind that the objectives and outcomes of the study were not to be compromised in the process. The external validity was also considered, that is, to ensure that enough data was collected such that the results of the study could be generalised to other people other than the participant of the study.

Another method used in the study for validation purposes is triangulation of data collection instruments as mentioned in the research design. The concept of triangulation dictates that the researcher uses multiple methods for collecting and analysing data, so that all sources converge on facts (Miles and Huberman, 1994). This study has triangulated qualitative data sources such as interviews and quantitative sources in the form of survey questionnaires.

Reliability analyses measures how consistent a test or instrument is across items (Von Cranach, 1988). The easiest type of reliability to obtain is internal consistency reliability, because this type requires administering and scoring a test or survey only once. The basic principle in underlying internal consistency reliability is that all of the questions or items that are supposed to measure something should be related. A test or survey should not just be a set of unrelated questions, reliability of the test instruments gives the guarantee that the results will be statistically significant and will give a true and accurate record. After administration, the instruments will be coded and entered into SPSS, that is, Statistical Package for Social Sciences. Cronbach's reliability coefficient will be computed for each item at a set reliability value. If the output gives a value that is greater or equals to 0.7, the item will be regarded acceptable. With Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which ranges from 0 to 1, the closer it is to 1.0 the greater the internal consistency of the items in the scale.

3.5 Ethical issues

Being vested the authority by the Ministry of Education and Skills Development, as leaders of the institutions, the School Heads have control over their institutions; hence they have the responsibility to give the researcher consent to carry out the study in their territory. They have the powers to give the researcher access to the setting, with the assurance that the information obtained from the study will be used for the reason stated, as for the purpose of attaining a Master Degree in Education from the University of Botswana. Data collection schedule was also discussed and agreed upon with those in charge of the schools.

The participants needed to be given the assurance that the information they divulge was to be used for research purposes only and will not be published or used in a way that will reveal identities or cause embarrassment or harm to them in any way. Bell (1999) maintains that it is best to ensure confidentiality as well as anonymity. At the same time, despite all these being taken into consideration, one should neither compromise the standard of the research nor its validity and reliability. The results obtained need not be changed from general to particular, more especially in cases like the one at hand where there is only one officer at a particular designation, where it is easy to find the identity of the participant.

3.6 Data Collection Methods

The main data collecting instruments for this study were interviews for the senior management and questionnaires for the teachers and students. Interviews enable the researcher to collect views, expressions, feelings and attitudes towards the issue of absenteeism in schools. Cohen and Manion (2000) explain that: “the importance of collecting qualitative data through interviews is to capture participants’ perspectives through their verbal interactions with the interviewer”. Furthermore a major advantage of interviews is its adaptability to allow an interviewer to follow ideas, probe for responses and investigate motives and feelings which a questionnaire cannot capture (Janesick, 1998). The interviews used were neither completely structured nor completely unstructured. Bell (1999) says the loose structure is to ensure all topics which are considered crucial to the study are covered and to eliminate some problems of entirely structured interviews.

To complement the interviews, the researcher used a questionnaire (with close and open ended items) to capture respondents’ views to achieve the objectives of the study. The items in the questionnaire were developed based on an analysis of the quantitative needs of the research questions of the study, that is, to determine what is needed to answer the questions of the study. A questionnaire is a commonly used research instrument in survey research designs. It is used to make data collection easy and less time consuming and it has the potential of covering large samples. The questionnaire items were formulated in a Likert-type scale, a rating scale to make responses simple and quick. A five point Likert scale on agreement was developed for a given set of questions. All that the participants needed to do was to put a tick in the box most appropriate to their feeling.

3.7 Data Analysis

The information obtained from the survey has to be analysed so that at the end of the day it makes sense to the reader. According to Yin (2003) data analysis consists of "examining, categorizing, tabulating, testing, or otherwise recombining both quantitative and qualitative evidence to address the initial propositions of a study" (p.109). In general, data analysis means a search for patterns in the data collected (Neuman, 2005). He further states that once a pattern is identified, it is interpreted in terms of a social theory or the setting in which it occurred and that the qualitative researcher moves from the description of a historical event or social setting to a more general interpretation of its meaning.

The data from questionnaires were coded and entered into a statistic package called SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) and computed to find relationships, correlations and association between variables. The data from questionnaire that is in the form of ordered categorical data was represented in descriptive statistics in the form of graphs and tables. Each of the five responses was assigned a value which was used to measure the Likert item under investigation. Qualitative data from interviews was grouped according to the themes that kept on recurring and thematic content analysis used to analyse the data. The thematic content analysis though time consuming, allow the information obtained to be interpreted as it is without distortion and more expressions will be captured and represented verbally (Babbie, 1990).

Chapter 4

4.0 Data presentation, interpretation and analysis

4.1 Students' gender and age distributions

Part of the demographic information that was required from the students was their ages and gender. The results were placed according to **Table 2** below.

Table 2: Cross tabulations between gender and age of respondents

		Student's age						Distribution				
		12	13	14	15	16	17	18	8	9	Missing	Total
Gender	Girls	1	11	17	16	12	4	2	0	0	0	63
		1.6%	17.5%	27%	25.4%	19%	6.3%	3.2%	0%	0%	0%	100%
	Boys	0	5	13	12	13	1	0	1	1	0	46
		0%	10.9%	28.3%	26.1%	28.3%	2.2%	0%	2.2%	22%	0%	100%
	Missing	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	1	5
		0%	0%	20%	0%	0%	20%	20%	20%	0%	20%	100%
Total	1	16	31	28	25	6	3	2	1	1	114	
	0.9%	14%	27.2%	24.6%	21.9%	5.3%	2.6%	1.8%	0.9%	0.9%	100%	

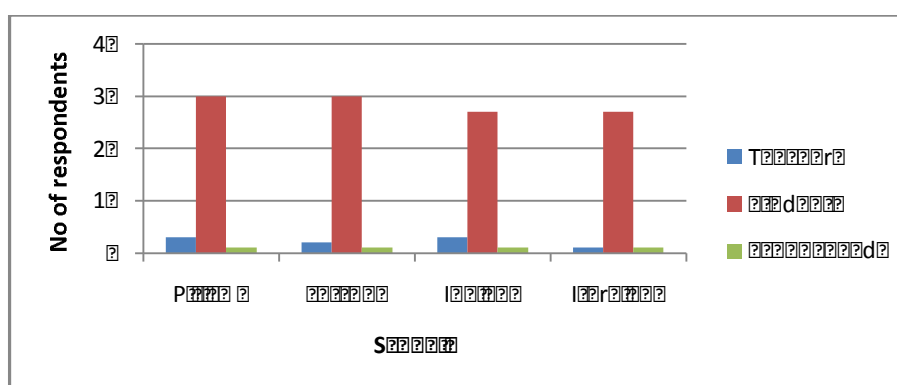
The table indicates that among the sampled students the highest number of students ranges between ages 14 to 16 years of age, making 71.4 % of the total. This shows that the students in the study are around teenage years. At the level of Junior Secondary School, the majority of students fall between the ages 14 and 16. Fewer students would be below this and above this. Some students are able to enter at an early age if they had skipped a standard, but this is on a rare occasion. Some students on the other hand would be above this age if they had dropped out of school before and have entered the school as re-entries or if they had started school later than the recommended age.

Table 3: Gender distributions; Student distribution by sex

Schools	% Male	% Female	% Missing
Pitikwe	40	60	0
Letsopa	43.3	43.3	13.4
Itireleng	48.1	51.9	0
Ipelegeng	29.6	66.7	3.7
Total	55.3	40.4	4.3

What is indicated in **Table 3** is that there were approximately as many boys sampled as girls in the study. This could be an indication that boys and girls in Botswana had equal opportunity of being selected in the sample. Pitikwe had 220 pupils (40%) of its sampled pupils being males and 330 pupils (60%) being females. Letsopa had 209 pupils (43.3%) males and females respectively. Itireleng had 211 pupils (48.1%) of its sampled pupils being males and 228 pupils (51.9%) being females. Ipelegeng had 146 pupils (29.6 %) of its sampled pupils being males and 329 pupils (66.7%) being females. 4.3% of students did not indicate whether they are boys or girls, 13.3% of these were from Letsopa while 3.7% were from Ipelegeng.

4.2 Response rates

Figure 1: School Heads, teachers and students response rates

The study targeted 4 School Heads, 4 Deputy School Heads, 4 Head of Houses and 4 Guidance and counselling teachers, making it a total of 16 school authorities. From **Table 1**, the data shows that

students and the school personnel from the four schools had equal chances of participation in the study. 65% of the sampled school personnel participated in the study. Some of the school authorities chose not to participate, for most part, the School Heads would rather delegate their immediate subordinates to take part in interviews. Even though they had given the go ahead for the study to be undertaken in their institutions, they themselves chose not to take part. Some of the authorities were on leave for the duration of the study and hence they could not be reached for comments. Only one out the four schools had the entire selected personnel responding to the interviews and questionnaires. The other factor that led to a reduced number of respondents was that the schools sizes differed. Pitikwe Secondary School and Letsopa Secondary School each has two Head of Houses as compared to Itireleng Secondary School and Ipelegeng Secondary School which have only one Head of House each.

The number of Head of Houses corresponds to the number of students in each school, the less the number of Head of Houses, the less the students. Itireleng Secondary School and Ipelegeng Secondary schools had fewer students than the other two schools. Out of the 30 students that were selected from each school only two of the schools had a hundred percent of the selected students responding to the questionnaires. The other two schools could not make the selected sample. In trying to balance the gender of the students and their form, this was also not practical as in some schools one of the sexes dominated in absenteeism and in some schools it was one form which dominated in absenteeism. At the end of the day, from the selected 120 students, 114 managed to participate, making it 95% of the desired sample.

4.2 Rate of absenteeism

Figure 2: Rate of absenteeism

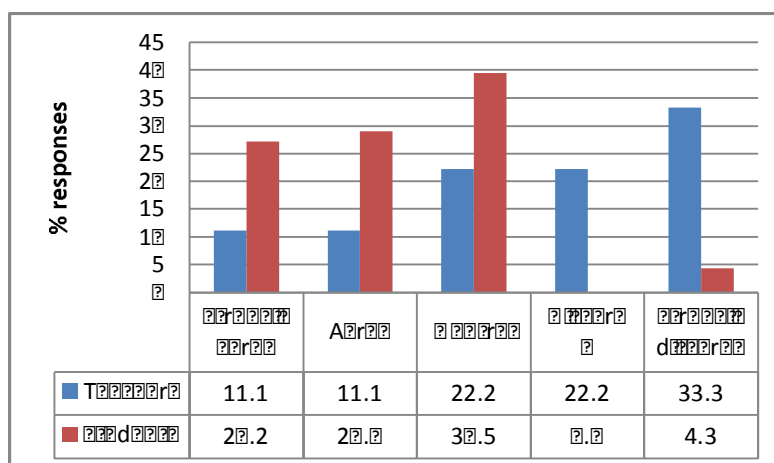


Figure 2 shows that the students and the teachers disagree about the rate of absenteeism in their schools. A large number of students (56.1%) indicated that the rate of absenteeism in their school is high while the teachers, (55.5%) indicated a disagreement. This might show that the understanding and perceptions of absenteeism between teachers and students differs.

School Heads and Rate of student absenteeism

Table 4: Prevalence of student absenteeism

	Little	Moderate	Lots	Totals by row
	1	1	2	4
Column totals	1	1	2	4

Table 4 above shows that the School Heads on the other hand shared the same view with students and concurred that, yes indeed the rate of absenteeism is high (50%).

Table 5 Correlation between dwelling and rate of absenteeism

		Attended	Did not attend
Attended	Did not attend	1	3
	Total	114	114
Did not attend	Attended	3	1
	Total	114	114
Cramer's V = 0.011			

In order to determine if the dwelling place of the student has any relevance to his/her absenteeism, the students were asked about their dwelling places. A majority of the students come from areas around their schools. For instance, most students at Pitikwe JSS live in Pitikwe, most from Letsopa JSS are from Woodhall, those from Itireleng live in Thema and most from Ipelegeng are from Peleng. This however is not significant since some of the respondent students from all the schools hailed as far as Otse (a village

20Km from Lobatse), while some came from Molapowabojang, which is about 10 Km from Lobatse. Some students do not necessarily choose to study in schools closest to them. They pass other schools each day on the way to their school. A Pearson's correlation (r) was carried out and it is observed from **Table 5** that the correlation is significant at 0.011level. Correlation between dwelling and always absent is ($r= 0.360^{**}$) showing a weak positive relationships between the variables. This shows dwelling does not always determine student's rate of absenteeism. This proposes that there are other factors besides dwelling place, which determine absenteeism in schools.

Correlation between rate of absenteeism and reasons

Table 6: Factors relating to being absent

	Waking up late	I hate school	I dislike some subjects	Friends influence	Fear of some teachers	Trouble at home
Always absent correlation	-0.014	-0.022	-0.010	0.015	-0.017	-0.004
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.885	0.815	0.92	0.878	0.862	0.968
N	114	114	114	114	114	114

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

A number of choices were given to the students, so as to find out if they could be the reasons they absent themselves. These choices were: Not coming to school when they realise that they had woken up late, not attending because they hated school, having strong dislike for some subjects, succumbing under peer pressure and being influenced by others not to attend, having fear of some teachers who could be on duty or meeting them in some subjects through the day and having some reason emanating from home that could hinder them from attending.

Pearson's correlation (r) was carried out and it is observed from **Table 6** that the correlation is significant at 0.01level. Correlation between always absent and waking up late($r= -0.14$),I hate school ($r=-0.022$), I dislike some subjects($r= -0.010$), Friends' influence ($r= 0.015$), Fear of some teachers ($r= -0.017$) and Trouble at home($r=-0.004$) showing a weak negative relationships between always absent and most of the variables. This shows that students from the four schools sampled do not consider always being absent as much related to these other variables.

4.4 Causes of absenteeism

Figure 3 Teachers and students reasons for student's absenteeism

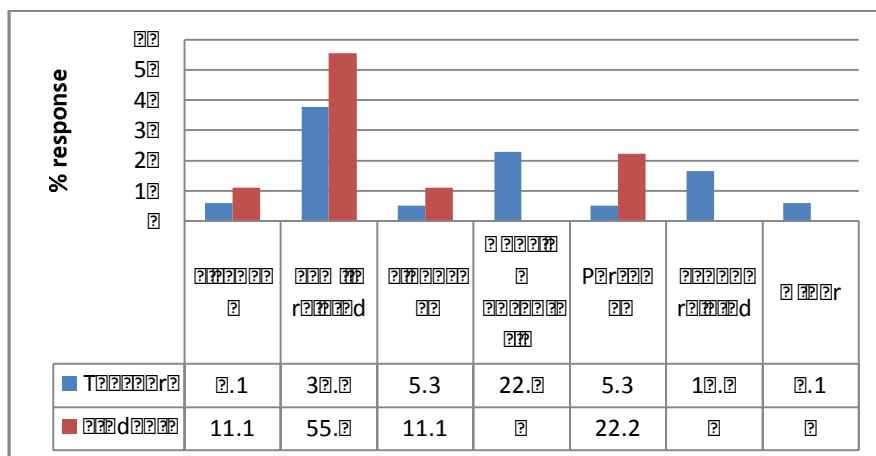


Figure 3 above shows that family related issues have the highest response as a cause of student absenteeism. 37.7% of the teachers and 55.6% of the students affirmed this. Factors such as, denying that absenteeism existed was at 22.8% from the teachers whilst 22.2 % of the students said the absenteeism was due to personal reasons. To a certain extent school related issues were also viewed as causes.

Reasons for not coming to school

Table 7: Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
Waking up late	114	1	99	2.473684
Hate school	114	1	99	2.526316
Dislike subjects	114	1	99	3.096491
Friends' influence	114	1	99	4.377193
Fear of some teachers	114	1	99	4.438596
Trouble at home	114	1	99	5.008772

Valid N (listwise) 114

Table 7, above reveals a high mean at 5.01 for students who said that troubles at home cause absenteeism and lowest mean of 2.47 indicating that waking up late is a cause for absenteeism. This findings links to **figure 3** which also indicated that family related problems causes absenteeism.

Drug abuse as a cause of absenteeism

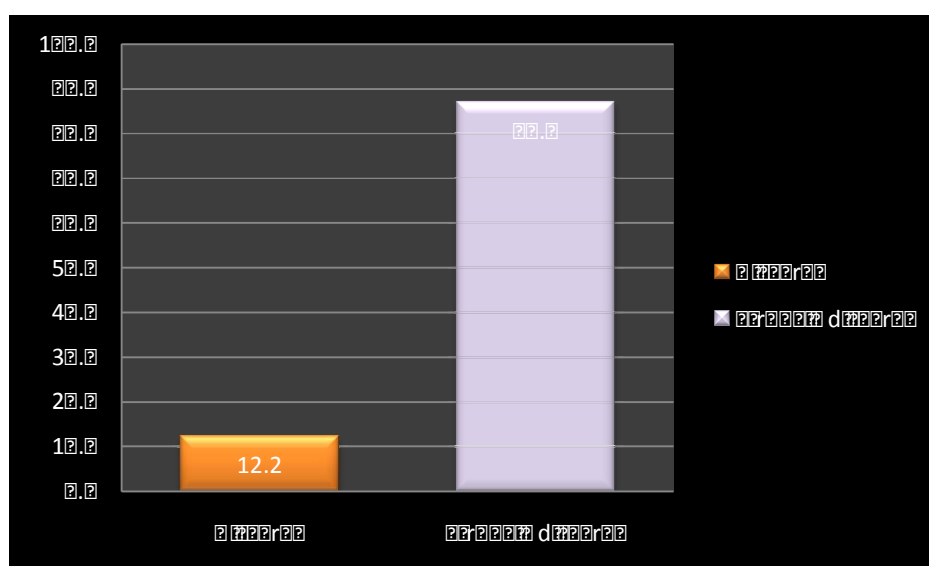
Table 8: Drugs as a cause of absenteeism amongst students

	Cigarettes	Alcohol	Marijuana
Strongly agree	7	1.8	9
Agree	13	2.6	1.8
Neutral	9	1.8	0.9
Disagree	15.7	24.6	13.2
Strongly disagree	62.6	68.4	13.2

Table 8 above shows a highest disagreement, that is, the percentage of those who indicated disagree combined with the percentage of those who indicated strongly disagree; cigarettes at 78.3%, alcohol at 93% and marijuana at 26.4%, were recorded among the drugs listed as causes of absenteeism. This might be the case because no student can declare that he/she takes drugs due to fear of victimization. Some students admitted to having tasted or taken cigarettes at least once, but they did not admit to them having any relation to their absenteeism.

4.5 Solutions to absenteeism

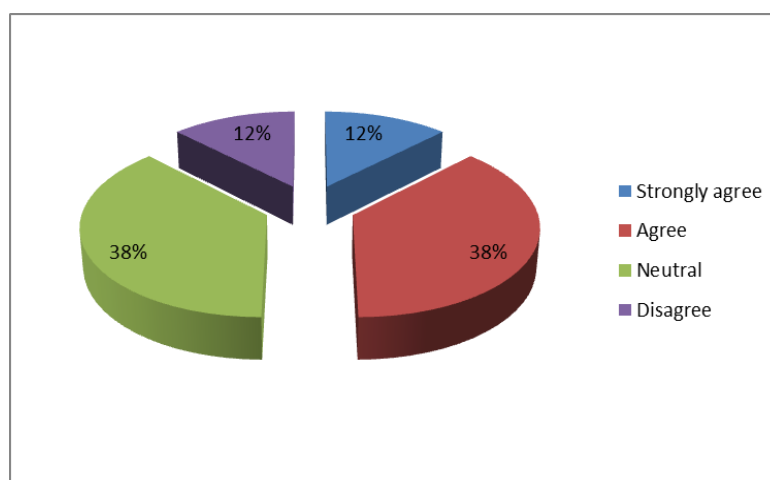
Figure 4 Punishment as a solution to absenteeism



For the reasons that the students are on the receiving end of punishment, 99.2% of them do not view punishment as a solution to absenteeism (figure Y). The ubiquitous method of administering punishment in public Junior Secondary Schools in Botswana is corporal punishment. The students automatically have that frame of mind when they are asked about punishment.

Teachers' view on discipline

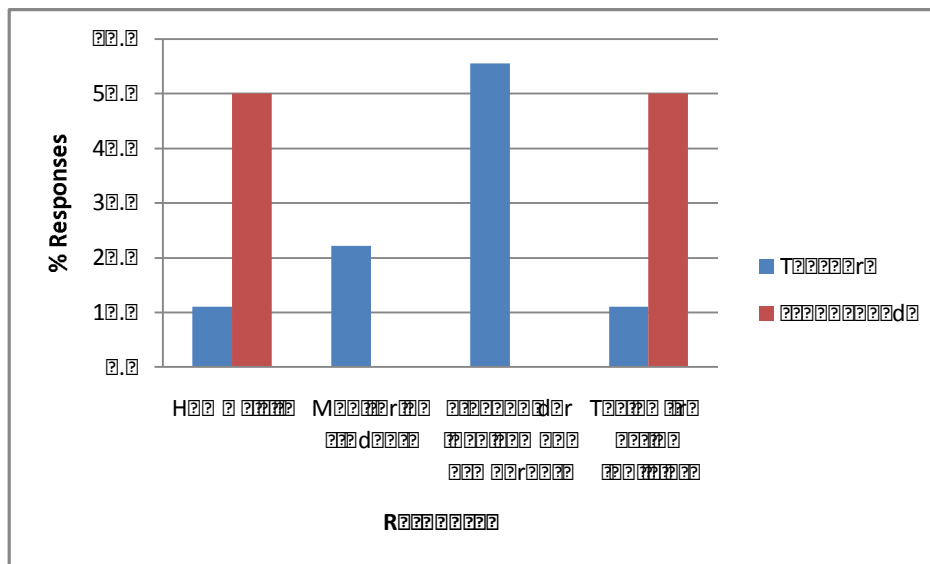
Figure 5 Teachers who discipline students for absenteeism



Fifty percent (50%) of the teachers say that they discipline students who habitually absent themselves from school without valid reason. The aforementioned teachers use this punishment as a form of discipline measure, not as a way of inflicting physical pain to the students. The students also know that they could be punished if they unlawfully play truant.

Teachers and schools heads solution to curbing absenteeism

Figure 6 Ways of curbing absenteeism



The school authorities, mainly the School Head and the Deputy School Heads indicated that stakeholder involvement (at 50%) and home visits(also at 50%) as well as taking firm action will solve absenteeism effectively while teachers also concur on stakeholder participation (55%) and monitoring students (22%) as a solutions to student absenteeism . School authorities here are seen as taking a reactive role towards the problem as opposed to being pro-active.

Absenteeism can be reduced and designation

Table 9: Teachers in agreement that absenteeism can be reduced

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral
HOH	3	2	0
Senior Teacher I	0	1	0
Senior teacher II	1	0	0
Teacher	0	1	1
Total	4	4	1

Table 9 indicates that eight teachers (88.9%) have positive hope that though there is high prevalence of absenteeism in schools chances of it being reduced is very high. The teachers mentioned such methods as making home visits and calling forth parents of those students who excessively play truant as well as keeping attendance records and making follows up on persistent cases. In regard to availability of policies that are used to curb absenteeism majority of teachers 88.9% felt that there are policies in place to apprehend absenteeism. This is the new Pastoral Policy that takes the welfare of the students into serious consideration. To an extent that there are teachers that do not do the actual teaching in classrooms, but are rather employed on behalf of the students in order to deal with their issues without disrupting the school programmes. Internally, there are individual policies that are in charge of matters that are unique to each school. These are tabulated at meetings and amended as needed by the teaching staff and the Senior Management of the schools.

Chapter 5

5.0 Discussions, implications and recommendations

5.1 Introduction

Each of the above questions and their related findings are discussed below, together with what they imply and the subsequent conclusions emanating from them.

5.2 Discussions

This study can be replicated by any other researcher using similar instruments because there is a lot of objectivity and inter-tester reliability. According to Thomas & Nelson (2001) “This facet of reliability is the degree to which different testers can achieve the same scores on the same subjects”. So when using a different data collector, similar results could still be obtained. The good thing about cross sectional studies is that the relationships between variables are easily determined. Despite a certain degree of failure to secure cooperation, a desirable number of respondents had been obtained. In some cases where complete cooperation was obtained there was failure to execute interview procedures as the researcher had planned. This was a case where the teachers in charge preferred to have them taking care of the distribution of the questionnaires to the students with the researcher looking on. An ideal situation is whereby the researcher has a one on one meeting with the students to reduce the degree of fear of victimisation. The presence of the teachers leads to falsification of answers, where the students who had been identified by the researcher as habitual truants from the school records denied their truancy.

5.3 Implications

What the study came up with is the insinuation that the students have no problem with the policies in place for curbing absenteeism. For the school to have preventative measures of absenteeism it does not necessarily have to instil rules that are so rigid they turn the school into a mini penitentiary. However there is a need to educate all stakeholders on the policies put in place by the school authorities. It is a good thing that there are circles of support within the new pastoral regulations, since they have positive outcomes. The Head of Houses are allowed to follow up students who habitually play truant and dig the core of the problems in order to deal with them with the guidance office as well as the other school authorities. The schools’ pastoral system that allows students to be a part of all the teacher committees also bears improvement in the way the administration deals with the students. This system gives students a chance to be part of the leadership, hence empowering them; this ultimately encourages good peer interaction and a reduction in prevailing problems.

Even when the students are given liberty to air their views, the kind of questions that required students to give their opinion about attitude mostly yielded negative answers. The student though, indicated a love for school and very little problems with the teachers who taught them, as well as the subjects that they were offered in school. On the question that required them to say what their favourite event in school was, they gave extra- curricular activities instead of academic based activities. Very few mentioned the Prize Giving Ceremony, but many listed sporting activities and once off activities such as talent shows. This calls for the schools to have more engaging educational activities that will draw students to school. The students had their favourite day at school for various reasons such as days when they had double lessons and triple lessons. They said on such days they enjoyed school since they did not have to carry a lot of books in their bags. In schools nowadays there is a lot of vandalism, lockers where books are kept are no longer used for fear of being broken into, therefore the students have to carry books for all their subjects, everywhere they go, through-out the day. The students find this cumbersome and would rather leave some books behind, leading to them skipping those lessons for which the books have been left. On this regard, the school has to find ways in which the books can be kept in a safe place, where learners can have access to them during the day.

5.4 Conclusion

The increased interest in school related problems is shown through emerging studies, new policies formulated and nation-wide rules that bind the secondary schools. Even though there is some element of absenteeism, it is one problem that is not easy to combat. Many students; both male and female, in their teens absent themselves from school illicitly. The role of the administration is to ensure that the policies that are in place are utilised as this will curb such problems at levels that can be controllable, like at Junior Secondary School level, where the schools are small and the students are easy to contain. The main problem comes if the policies are just too strict for the students, ending up causing dropouts and other issues that can emanate from the problem of absenteeism. The teachers who are not at administration level fail to acknowledge the high extent of the problem, insisting that they take disciplinary measures against the culprits. The students on the other hand concede to the high prevalence of absenteeism, but they say punishing the offenders is not a viable solution to the problem. They denied its link with drugs but rather listed home dynamics as being the chief reason for absenteeism. They mentioned such things as having to attend to funerals, weddings, religious rituals and other family commitments. This emanates from our Setswana culture which calls for involvement in family matters from early ages. Some students said they periodically had to miss school so that they could go to their home villages as they had migrated in order to attend better schools.

5.5 Recommendations

Some of the strategies that could be adopted in our schools are: To make students feel welcome in schools, to engage the parents more in the welfare of their students. The latter was mentioned by a lot of teachers as one of the methods that they employ to reduce the prevalence of absenteeism. Students could also be rewarded for good attendance as well as the school engaging the students in different and interesting teaching strategies. An environment where there is mutual respect between the teachers and the students also brings about a reduction to a number of problems, absenteeism included.

The senior management vie for home visits as well as to fully put into practice existing policies on absenteeism whereas those teachers who are not in authority designations feel that monitoring of students' attendance and making follow ups on frequent cases as well as involving parents more would surely reduce the rate of absenteeism.

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