



Examinations Council of Zambia

**Research Study on Learner Absenteeism from Public
Examinations: An Inquiry into the Extent and Causes of
Absenteeism at the Primary and Junior Secondary School
Level**

Examinations Council of Zambia

In conjunction with

UNICEF Zambia

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Extent and Causes of Absenteeism at the Primary and Junior Secondary School Level

Foreword

The Examinations Council of Zambia (ECZ) is a corporate body that was established in 1983 by an Act of Parliament with the mandate of conducting examinations at different school levels. In addition to conducting high stake examinations, ECZ undertakes education-related research. This is premised on the assumption that evidence-based decision making is critical for improving the quality of education in Zambia.

Following the ministerial concern on increasing rate of absenteeism at grades 9 and 7 examination levels, UNICEF in collaboration with ECZ embarked on research to generate empirical evidence. This research was undertaken by the Research and Test Development (RTD) Department of ECZ. The study was made possible with the support from United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) under its support to "Quality Basic Education" component.

The purpose of the study was to investigate the extent, trends and causes of learner absenteeism during public examinations at Grades 7 and 9 levels despite the introduction of free basic education which includes the abolition of examination fees. The study also endeavoured to establish the following; association between learner absenteeism from class during learning time and learner absenteeism during public examinations; assess the extent to which teacher absenteeism during class impacts on learner absenteeism during public examinations; and linkages between learner absenteeism and socio-economic factors.

It is hoped that the findings of this study will provide useful information to various stakeholders in our quest to improve education standards in Zambia.

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

DEBS	District Education Board Secretary
ECZ	Examinations Council of Zambia
ESO	Education Standards Officer
ESO-GI	Education Standards Officer - General Inspection
FGD	Focused Group Discussion
GRZ	Government of the Republic of Zambia
JSSLE	Junior Secondary School Leaving Examination
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MESVTEE	Ministry of Education, Science, Vocational Training and Early Education
PEO	Provincial Education Officer
RTD	Research and Test Development Department
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
ZANEC	Zambia National Education Coalition

Abstract

Governments in developing nations in response to the Millennium Development Goal 5 introduced free basic education. In Zambia, from grade 1 to 7, education is free. This also means that the learners do not pay any examination fees for the two public examinations at Grade 7 and 9. However, learner absenteeism from the two public examinations is a potential threat to the attainment of the EFA and MDG goals. This study was aimed at profiling the extent of learner absenteeism from the two public examinations, document the major causes and propose recommendations to remedy the situation.

The study was carried in two phases, with the first being a quantitative study that was mainly desk research and literature search in nature, while the second phase was mainly qualitative in nature and used a mixed method approach. The primary respondents were the learners who absented themselves from any of the public examinations. School checklists, questionnaires, in-depth interviews and focused group discussions were used to collect the field based data.

The study found that learner absenteeism from examinations was prevalent countrywide and on the quite high especially at grade 9 level. The average absenteeism rates over the 13 year period were 9.03 percent during Grade 7 examinations and 11.30 percent during the Grade 9 examinations. The major causes identified for this type of absenteeism included early marriages and teen pregnancies, lack of parental involvement in education of their children, customs and traditional beliefs, lack of seriousness and unprepared for the examinations, lack of examination centre status, double entries, geographical and natural causes such as illness, and distance covered by learners. The causes were then classified into three categories namely home background, school related and system related factors. Further, the study also found that the macro impact of absenteeism as a system wastage amounted to K1.6 billion over a period of seven years.

Therefore, the study concluded by recommending interventions to reduce the levels of absenteeism from public examinations. Stakeholders, communities, education authorities and learners were called upon to play their part in remediating the challenge posed by absenteeism from examinations.

Key Words: Absenteeism, Contact time, Examinations, Systems wastage, Socio-economic status.

Executive Summary

Absenteeism rates at primary and junior secondary school continue to pose challenges in the attainment of quality education in Zambia despite the introduction of Free Primary Education. A trend analysis of examination candidature revealed that absenteeism was on the rise. This situation raised a lot of concerns from various stakeholders in the education system, a situation which necessitated this study.

The objective of the study was to examine the extent, trends and causes of learner absenteeism during public examinations at Grades 7 and 9 levels. The study was approached in twofold; the first part was the quantitative analysis of absenteeism trends during national examinations between 2000 and 2012 and the cost implications while the second part of the study was qualitative where information was collected from learners, teachers, parents and district education officials through questionnaires, interviews and focused group discussions.

The key research questions were;

- 1. What is the extent of learner absenteeism during examinations?*
- 2. What are the main causes of learner absenteeism?*
- 3. Are the learners who absconded from class during the term more likely to abscond during public examinations?*
- 4. Are learners where Teachers absenteeism in class is high more likely to absent during public examinations?*
- 5. Are learners with a particular cultural or socioeconomic backgrounds more likely to be absent from public examinations than others?*
- 6. What is the value as a systems wastage does learner absenteeism cause during public examination?*
- 7. What could be done to redress the problem of learner absenteeism?*

Purposive sampling was used to arrive at the target population. In total, ninety schools with high absenteeism rates during the 2011 and 2012 examinations were selected from three districts with the highest rates of absenteeism in each of the 10 provinces of Zambia. From such schools, learners who did not sit either the Grade 7 or 9 examinations were selected for the study. The instruments used to collect data included questionnaires, checklists, interviews and focused group discussions. Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS software while qualitative data were transcribed and interpreted.

Some of the key findings of the study included the following;

- 1. The average rates of absenteeism were 9.04 percent and 11 percent at Grades 7 and 9, respectively despite the introduction of free education policy and the abolition of examination fees from grade 1 to 9.*
- 2. At Grade 7 level, the absenteeism rates were higher for girls than boys. For example, 10.12 percent of the girls were absent compared to 9.48 percent boys in the 2012 examination session; 13.64 percent of the girls were absent compared to 11.95 percent boys in 2011; and 11.76 percent of the girls were absent compared to 11.14 percent boys in 2010.*

The pattern of having more girls being absent from public examinations was found both at Grade 7 and 9 level.

3. *In terms of provincial absenteeism, Western (14.35%) and Northern (13.24%) Provinces recorded the highest rates while Copperbelt (7.26%), Southern (7.68%) and Lusaka (7.98%) Provinces had the lowest rates.*

Lusaka (11.34%) and Copperbelt (11.62%) Provinces recorded the lowest rates of absenteeism at Grade 9 level while Western (23.65%) and Central (21.19%) were the provinces with the highest absenteeism rates.

4. *The identified causes of absenteeism were system related factors, school-related factors, and home background factors. These included early marriages and teen pregnancies, lack of parental involvement in education of their children, customs and traditional beliefs, lack of seriousness and un-preparedness for the examinations, lack of examination centre status for some schools, double entries, geographical (distance covered by learners), the hidden cost and natural causes such as illnesses.*
5. *According to district education officers, school-related factors ranked the highest with 33.30 percent of the respondents attributing absenteeism to it.*
6. *The parents indicated that early marriages and teenage pregnancies (44.90%) were the main causes of absenteeism while learners indicated lack of parental involvement (27.10%) was the main reason for absenteeism during public examinations.*
7. *In terms of ranking the factors that accounted for learner absenteeism, early marriages and teenage pregnancies ranked number one while socio economic reasons were ranked least.*
8. *Further, the study revealed that there was a strong relationship between learner absenteeism in class and the final examination. The implication of this finding is that curbing absenteeism during classes could significantly reduce absenteeism during public examinations.*

The study findings indicated that absenteeism during public examination was widespread despite the abolition of examination fees and that redressing the challenge posed by absenteeism would require more holistic and pragmatic approaches. Recommendations targeted at different players/groups were made to the Ministry of Education, Science, Vocational Training and Early Education to address the issue were as follows;

1. *Sensitization on the dangers of early marriages and teenage pregnancies.*
2. *Sensitization on the “Re-entry Policy” for girls who fall pregnant and would like to go back to school after delivery.*
3. *Design programmes that can encourage parents to be more involved in the education of their children.*
4. *MESVTEE to ensure that new school construction guidelines also provide for all the facilities for a school to be considered as an examination centre.*
5. *Sensitize the schools on the procedures and guidelines for attaining status of examination centre.*
6. *Complete abolition of user fees and all hidden examination-related costs that are normally transferred to the learners.*
7. *Strengthening the provision of social security schemes e.g. bursaries, grants.*

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1.0. Introduction

1.1. Background

Education is an essential ingredient for socioeconomic growth and development as well as the reduction of intergenerational transmission of poverty. The recognition of education, as a human right and cornerstone for development, has seen Zambia record tremendous progress towards the attainment of the millennium development goal number two of ‘achieving universal access to primary education’. The pace of investments in education has stimulated a lot of positive growth and this has created an enabling environment for the country’s drive towards the actualization of the Education for All (EFA) targets by 2015. Some of the factors to which the growth in access to primary education in Zambia is attributed to include; provision of free primary education, construction of schools, removal of examination fees at Grades 7 and 9, and introduction of favourable policies such as re-entry policy aimed at getting more children, especially girls, into school (MESVTEE 2011, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands (IOB), 2012). Notably, student’s population for primary and junior secondary schools in 2012 was 3,591,726 compared to 3,290,218, showing a 9.2 percentage increase in terms of access to primary education. Further, according to the Ministry of Education, Science, Vocational Training and Early Education Statistical Bulletin (2013), “the number of schools increased from 8,013 in 2008 to 8,801 Schools in 2013 for Primary and Junior Secondary Schools.”

The learner/student assessment system in Zambia comprises; school-based assessments, large-scale national and international assessments and public examinations. The public examinations conducted are the Grade 7 Composite Examination, the Grade 9 Junior Secondary School Leaving Examination (JSSLE) level and the Grade 12 Joint Examinations for School Certificate (SC) and General Certificate of Education (GCE) Ordinary level. These examinations are high stakes in nature, because the main purpose is selection and certification. This means that for learners to progress to Grade 8 after seven years of primary schooling, or to move to Grade 10 after completion of two years of junior secondary, they must sit the relevant examination. The Grade 12 examination is a school exit examination and the gateway to the world of tertiary education and employment. On the other hand, it is used not only for selection but certification of learners who successfully complete twelve years of schooling and are awarded a School Certificate or the General Certificate of Education (GCE).

According to the examinations statistics by Examinations Council Zambia (ECZ), the period from 2000 to 2013, candidature increased exponentially at both primary and junior secondary school levels. For instance, during the 2013 examination session, candidature increased by over 15.4 percent at the Junior Secondary School Leaving Examination (JSSLE) level with 353,443 entering to sit the JSSLE in 2013 compared to 306,408 in 2011. At grade 7 level, a similar trend was observed with an increase of 2.8 percent from 342,592 candidates in 2011 to 352,266 candidates in 2013.

However, the same period recorded relatively high rates of absenteeism from examination at both levels. The average absenteeism rates for the 13 year period were 9.03 percent during Grade 7 examination and 11.30 percent during the Grade 9 examination. The lowest absenteeism rates recorded were 4.17 percent in 2005 for Grade 7 examinations and 6.67 percent in 2003 for Grade 9 examinations. The highest absenteeism rates for both Grade 7 and 9 were 13.14 percent and 16.06 percent respectively were obtained in 2000 (See Table 1).

Table 1: Candidature and Absenteeism levels at Grade 7 and 9

Year	Grade 7		Grade 9	
	Candidature	Absentees	Candidature	Absentees
2000	181,442	23,847	121,537	19,515
2001	193,289	18,333	132,283	20,473
2002	200,199	12,892	145,228	21,745
2003	224,869	19,615	145,121	9,683
2004	246,636	10,276	166,950	13,517
2005	272,221	21,582	190,389	16,837
2006	293,583	25,486	195,243	18,980
2007	315,177	26,469	218,736	29,137
2008	332,279	30,852	254,032	25,925
2009	340,396	33,188	247,247	23,088
2010	341,326	34,618	281,326	24,575
2011	342,592	39,702	306,408	29,568
2012	337,706	33,277	345,565	54,836
2013	352,266	39,823	353,443	67,807

Source: ECZ Annual Reports

Absenteeism rates at primary and junior secondary school have a high potential of undermining the attainment of quality education in Zambia. In particular, absenteeism rates in public examinations recorded have been proportionately high over time. The absenteeism from examinations is in two forms namely:

1. Candidates absenting themselves from one or more subjects but present in some subjects.
2. Candidates absenting themselves from the entire examination.

The 11th edition of Concise Oxford English Dictionary defined absenteeism as “the practice of staying away from work or school without good reason.” Further, Obeng-Denteh and Others (2005), defined absenteeism as “the persistent absence from work or some other place without good reason.” In the context of this study, absenteeism has been used to refer to a proportion of learners who duly registered for examinations during a particular calendar year but fail to present themselves for an entire examination.

1.2. Reference to the Policies and Goals on Access

Nations world over that have advanced their economies in the recent decades are known to have made radical changes and implemented educational policies aimed at developing the human resource, a key component in fostering economic growth and development. As a result education has seen its recognition as a human right and furthermore enshrined within the bill of rights for most countries’ constitutions. Zambia is no exception, and to this effect the government made a number of commitments whose goals

attempted to attain Millennium Development Goals and EFA goals of universal primary education. In 2002, the Zambian Government in response to the declining enrolment rates and increasing dropout rates introduced the Free Primary Education (FPE) policy at grades one (1) to seven (7) where no child is left behind who is of school going age.

The policy provided for free primary education where statutory fees from Grades 1-7 were abolished and no child was to be denied access to school on account of not paying fees and lacking school uniform (MoE, 2003). The Policy also provided for the abolishment of examination fees (MoE 2004) at Grades 7 for the Grade 7 Composite Examination. The implementation of free education policy at primary school level saw a significant increment in enrolment in grades 1 to 7. The IOB report of 2008 and 2011 on the impact evaluation of Zambia's primary education during the period 2000 to 2007 revealed that enrolment in grades 1 to 7 increased by 67 percent from 1.6 million learners in 2000 to 2.8 million in 2007.

In 2012, government in noting the positive outcomes especially with school enrolments, made further policy pronouncements that saw the introduction of free education for all learners from Grades 1 to 9. This policy was aimed at removing all barriers that limited access and progression in education up to the grade 12. This policy would be implemented in phases and this began with the abolishment of grade 9 examination fees in 2012. Other factors attributed to the growth in access to primary education in Zambia have been the construction of more schools countrywide, and introduction of favourable policies such as re-entry policy aimed at getting more children, especially girls, into school and community schools (MoE, 2008).

During this ten year period (2002 to 2012), the removal of examination fees coupled with an increase in the number of children attending school made Zambia record significant growth in the number of pupils sitting the grade 7 examination. According to the IOB (2008), in the period between 1997 and 2000, "it was estimated that number of pupils taking the grade 7 examination decreased by (7%), but after 2000, there was an increase in enrolment and resulted in a growing number of pupils taking the grade 7 examination. IOB (2011) report also revealed that the enrolment increased by (88%) between 2000 and 2010, with the growth rate of (6.5%) per year. However, despite the positive development in the number of candidates sitting for the examination there seems to be a corresponding increase in the absenteeism rates during public examination especially at grades 7 and 9 levels.

1.3. Statement of Problem

Since the advent of free primary education policy in Zambia, enrolments rates have increased dramatically. At Grade 7 level, the candidature grew from 181,442 in 2000 to 337,706 in 2012 representing an increment of 156,264 candidates. The case was similar for Grade 9 where candidature rose from 121,537 in 2000 to 345,565 in 2012 representing an increase of 224,028 candidates. However, the increase in candidature at the two levels also recorded an increase in learner absenteeism during public examination. The average absenteeism rates during the Grade 7 and 9 examinations was 9 and 11.3

percent, respectively. The absenteeism rates are considered too be high and of a serious threat to attainment to universal access to education. In particular, the high rates of absenteeism during Grade 7 and 9 public examinations have been identified as one such hindrance towards the attainment of quality and access to education. Further, absenteeism has a potential to invalidate the gains, if left unchecked.

1.4. Purpose of Study

The study aimed at comprehensively investigating the extent to which institutional, policy, socio-cultural orientation, learning environments and other factors contribute to absenteeism during public examinations at Grade 7 and 9. The study also aimed at generating pragmatic solutions that would help redress the increasing absenteeism rates during public examinations. It was hoped that the study recommendations would ultimately inform policy in devising interventions to reverse the challenges of absenteeism.

The study specifically aimed to:-

1. determine the causes of absenteeism;
2. establish the relationship between learner absenteeism from class during learning time and learner absenteeism during public examinations;
3. establish the relationship between learner absenteeism from public examinations and socio-economic / cultural backgrounds;
4. assess the macro impact of absenteeism as a systems wastage; and,
5. recommend policy interventions to reduce learner absenteeism from public examinations.

1.5. Research Questions

The main research question for this study was to find the causes and extent of learner absenteeism during public examinations at grade 7 and 9 levels despite the removal of examination fees. The specific research questions were as follows;

1. What is the extent of learner absenteeism during examinations?
2. What are the main causes of learner absenteeism?
3. Are the learners who absconded from class during the term more likely to abscond during public examinations?
4. Are learners where teachers absenteeism in class is high more likely to absent during public examinations?
5. Are learners with a particular cultural or socioeconomic backgrounds more likely to be absent from public examinations than others?
6. What could be done to redress the problem of learner absenteeism?
7. What is the value as a systems wastage does learner absenteeism cause during public examinations?

1.6. Significance of the Study

An inquiry into the extent and causes of absenteeism is worth undertaking as it would help come up with interventions to address the challenges that this poses. If the root causes of this problem were exposed, more learners would stay in school as strategies to prevent the situation would be devised. This would help policy makers come up with evidence-based decisions when dealing with the matter. Further, the gains attained as a result of already existing favourable policies such as the removal of examination fees and the introduction of the re-entry policy for girls who fall pregnant would be consolidated.

Additionally, it is important to note that there is very little body of evidence on absenteeism from public examinations in Zambia. The studies that have been conducted on the phenomenon mostly focus on learner absenteeism from school class. Thus, this study will contribute to filling that knowledge gap on the topic of absenteeism from public examinations.

2.0 Literature Review

In this Chapter an attempt has been made to highlight studies done on teacher and learner absenteeism. Particularly, the literature review focused on the causes of learner as well as teacher absenteeism; the impact of learner / teacher absenteeism on learning and performance, and the suggested strategies for combating absenteeism. The chapter was concluded by the identification of gaps in the literature reviewed with particular emphasis on the Zambian situation.

2.1 Extent of Learner Absenteeism

Most studies and literature indicates that learner absenteeism was beginning a serious challenge in education. For example, Epstein and Sheldon (2002) observed that many children who are normally enrolled in school do not attend class on a regular basis. Other scholars like Bennett (2010) have actually stated that although there have been concerted efforts among various stakeholders to reduce absenteeism in schools; challenges still exist as many learners continue to absent themselves from classes. Reimer and Smink (2005) in Cooperkline (2009) add that school absenteeism within the public school system in America had reached a crisis point. Create India Policy Brief 3 (2011) also reported that absenteeism was rampant in India while Wadesango and Machingombi (2011) equally acknowledged absenteeism as a serious problem in Africa, particularly among South African students.

2.2 Causes of Learner Absenteeism

A study was conducted in India by Create India Policy Brief 3 (2011) to explore the causes and correlations of absenteeism, repetition and silent exclusion. The analysis was based on the Create research in three clusters in the states of Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. The findings showed that absenteeism was rampant considering that on the day of the field visit, 22 percent of the children were absent from one sampled school, 35 percent in the second school and 47 percent in the third school. The findings generally revealed that children from economically and educationally disadvantaged families had high levels of absenteeism and repetition.

In America, a study was conducted by Bridgeland, et al. (2006) to better understand the lives and circumstances of students who drop out of high school. The study was conducted in response to the high school dropout epidemic in America. Focus group discussions and a survey was conducted in which participants who identified themselves as high school dropouts in 25 different locations throughout the United States participated to give their stories. The findings revealed that participants generally regretted the decision to drop out of school. Among the major reasons advanced by respondents for dropping out of school were that they absented themselves from class for many days and therefore could not catch up. Some found classes uninteresting and spent time with people not interested in school while others indicated that they had to get a job; became parents or had to care for a family member. This study was

different from the other studies considering that the students themselves were the main source of data, which helped to paint an in-depth picture of their stories.

In Africa, a similar study was conducted by the Community Agency for Social Enquiry (2007) to investigate the incidence of learner and reasons for absenteeism in South Africa. The investigation used interviews and structured questionnaires to collect data from school principals, representatives of school governing bodies and district/provincial education officials. Among the factors identified for student absenteeism were: personal characteristics (illness, age, gender, learning disabilities); socio-economic (lack of parental involvement, disintegrated family structures, food insecurity, child labour, transport, teen pregnancy); school-based (competence of educators, punishment for late coming, violence in school and poor school facilities).

One of the major recommendations provided on addressing absenteeism was that approaches to managing absenteeism should be devised in a holistic way implying that solutions must take into account specific socio-economic and cultural characteristic of the schools and surrounding communities where absenteeism was a problem.

2.3 Extent of Teacher Absenteeism

Literature indicates that absenteeism of teachers is widespread and unpredictable. For example, in a survey conducted by Chaudhury, et al. (2006) in which almost 70,000 surprise visits to primary schools across six poor countries in three continents was done, it was found that teachers were absent 19 percent of the time on average. In a district by district assessment, Pratham, an NGO focusing on primary education, found 23 percent absenteeism rates among teachers throughout India (Annual Status Education Report, 2005). In a similar study conducted in Africa, a significant number of teachers were absent from school, and only about half were teaching, during unannounced visits to 53 public primary schools in Lagos State, Nigeria (Independent Advocacy project, 2009-2010).

2.4 Causes of Teacher Absenteeism

The Teachers' Union of Nepal were contracted by UNICEF Nepal in October 2009 to undertake an assessment of seasonal factors impacting teacher and learners school attendance in selected schools of the Karnali zone. The study employed both qualitative and quantitative data methodologies to collect data. Particularly, focus group discussions, structured questionnaires and school attendance registers were used to collect data. The main findings of the study were that 83 school-days were lost each year through absences linked to seasonal events.

Some of the main seasonal factors cited for teacher absenteeism were early departure for vacations; late return after vacations; involvement in farming activities and migration to avoid cold weather. The main non-seasonal factors cited were poor management of teachers in schools, participation in teacher training with no system for providing substitute teachers during these periods and involvement in trade or

business. The study conclude that learners from poor families and those from households engaged in agriculture or livestock-raising were more likely to be absent from school.

In Africa, a study was conducted in Uganda by the African Network for the Prevention and Protection against Child Abuse and Neglect (2010) to measure the extent of and reasons for teacher absenteeism. Using both random and non-random sampling methods, the study focused on Iganga district following reports by the district office about possible teacher absenteeism in the previous three years. A total of 620 people participated in the study through interviews. The major findings showed that absenteeism among female teachers was more than that of the males. Sickness, involvement in other income generating activities especially farming; inadequacies in inspection; weak monitoring mechanisms at school level; lack of teachers' houses; long distances to school and distances to banks were linked to absenteeism.

2.5 Impact of Teacher and Learner Absenteeism

Teacher absenteeism can influence the overall quality of education considering that it can greatly reduce the overall effectiveness of the school, diminish pupil achievements, damage the school's reputation; induce pupil absenteeism and display negative role models for students who often see teachers as mentors (Bray 2003; Das and et al. 2005). Miller, et al. (2007) conducted a study that was aimed at examining the casual effects of teacher absences. Apart from conducting interviews with school principals, patterns of teacher absences were documented based on local school calendars. The findings showed that each 10 days of teacher absenteeism reduced student's mathematics achievement by 3.3 percent of a standard deviation.

The Independent Advocacy Project (2009 – 2010) in Nigeria also conducted a study with the purpose of finding out the causes and consequences of teacher absenteeism in Nigerian public schools. The study methodological approach included a desk study, focus group discussions, facility visits and survey questionnaires. The findings indicated that teacher absenteeism contributed to the falling standards of education. Particularly, the results showed that absenteeism of teachers amounted to heavy loss of valuable class work and the inability to cover the syllabus. Other findings showed significant absenteeism behaviour among female teachers. The major causes of absenteeism included poor salaries, lack of effective monitoring oversight and economic pressures.

The study conducted by African Network for the Prevention and Protection against Child Abuse and Neglect (ANPPCAN) Uganda Chapter with Support from Transparency and Accountability Program (TAP) of the Results for Development Institute in Uganda found that, absenteeism was more rampant among female teachers than of the males teachers (Teacher absenteeism was found to be at 43.6% being higher among females (51%), than males (49%). It was found out on average, the absenteeism rate of head teachers is 19.7%). Some of the reasons advanced for teacher absenteeism included sickness, attending to family problems, training, leave and attending to administrative duties.

Sponsored by UNICEF, Hua (2008) conducted a study aimed at identifying the status and trend in school wastage with a focus on students' participation and attendance in schooling in Armenia. The study employed both qualitative and quantitative methodologies and used various data sources to analyse and evaluate key indicators of school wastage, including student participation and academic performance. One of the key results was that student absenteeism in Armenia was negatively correlated with student academic performance - the more hours students were absent, the worse their academic performance was. Other findings were that the dropout rate in Armenian schools had worsened over the years and that students in higher grades were more likely to be absent than those in lower grades.

In another study carried out by Suryadarma et al. (2004) to investigate the determinants of student performance in mathematics and dictation tests among fourth-grade school children in Indonesia, it was revealed that teacher absence rate was among the strongest influence on student performance. Further, a study to investigate the impact of learner/teacher absenteeism on performance was conducted by Denteh, et al. (2011). The study which was exploratory in nature was conducted in Kumasi, Ghana to find out whether student and teacher absenteeism affected the performance of students in Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) results. The results indicated that while student absenteeism was of no significance to the performance of students in BECE, teacher absenteeism greatly impacted on the performance of the students in BECE.

Wadesango and Machingambi (2011) conducted a study to examine the implications of student absenteeism in selected universities in South Africa. The study also sought to explore the extent and reasons of student absenteeism. Data were collected through questionnaires and interviews with students. The study found an inverse relationship between student absenteeism and course performance. The study further revealed that student absenteeism was rampant in the universities under study. Some of the reasons advanced for absenteeism were lack of subject interest, poor teaching strategies by lecturers, unfavourable learning environment, too much socialization, part-time jobs to augment meagre bursaries and poor relations with the lecturers.

Other scholars like Epstein and Sheldon (2002) also conducted research on absenteeism which took a different dimension. Particularly, the research which was a longitudinal study was aimed at finding out how families and community involvement activities were implemented to reduce chronic absenteeism among students. The findings showed that communicating with families about attendance, celebrating good attendance and connecting chronically absent students with community mentors measurably reduced students' chronic absenteeism from one year to the next.

2.6 The Zambian Situation

Learner absenteeism is equally a challenge in Zambia as the situation is not any different from that of other countries reported above. For example, the 2012 National Assessment Survey on Learning Achievement at Grade 5 Level cited learner absenteeism as a serious considering that 97 percent of pupils that participated in the research stated that they were absent once or more times in the school term. The major reasons that accounted for pupil absenteeism were sickness (53%) . Other reasons included pupil involvement in economic activities, teacher harassment and inability to pay user fees. Absenteeism from examinations is also a growing challenge in Zambia. The Examinations Council of Zambia (2011) reported that absenteeism during examinations grew from 4.17 percent in 2004 to 9.75 percent in 2009.

Another study conducted by the Examinations Council of Zambia in 1997 sought to report the extent and causes of learner absenteeism during examinations at Grade 7, 9 and 12 for the year 1994 – 1995. The extent of learner absenteeism was obtained through an analysis of statistics on examinations at national and provincial levels. The findings showed that the causes of absenteeism included lack of preparedness for examinations, expulsion and natural causes. For most girls, pregnancies and early marriages was the most predominant reason for absenteeism (80%).

Studies on the impact of teacher absenteeism in Zambia have shown similar findings to those conducted in other countries. For example, the findings of a study conducted on the consequences of teacher absenteeism on learner achievement revealed that a 5 percent increase in teacher absenteeism rates reduced learning by 4 to 8 percent of average gains over the academic year in English and mathematics (Das et. al, 2005).

Zambia National Education Coalition (ZANEC) and Transparency and Accountability Program (TAP) (2012) conducted a study to examine the extent and causes of teachers' absenteeism in selected basic schools in Zambia as well as identify strategies for improving the teachers/pupil contact hours at basic school level. Spontaneous survey visits to schools were made to provide insight on absenteeism rates. The findings indicated that absenteeism among teachers was widespread considering that out of the 908 teachers who were employed in the 40 sampled school, 388 (42%) teachers were not in school at the time of the visit.

2.7 Conclusion

By and large, most studies reviewed showed that learner absenteeism was quite prevalent all over the world and that Zambia is not an exception. Globally, the causes and consequences of learner absenteeism are different and multifaceted. Consistent also in the studies is that teacher absenteeism adversely affects learner performance and the provision of quality education. It is also important to mention that most studies on absenteeism have concentrated more on the absenteeism of learners from class than from examinations.

3.0 Methodology

The methodology of the study has been explained in this section. It highlights the research design used; sampling procedures; instruments used; data collection methods; data analysis procedures and concludes by underlining the study limitations.

3.1. Study Design

Mixed methods approach (qualitative and quantitative) was used to collect data on the causes and extent of learner absenteeism during public examinations. The use of this method afforded the researchers an opportunity to use strengths of some methods to counterbalance the weakness of the other methods.

In the initial phase of the study, descriptive research design was used to ascertain the extent of absenteeism during examinations. The choice of this research design helps to describe the characteristics of the target population and determine relationships between variables and make specific predictions for solving research problems (Stebbins, 2001). National examination datasets were used to establish absenteeism trends, quantify systems wastage as well as establish absenteeism profiles of schools and districts.

The second phase of the study involved use of exploratory research design during data collection in the schools based on the profiles created during the first phase. According to Stebbins (2001), exploratory research designs place emphasis on gaining and discovering ideas and insights which are not final answers but rather help to produce hypotheses about what is going on in a situation. The study used school checklist, questionnaire, interviews and Focus Group Discussions to collect data during the field visits.

3.2. Scope of the Study

The coverage of this study was in all the ten provinces of the country. From each of the provinces, the focus was on three districts with high absenteeism rates. Further, the sample was drawn of only primary and junior secondary schools with the highest absenteeism rates in the 2012 examination session. The timeframe for undertaking the study was one month. The 30 districts that were covered under the study are shown in Figure 1.

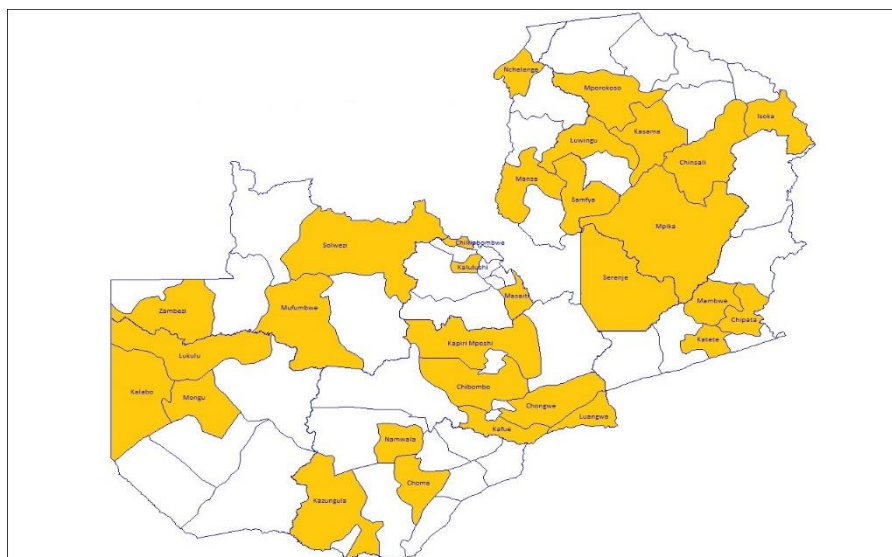


Figure 1: Map of Zambia with 30 Sampled Districts highlighted

3.3. Study Sample

The sample for the study was drawn from the schools, communities and district education offices within the 30 districts catchment area. The key sources of information in schools were the learners, the class teachers, guidance teachers and head teachers. Parents and former learners who failed to present themselves for the 2011 and 2012 examination sessions were also identified from the communities. Education Standards Officers were identified as key informants at the district level.

The distribution of target group for the study was as follows;

1. Schools;
 - i. In each of the 90 schools, 15 learners currently in examination classes (Grades 7 and 9) participated in Focus Group Discussions (FGD). Further, 75 learners who missed the 2011 and 2012 examination sessions and were in school at the time of the study, participated in one on one interview sessions.
 - ii. Former learners who missed an examination at either Grade 7 or 9 levels and were currently out school were identified in the communities and interviewed together with their parents. In total, 75 (36 boys and 39 girls) former learners living in surrounding communities of the 90 schools were purposively sampled countrywide and interviewed.
 - iii. In each of the 90 sampled schools, selected class teachers handling examination classes as well as teachers in charge of school guidance and counselling participated in guided interview sessions.
 - iv. In each of the 90 sampled schools, all school head-teachers responded to the school questionnaires.
2. 30 community members consisting of parents and guardians and Parent Teacher Association (PTA) representatives participated in guided interview sessions.
3. 30 key informants comprising of education standards officers – general inspection responded to the questionnaires.

3.4. Sampling Techniques

Purposive sampling was used to select three schools from three districts in each of the 10 provinces. The only criterion was that each of these schools and districts should have been the three with the highest rates of absenteeism during the 2011 and 2012 examination sessions. In total, 90 schools constituted the sample for the research (*Refer to Annex 2*). Further, participants for the guided questionnaire and focus group discussions were selected from the sampled schools using Critical Case Sampling and Snowball Sampling which according to Groves et al. (2009) were non probability sampling methods.

3.5. Data Collection Instruments

Data was collected using the following instruments;

1. Self-administered questionnaires for key informants.
2. In-depth interviews for learners and community members.
3. Focus group discussions.
4. Desk review of Examinations Statistics

3.6. Data Analysis

The quantitative data from the school checklist, questionnaires, class registers and examination datasets were analysed using Excel and SPSS software to generate descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics were used to identify the causes of learner absenteeism while inferential statistics were used to establish the association among various factors. Analyses involved running frequencies, cross-tabulations, correlation analysis and linear regression.

In-depth interviews were conducted with candidates who were absent from the Grade 7 and 9 examinations. Analysis of qualitative data involved manual synthesis of responses, aggregation of findings, matching the response patterns, generating summaries and in some instances reporting verbatim responses.

3.7. Limitations of the Study

Due to time limitations and resources, not all schools with high learner absenteeism rates were included in the study. In addition, poor record management in some schools posed a challenge in collecting information related to school attendance by learners and teachers.

3.8. Ethical Consideration

Consent was obtained from all participants. The study ensured confidentiality by using codes for all interview transcripts and concealing names of all participants. The study was therefore conducted with respect and concern in the interest of all informants.

4.0. Findings of the Study

The findings of the study are presented in two parts. The first part is about the findings of the desk review while the second part outlines findings from the field visits.

4.1. Part One Findings based on the Quantitative Study

The first section profiles the extent and trends in learner absenteeism from public examinations for the period 2000 to 2013 at the Grades 7 and 9 levels. The section concludes with a presentation of findings on the system wastage resulting from learner absenteeism. The findings in this section are mainly from the desk review conducted in the first phase of the study. The desk review study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. *What is the extent of learner absenteeism during examinations?*
2. *What is the value as a systems wastage does learner absenteeism cause during public examination?*

(i) Absenteeism Rates

From the year 2000 to 2012 candidature at Grade 7 doubled from about 180,000 to 340,000 candidates. At Grade 9 level the candidature increased during the same period from almost 120,000 to 345,000. The number of learners absent at Grade 7 level increased from about 24,000 to 33,000 and it increased from about 19,500 to 55,000 at Grade 9 level, the figures are in Table 2.

During the period under review, a total of 654,589 candidates who were duly registered for the examinations at Grade 7, 9, and 12 failed to present themselves for examinations due to various reasons this study sought to unveil.

Table 2: Candidature and Learner Absenteeism Rates

Year	Grade 7			Grade 9		
	Candidature	No. Absent	Absenteeism Rates (%)	Candidature	No. Absent	Absenteeism Rates (%)
2000	181,442	23,847	13.10	121,537	19,515	16.10
2001	193,289	18,333	9.50	132,283	20,473	15.50
2002	200,199	12,892	6.40	145,228	21,745	15.00
2003	224,869	19,615	8.70	145,121	9,683	6.70
2004	246,636	10,276	4.20	166,950	13,517	8.10
2005	272,221	21,582	7.90	190,389	16,837	8.80
2006	293,583	25,486	8.70	195,243	18,980	9.70
2007	315,177	26,469	8.40	218,736	29,137	13.30
2008	332,279	30,852	9.30	254,032	25,925	10.20
2009	340,396	33,188	9.70	247,247	23,088	9.30
2010	341,326	34,618	10.10	281,326	24,575	8.70
2011	342,592	39,702	11.60	306,408	29,568	9.60
2012	337,706	33,277	9.90	345,565	54,836	15.90
2013	352,266	39,823	11.30	353,443	67,807	19.18

Further analysis indicated that the majority of those absent from the examinations were at Grade 9 level compared to Grade 7 level. In absolute terms, Grade 9 has recorded absenteeism numbers larger than Grade 7 in the most recent years especially for the 2012 and 2013 examinations sessions. On average, absenteeism rates over the 13-year period (2000 to 2013) were higher at Grade 9 level (11.3%) compared to Grade 7 level at (9%).

(ii) Trend Analysis of Learner Absenteeism

Provincial trend analysis for four years (2008 – 2012) at Grade 7 level indicated that the absenteeism rates were the highest during the 2011 examination session. Overall, Western Province recorded the highest number of learners who were absent. Northern and Luapula Provinces equally had high rates, in second and third positions respectively (See Figure 2).

Generally, the trends analysis of absenteeism rates from examinations at grade 7 level revealed a relatively stable pattern across provinces with peaks observed for Western and Northern province and low pecks for Copperbelt, Southern and Lusaka provinces. The 2011 examination session had relatively higher rates across provinces while 2008 examination showed relatively lower rates across provinces during the five examination sessions (2008 to 2012).

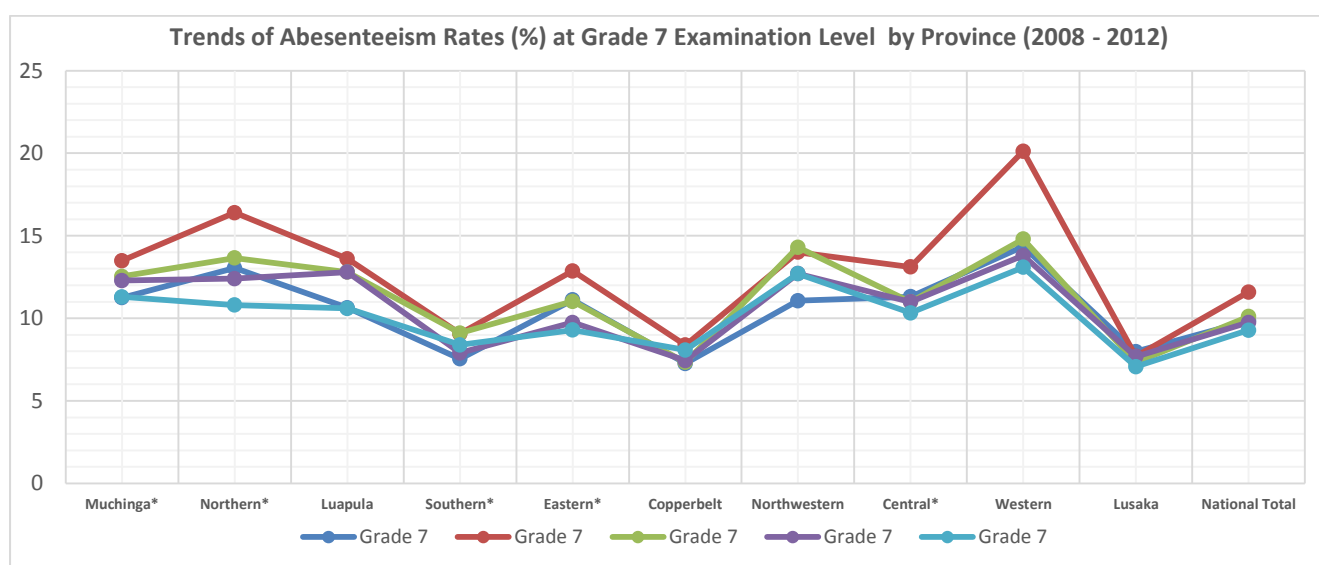


Figure 2: Trends of Absenteeism at Grade 7 Level by Province

At Grade 9 level, a relatively unstable pattern across provinces was observed with the 2012 examination session standing out compared to the other years (2008 – 2012). Considerably high pecks were observed for Western, Central and Northwestern provinces while low pecks are observed for Lusaka and Copperbelt provinces. Northern Province on one hand revealed a gradual but distinct increase in rates of absenteeism during the 2008 – 2012 period (See Figure 3).

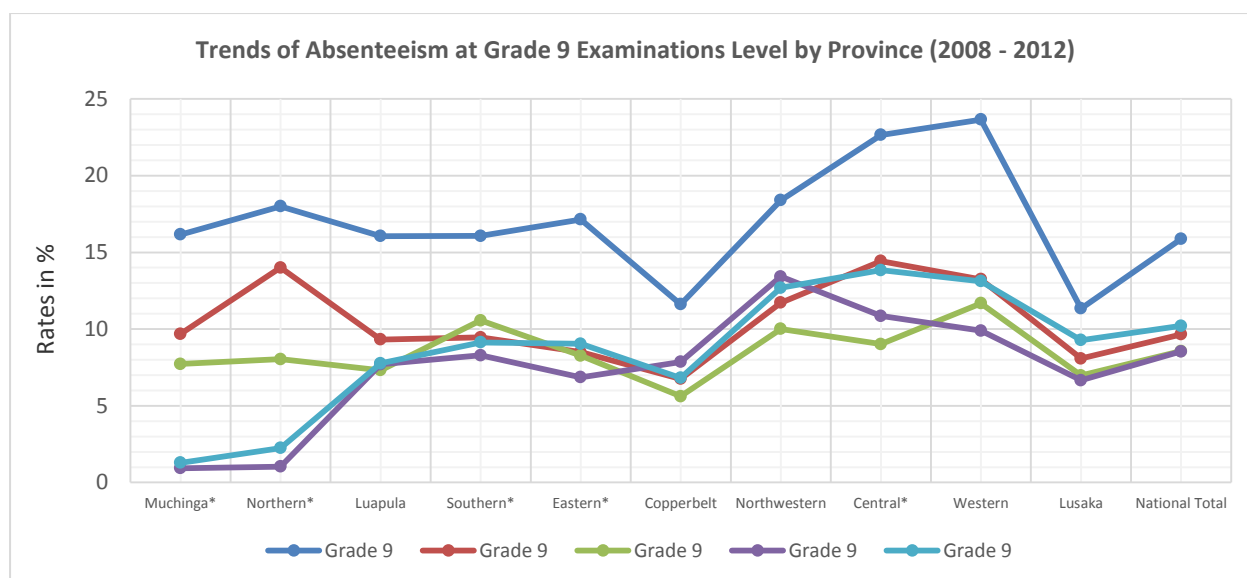


Figure 3: Trends of Absenteeism at Grade 9 Examinations Level by Province

From the year 2005 onwards, learner absenteeism from public examination at both Grade 7 and 9 levels showed an upward trend (Figure 4). Ironically between the years 2011 and 2012, a sharp increase in absenteeism rates was recorded at Grade 9 level and this coincided with when the declaration of free education was made. Overall, learner absenteeism rates from examinations reached the lowest levels in 2004 at 4.2 percent at Grade 7 and 6.7 percent at Grade 9 in 2003. The highest levels of absenteeism recorded for the years under review were in 2000 at both Grade 7 and 9 with 13.1 percent and 16.1 percent, respectively.

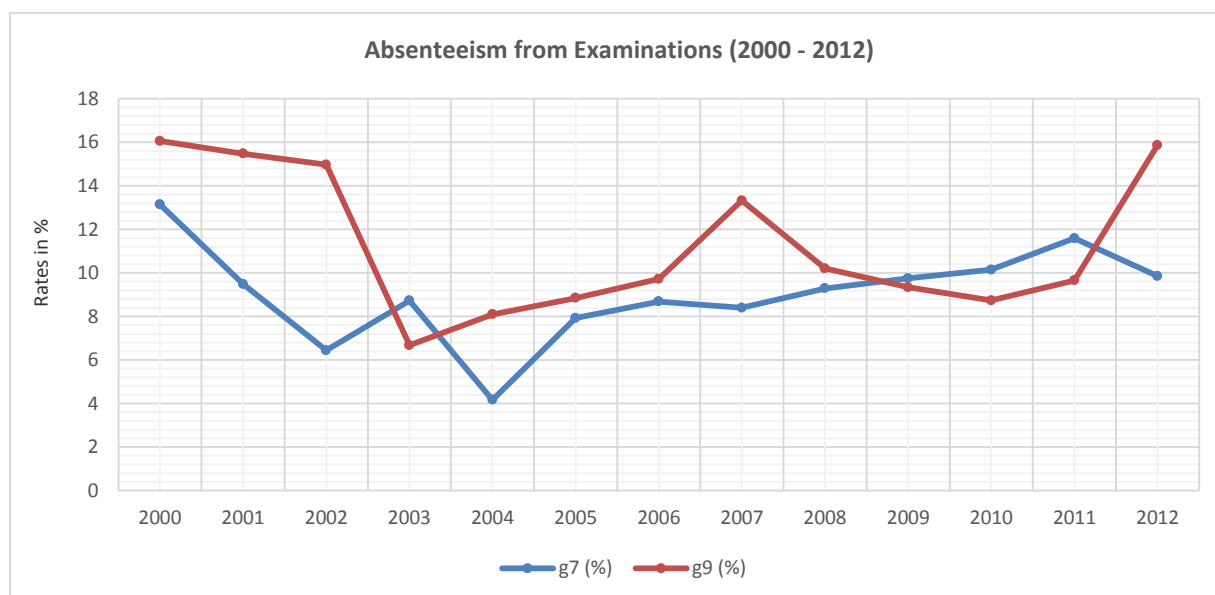


Figure 4: Trends in Learner Absenteeism at Grade 7 and 9 during the Past Decade

(iii) Absenteeism According to Province and Gender

Overall, absenteeism rates amongst girls were higher than boys across all the provinces. Boys from Lusaka and Copperbelt Provinces, which are predominantly urban provinces, recorded lower rates of absenteeism compared rural provinces such as Northern, Luapula and North Western Provinces. For the last three years, North Western, Western and Northern Provinces consistently recorded high rates of absenteeism at both levels of the examination (See Table 3). Over the three year period, the absenteeism rates were higher for girls than boys across all provinces with the exception of Central Province where boys' average absenteeism rates were slightly higher for boys compared to girls.

Table 3: Learner Absenteeism Rates at Grade 7 and 9 According to Gender and Region (2010,2011,2012)

	Grade 7						Grade 9					
	2010		2011		2012		2010		2011		2012	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Northern	13.04	13.45	14.75	16.57	11.80	13.26	7.97	8.66	11.34	12.54	17.16	17.75
Luapula	14.12	14.13	12.60	14.84	10.47	10.85	6.69	8.20	8.93	9.86	15.22	17.19
Southern	8.41	9.07	9.16	9.72	7.43	7.94	8.68	10.48	8.63	10.30	14.69	15.63
Eastern	8.94	11.00	11.49	14.95	10.22	12.49	7.28	9.09	8.45	10.07	18.31	20.40
Copperbelt	8.08	8.73	8.04	8.72	7.02	7.50	5.33	5.90	6.51	6.97	11.02	12.18
Northwestern	13.24	14.46	12.93	15.24	9.74	12.61	9.61	10.56	11.08	12.57	17.19	20.00
Central	11.86	10.98	12.60	12.83	11.64	11.56	7.87	8.99	13.54	14.70	21.71	22.07
Western	14.33	14.71	18.55	21.85	13.80	14.94	10.69	12.95	12.25	14.45	22.74	24.78
Lusaka	8.27	9.32	7.40	7.98	7.47	8.46	6.36	7.55	7.34	8.74	10.13	12.43
National	11.14	11.76	11.95	13.63	9.48	10.26	7.44	8.48	9.18	10.17	15.43	16.35

The graphical presentations of the 3-year average of learner absenteeism during the Grade 7 examinations level is shown in figure 5.

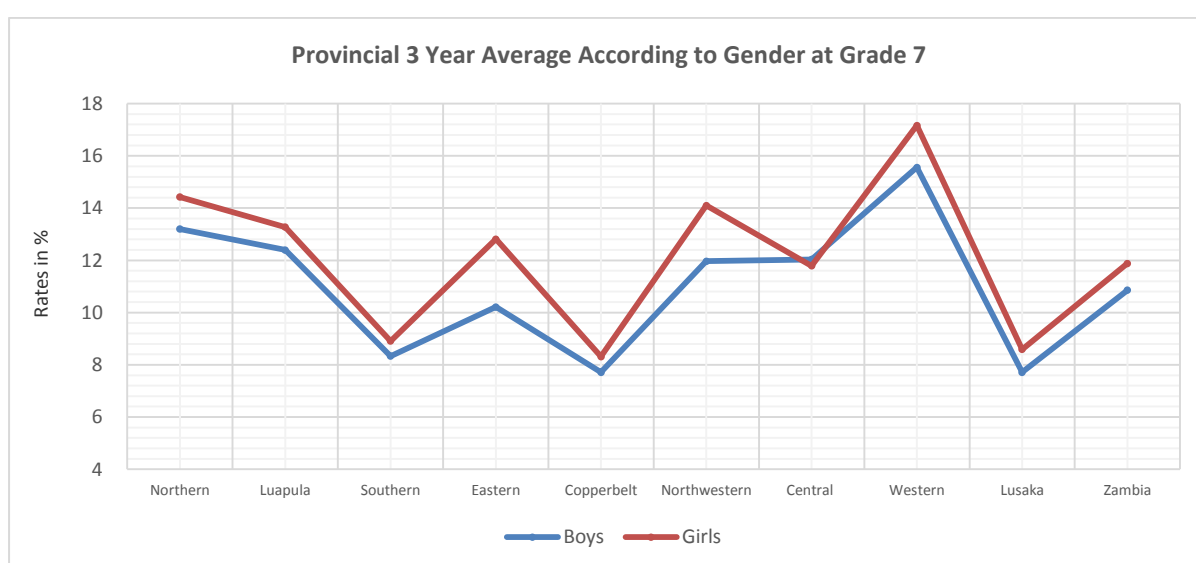


Figure 5: Provincial 3 Year Average According to Gender at Grade 7

At Grade 9 level, the 3 - year average absenteeism rates were highest in Western, Central, North Western and Eastern Provinces and it was the lowest on the Copperbelt and Lusaka Provinces. A similar trend was observed at this level where average absenteeism rates were higher for the girls than boys across the country.

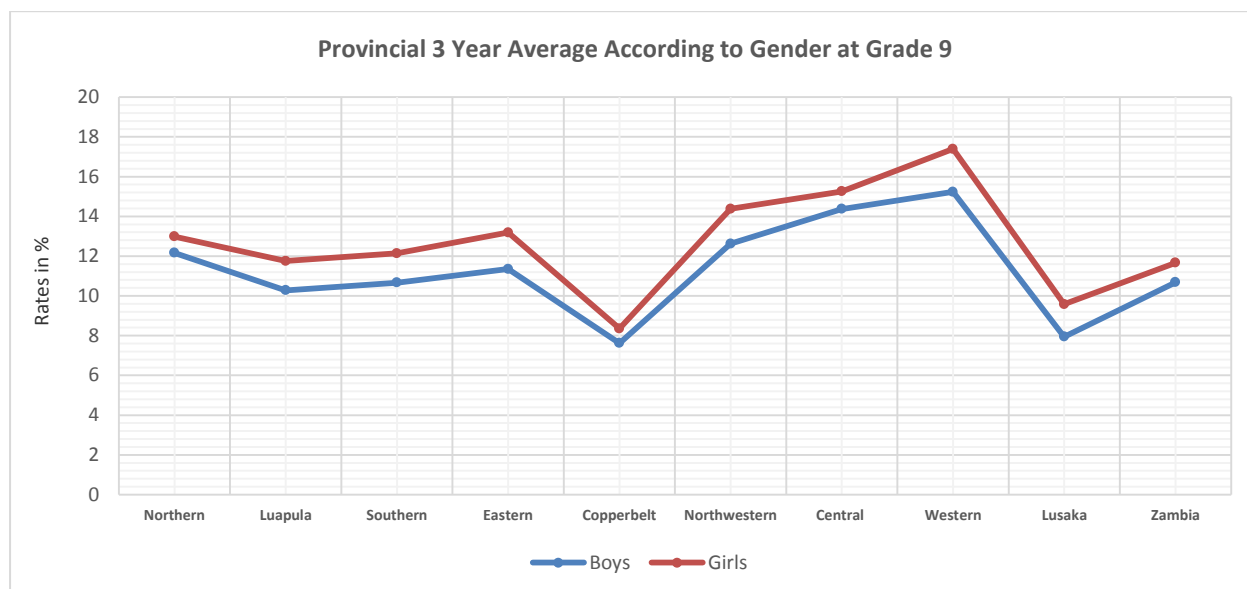


Figure 6: Provincial 3-Year Average According to Gender at Grade 9

(iv) Learner Examination Absenteeism in Specific Subjects

At Grade 7 for subject-specific absenteeism by the learners indicated an average of 10.3 percent for all the subjects except Zambian Languages in 2010 which went up in 2011 at 11.0. The Zambian Languages had the highest absenteeism rate of 10.6 percent which increased to 12.2 percent in 2011. This clearly shows that learners were mostly absent from Zambian Languages compared to other subjects. This could be attributed to the fact that a number of private and most of the government schools in urban areas do not impress upon learners to take interest in the Zambian languages.

At Grade 9 level, practical and Zambian Language subjects recorded the highest levels of absenteeism with Art recording almost 20.1 percent, followed by Agriculture Science at 19.9 and Home Management at 19.8 percent. For the compulsory subjects such as English Language, Mathematics, Environmental Science, Civics, History and Geography, the average absenteeism rate was 18.5 percent.

The absenteeism rates according to subject in 2012 is shown in table 3. Environmental Science, History and Civics recorded the least subject specific absenteeism rates.

Table 4: 2012 Ranking Absenteeism According to Subjects at Grade 9 level

Subject Area	Absenteeism Rate	Rank	Subject Area	Absenteeism Rate	Rank
Art	20.1	1	Lunda	11.3	13
Agriculture Science	19.9	2	Technical Drawing	11.2	14
Home Management	19.8	3	Cinyanja	11.1	15
Woodwork	18.3	4	Book Keeping	11	16
Kiikaonde	17.2	5	Religious Education	9.4	17
Music	14.8	6	French Language	9	18
Chitonga	14.2	7	English Language	8.7	19
Metal Work	12.6	8	Mathematics	8.6	20
Silozi	12.2	9	Geography	8.6	20
Icibemba	11.9	10	Civics	8.5	21
Luvale	11.5	11	History	8.5	21
Office Practice	11.3	12	Environmental Science	8.5	21

(v) Learner Absenteeism as a System Wastage

In addressing the research question on the macro impact of absenteeism as a system wastage, the study looked at it in the context of learner dropping out, and failing to present oneself for summative assessment such as public examinations (Yerevan, 2008). To calculate the System Wastage, the following formula was used;

$$Wastage = B \times A \times C$$

Where:

B = drop outs for the period

A = unit cost in current prices (subsector allocation divided by the subsector enrolments)

C = official length of the education cycle

There was bound to be variations across the years in the subsector allocations, depending on the Ministry of Education's priorities for each particular year. Hence, a singular year's subsector allocation was adopted for the purposes of the analysis. Where there was no reliable information on the subsector allocation, the 2007 subsector allocation which appeared to have been stable was adopted as an anchor year for this purpose. The unit costs were therefore computed for the subsectors for 2007 and adjusted annually backwards until 2000 and upwards until 2012 using a conservative GDP deflator of 6.5 percent. (See Table 5).

Table 5: Education Level Per-Capita Annual Unit Expenditures

Year	Grade 7	Grade 9	Grade 12	Deflator
2000	141	141	1402	6.5%
2001	150	150	1499	6.5%
2002	161	161	1604	6.5%
2003	172	172	1715	6.5%
2004	184	184	1834	6.5%
2005	197	197	1962	6.5%
2006	210	210	2098	6.5%
2007	225	225	2244	6.5%
2008	240	240	2390	6.5%
2009	255	255	2545	6.5%
2010	272	272	2711	6.5%
2011	289	289	2887	6.5%
2012	308	308	3074	6.5%

Summary	Grade 7	Grade 9	Grade 12	Total
Total Cost	712,398,174	854,187,346	45,844,623	1,612,430,144

From table 5 above, the actual wastage in 2012 current prices was ZMW 712, 398,174.00 at the Grade 7 level, ZMW854, 187,346.00 at Grade 9 and ZMW 45,844,623.00 at Grade 12.

For the period 2000 to 2012, a total of 654,589 learners who were duly registered candidates dropped out of school by not writing the final examinations for all the examination levels. This resulted in a monumental financial loss of **ZMW 1,612,430,144.00** (about **US\$ 293,169.12**).

(vi) Implications

From the statistical information, it is evident that learner absenteeism from public examination has a potential threat on the provision of free education for all. The study has showed that the average rates of absenteeism were 9.04 percent and 11.0 percent at Grades 7 and 9, respectively despite the introduction of free education policy and the abolition of examination fees. Predominantly urban provinces showed lower absenteeism compared to the rural provinces. This is attributed to the prevalent socioeconomic conditions and lack of examination centre status in most remote schools. The study has evidently revealed that learner absenteeism from public examinations was found across the country and that it is growing concern and Zambia should recognise it as such. The findings of Epstein and Sheldon (2002) acknowledged that learner's absenteeism was a serious problem in Africa. As efforts towards achieving universal primary education are in top gear resources channelled towards this cause also need proper utilization. From learner absenteeism from examinations an estimated 1.6 billion kwacha has been since 2000.

4.2. Part Two Findings based on the Field Visits.

The findings from the field visits undertaken countrywide during the second phase of the study helped answer the following research questions:

- (i) *What are the main causes of learner absenteeism?*
- (ii) *Are the learners who absconded from class during the term more likely to abscond during public examinations?*
- (iii) *Are learners where Teachers absenteeism in class is high more likely to absent during public examinations?*
- (iv) *Are learners with a particular cultural or socioeconomic backgrounds more likely to be absent from public examinations than others?*

1) Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The Learner

A total of 75 learners and former learners took part in the study from the 90 sampled schools. Of these, 48 percent were boys and 52 percent were girls. Rural schools accounted for 81.3 percent of the schools sampled while only 18.7 percent were urban schools (*refer to Annex 2*). Further, 62.7 percent of the former learners interviewed reported to have been in the Grade 7 during the year 2012 while only 37.3 percent reported having been in the Grade 9 during the same year.

Furthermore, 90.7 percent of the former learners interviewed indicated that they had entered to sit for the examinations during the 2012 examination session at either Grade 7 or 9. Only 8 percent indicated that they wrote some of the subjects they registered for during the 2012 examinations session.

On when the learners decided that they would not sit for the examinations, it was found out that 50.7 percent decided not to write in the third term, 37.3 percent in the second term and only a paltry 5.3 percent reported having left school in the first term.

The Community

There were 69 respondents who were community members who had children or dependents who attended the sampled schools in the selected districts. 66.7 percent of the community members interviewed were from rural areas while only 33.3 percent were from urban set ups. Of these parents and guardians, 59 percent said they had learners, either past or current, who had been absent for an examination at either Grade 7 or 9 levels.

The School Managers and Teachers

In all the schools visited, school head teachers or guidance teachers were on hand and provided information that was required in undertaking the study. School guidance teachers were tasked with the school checklist that had a number of questions on school attendance on the day the research team was in

the school. It also provided information on the attendance of teachers. The school authorities on the other hand, responded to a questionnaire.

The District Officials

The sample for the study was done in such a way that 30 district officials would be interviewed, meaning one official from each of the three districts sampled from all the ten provinces. However, only 18 officials responded to the questionnaire and interviews representing 60 percent of the target population. About 67 percent were from rural while 33 percent were from urban areas.

2) Reported Causes of Learner Absenteeism from Public Examinations

These reported causes of learner absenteeism during the examinations were as follows; pregnancies, early marriages, seasonal shifting, economic activities.

(i) Teen Pregnancies and Early Marriages

Pregnancies and early marriages were the predominantly cited causes of absenteeism from public examinations for most girls. The respondents attributed pregnancies and early marriages to the traditional customs and beliefs as well as socio-economic circumstances. Nearly all regions in the country associated teen pregnancies and early marriages as major causes of learner absenteeism in public examinations. The study also found that early marriages were predominantly cited in rural provinces while teenage pregnancies were predominantly cited in urban provinces such as Copperbelt and Lusaka provinces. This is in spite of the re-entry policy.

The Re – entry policy was meant to accord an opportunity to girls who drop out of school due to pregnancies and continue with their education upon delivery. A review of the re- entry policy was undertaken in 2010, and the research found that there was relatively low rates of re-entry due to lack of clear implementation guidelines in school resulting in a number of girls who got pregnant not returning back to school to further their education which is key in widening opportunities in decision making and their choices of freedom (Mutambo and Mwenda, 2010). According to the Annual School Census of 2012, readmissions at national level indicate that since 2002, the proportion of girls going back to school at Grades 7 and 9 levels had varied between 34 and 43 percent reflecting some challenges faced in the implementation of re-entry policy. This therefore calls for more concerted efforts to disseminate the provisions of the policy.

Below is a verbatim excerpt from an interview recording of a former grade 7 learner who did not sit the examination due to pregnancy;

“.....there was no reason for not writing but when I became pregnant, I stopped school.”

A Grade 7 female learner

(ii) Seasonal Shifting and transfers

It was reported that candidates miss examinations due to seasonal shifting. There was a trend of learners

“.....It is true because we have different characters. Some girls in this generation are like men in terms of character. Some of them are not as innocent as they look because they go out with men in the evening. So after they are impregnated, they stay behind and miss exams. Sometimes we have situations where we hear that our fellow pupil was impregnated.....”

Grade 7 Male learner

registering for examinations in one centre earlier in the year, as per requirement, and later on transferring to another school where they go and register again. It was reported that in most cases learners such learners do not go back to the original schools to inform them that they will be writing from a different centre. Such candidates end up being reported as being absent from the examination.

Below is a story from a focus group discussion of effects of transfers on learner absenteeism from examinations:

“.....The girl failed to write her grade 7 final examination due to the fact that she was taken to Kapiri Mposhi by her elder brother. She registered at Mukanga with a view to writing the exams at the end of her academic year. The girl was very much ready to write. Now when she was transferred, the brother who took her, thought even there in Kapiri she can write. When the girl requested her brother to provide transport money so that she can come back for her examinations, her brother failed to meet her request.”

(iii) Socio-Economic Activities

Socio-economic activities were also cited as a cause of learner absenteeism and this was related to the locality of the learners. Due to the poor economic circumstances of the learners coupled with low perceived value towards education some learners are deprived of education. Noteworthy were also a small proportion of learners that quit school because they found it boring in exchange to the rewarding economic activities. Whilst still some learners found themselves in vulnerable situations such as being orphaned or pressured option was engaging in economic activities.

The most common economic activities mentioned were as follows;

1. Fishing and fish mongering, herding animals, basket or mat making, caterpillar-picking, bee-keeping, farming, mining and hunting. These activities were mainly attributed to learners in rural areas.

2. Street-vending, working as bus conductors and cross-border trading. Mainly attributed to learners in urban areas and those living in cross border towns.
3. Prostitution as a source of income to earn a living.

“.....The parents died when the grade 9 examination registration was almost nearing. When they died no one in the family seemed to care about their education but about economic issues, almost sending the orphans to street vending. The boy has lost interest in education and says that he can never go back to school.....”

Reported by one of the teachers

4. Piece work or food for work in certain drought prone areas.

(iv) Natural Causes and Disasters

Some learners were absent from writing the public examination due to natural causes such as sickness and death. Natural disasters such floods, drought and impassable roads were also some of the causes of learner

“....the boy suddenly accompanied the mother who was seriously sick to Congo for medical treatment. At the time of the examination, the boy was still in Congo where the mother died. He is the last born in a family of 3 (last born twin). Even his twin brother never sat the examination. The boys were learning from Chilongo Primary School which was not an examination centre.....”

This was the case with a boy from Luapula province who had taken up the role of a care giver for a sick parent

absenteeism.

(v) Absenteeism from Class during the Year

The study revealed that learners who frequently missed class during the course of the term were more likely to be absent from public examinations. Further, it was found that teacher absenteeism from class leads to lack of preparedness on the part of the learner. Following the abolishment of examination fees, learners reported that their attitude towards preparation for public examinations had dropped. This change in attitude was as a result of the fact that learners were free to attempt and re-sit the examinations as many times as possible. The lack of seriousness also meant that more learners are more likely to abscond class and subsequently miss the final examinations at the end of the year.

“.....He was good but joined bad company and peer pressure become too much for him. Now he does not value school. He was involved in an accident and took long to heal. A cyclist who was carrying iron sheets hit him and the iron sheets left him with a deep cut on the right hand. He had 21 stitches.....”

Reported by one of the teachers

Further, learners reported that teacher absenteeism from class and general fear of high stakes examination caused learners to feel inadequately prepared to write the examination.

(vi) Repetition

Repeating grades by learners after registering for the examination contributed to high absenteeism rates. school authorities and class teachers reported that “learners who felt inadequately prepared for the examination are allowed to repeat to lower grades.” Some learners repeat grades because they have traumatizing experiences in their lives at the time of the examination such as falling ill, death and being involved in accidents.

The study also found that there was an increase in repetition especially after entering to sit the examination following the abolishment of examination fees. In most cases, school authorities and guidance and counselling teachers reported that “Parents and sometimes the learners requested the school authorities to have their child repeat the grade mid-way in the examination year.”

Interestingly, learners also reported that “School authorities forced them to repeat the grade for fear of the school recording poor performance once after the release of examination results.”

Further, communities with majority of parents with low socioeconomic status abused the provisions of the policy on free education for all learners from grades 1 to 7 by encouraging their children to repeat grades especially in examination classes, enter in to early marriages, and promote involvement of their children in income generating activities. As a result, schools in these communities recorded higher dropout rates that in turn led to higher absenteeism rates during class time and eventually during public examination.

(vii) Feeder Schools

The study also found an existing phenomenon of ‘feeder schools.’ These were schools which were upgraded without being registered as examination centres. Learners from these schools were instead registered at the closest school with examination centre status in the vicinity.

The study established that ‘feeder schools’ account for almost 70 percent of the learners that reported absent from the established examination centres. Therefore, lack of examination centre status was identified as an issue which contributed greatly to learner absenteeism from public examinations. Kombe

(2012) in study of on the status of examinations centre she observed that, “the deficit of examination centres in 2010 stood at 42 percent.”

The study found that learners in some cases, covered over 15km to write the examinations in most remote areas of the country. The increase in the number of schools without examination centre status is one of the direct resultant factor arising from the increase in school enrolments and the policy at large.

(viii) Multiple / Double Entries

At Grade 7 level the policy intervention for abolishment of examination fees was made in 2004 and immediately the year 2005 recorded over 100 percent increase in absenteeism rates from 4.2 percent to 7.9 percent respectively. A similar picture presented itself at Grade 9 level where the absenteeism rates were below 10 percent but increased by over 5 percent during the intervention year (2012) and nearly doubled in absolute figures from 29,568 candidates in 2011 to 54,836 candidates in 2012 being absent from examination. Further, 2013 being the year after the policy intervention, absenteeism continued to record an increase by over 4 percent and with close to 67,807 candidates absent from the examinations in absolute terms.

Multiple candidate registration at various examination centres within the districts was cited as one of the major causes behind this increase during the policy intervention periods. Critical analysis on the patterns of absenteeism reviewed that of the candidates who were absenteeism from public examinations, 264 candidates countrywide had registered to sit the examination in 2012 more than two times. At regional level, Lusaka, Copperbelt and Eastern provinces recorded more multiple entries when the policy was implemented compared to other regions in 2012 (See Table 9).

Table 6: Multiple Candidate Entries in 2012

Region	2011			2012		
	No. Of Absentees with Multiple Entries	Candidates	% Of Multiple Entry within Region	No. Of Absentees with Multiple Entries	Candidates	% Of Multiple Entry within Region
<i>Muchinga</i>	0		0.00%	12		0.30%
<i>Northern</i>	10		0.30%	18		0.30%
<i>Luapula</i>	2		0.10%	6		0.10%
<i>Southern</i>	3		0.00%	19		0.20%
<i>Eastern</i>	3		0.10%	30		0.50%
<i>Copperbelt</i>	14		0.10%	39		0.30%
<i>Northwestern</i>	26		0.30%	14		0.20%
<i>Central</i>	1		0.00%	26		0.20%
<i>Western</i>	10		0.20%	16		0.30%
<i>Lusaka</i>	22		0.20%	84		0.60%
<i>Zambia</i>	91		0.20%	264		0.30%

(ix) Lack of Full Syllabus coverage and preparedness

Lack of full syllabus coverage or preparedness made learners shun part or the entire examination. Some of the factors advanced for this included the following;

1. Loss of class contact time due to various reasons.
2. Imposing subjects which learners perceived to be too difficult.
3. Teacher absenteeism during the term, making it impossible to cover most of the material to be examined.
4. General fear of high stakes examinations among some learners.
5. Perceived poor teaching and lack of teaching and learning materials

In some cases, it was reported that truancy among learners, challenges paying for their identity cards and user fees especially for rural learners accounted for a proportion of learners being absenteeism from the public examinations. This was quiet prevalent in the remote areas where learners identified these factors as possible causes of absenteeism during examination.

3) Ranking of Reported Factors that Account for Learner Absenteeism

The factors that had a bearing on learner absenteeism as reported by the various respondents during public examinations were grouped as follows; socio-economic factors, school-related factors, lack of parental involvement, early marriages and teenage pregnancies, natural causes (illnesses), customs and traditional belief, and lack of examination centre status. The proportion of reported factors are summarised in table 7.

Table 7: Reported Factors that Account for Learner Absenteeism

Category	Factors	Yes (%)	No (%)
Socio-economic factors	Level of family income / financial constraints	94.4	5.56
	Lack of food security	83.33	16.67
	Lack of support / Orphans and Vulnerable Children	94.43	5.56
	Fishing /herding / baskets / mat-making / bee-keeping / framing / mining / hunting / mining / hunting / household chores	77.77	22.22
	Street-vending / cross-border trading / fish mongering / caterpillar collection	77.77	22.22
	Lack of school uniforms	0.00	100
Lack of Examination Centre Status	Distance / Transport problems	88.89	11.11
	Rural Schooling	83.33	16.67
Teenage pregnancies and Early marriages	Teenage pregnancy	100	0.00
	Early marriages	100	0.00
Customs and traditional beliefs	Customs and traditional beliefs	83.34	16.67
Natural causes and illnesses	Geographical and natural causes	66.67	33.33
Lack of parental involvement	Lack of parental involvement	100	0.00
School-related Factors	Educator / Learner relationship (Corporal punishment)	77.78	22.22
	Poor school environment / School facilities	88.89	11.11
	Poor academic performance	61.11	38.89
	English Language as medium of instruction	66.66	33.33
	Transfers	77.78	22.22
	Repetition	50	50
	Loss of contact time due to absenteeism during the term	83.33	16.67
Combination of other factors	Violence and bullying	38.89	61.11
	Phobia for certain subjects	27.78	72.22
	Psychological difficulties / fear of failure / low self-esteem / drug abuse	66.67	33.33
	Illness and disease among learners / teachers / parents	77.78	22.22

When the above factors were analysed further as individual elements, early marriages and teenage pregnancies came out first followed by socio-economic factors. Natural causes ranked as the least factor that contributed to learner absenteeism during public examinations. When analysed further by computing average percentages by category and the results indicated that, early marriages and teenage pregnancies came out first followed lack of parental involvement. Natural causes, school related factors and economic reasons were amongst the least factor that contributed to learner absenteeism during public examinations. (See Table 8).

Table 8: Rank of Factors that have an influence on Learner Absenteeism

Factors	Yes (%)	No (%)	Rank
Teenage pregnancies and Early marriages	100.00	0.00	1
Lack of parental involvement	100.00	0.00	2
Lack of Examination Centre Status	86.11	13.89	3
Customs and traditional beliefs	83.34	16.67	4
Combination of other factors	74.77	25.22	5
Natural causes and illnesses	72.23	27.78	6
School-related Factors	72.22	27.78	7
Socio-economic factors	71.28	28.71	8

4) Perceived Factors that Contribute to Learner Absenteeism According to Respondent Category

The learners, parents, teachers, schools authorities and district education officials all had different opinions of the factors they perceived to have the most influence on learner absenteeism from public examinations. The key informants, that school heads and district officials, were of the view that living conditions, lack of parental involvement, teenage pregnancies and early marriages were the most important determinants of learner absenteeism.

Parents and learners, on the other hand, rated lack of preparedness, transfers and seasonal shifting as factors contributing to learner absenteeism the most. Figure 6 below shows what each category of respondent prioritized as the main causes of learner absenteeism from public examinations.

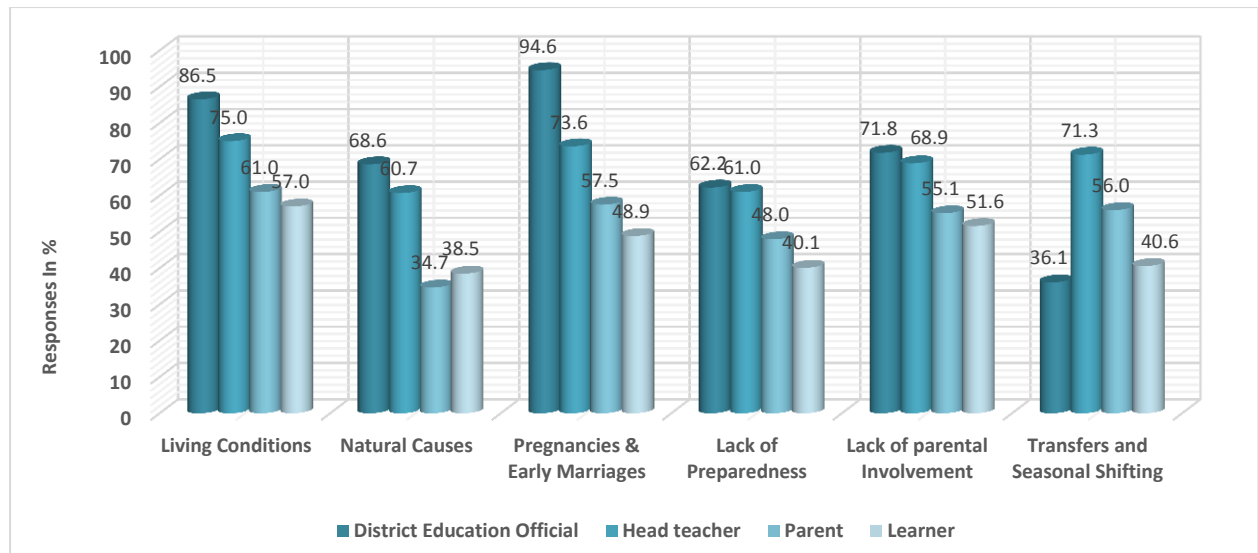


Figure 6: Perceptions of Factors According to Category of Respondents

5) Provincial Profiles on the Causes of Learner Absenteeism

Different provinces of the country reported specific causes of learner absenteeism during public examination and these were mostly associated with certain peculiar regional socio-economic activities, traditions and cultural practices. Early marriages was commonly linked to rural provinces while predominantly urban provinces such as Copperbelt and Lusaka provinces reported more cases of teenage pregnancies

Figure 7 below shows a regional profile of the various reasons cited as causing absenteeism among learners during examinations.

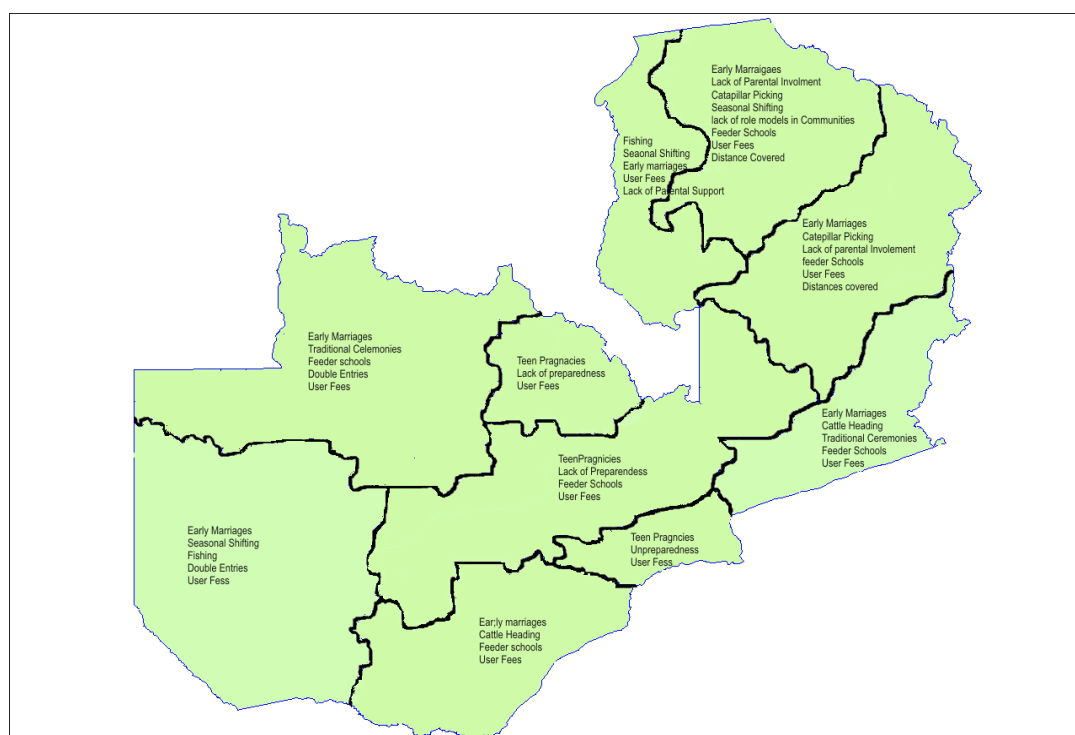


Figure 7: Map Showing Some of the Causes of Learner Absenteeism According to Regions

6) Relationship between Absenteeism from Class and Absenteeism from Public Examination

During data collection, the number of girls and boys in Grade 7 and 9 who were absent and present in each school was recorded and the absenteeism rate computed for each province. Provinces which recorded high absenteeism rates during these spot checks in class also exhibited high absenteeism rates during public examinations also as shown in Table 9 below.

Table 9: Learner Absenteeism Rates during Class

Province	Absenteeism Rates						
	Grade 7 (%)			Grade 9 (%)			Total (%)
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	
Northern	11.30	10.40	10.85	9.40	10.60	10.00	10.43
Luapula	19.50	22.20	20.85	19.10	20.10	19.60	20.23
Southern	8.40	5.80	7.10	6.00	5.00	5.50	6.30
Eastern	7.00	5.70	6.35	9.90	9.50	9.70	8.03
Copperbelt	5.00	5.00	5.00	11.50	12.10	11.80	8.40
North Western	9.80	8.60	9.20	11.40	10.40	10.90	10.05
Central	13.10	11.30	12.20	13.70	10.30	12.00	12.10
Western	7.70	7.00	7.35	6.00	5.90	5.95	6.65
Muchinga	18.20	23.90	21.05	13.10	16.10	14.60	17.83

In order to statistically establish if there was a relationship between absenteeism class and absenteeism from public examinations at Grade 7 level, a bivariate correlation was done and it yielded a weak to

moderate correlation coefficient of 0.46. In quantifying the extent to which absenteeism rates from class determine their absence from the final examination, a linear regression analysis was done and the coefficient of determination (adjusted R squared) of 0.21 gave the proportion of variance of 21.0 percent for absenteeism. This meant that 21.0 percent of learners who absent themselves from the examination are due to absenting themselves from class.

7) Implications

The common causes of absenteeism were identified and grouped as socio-economic factors, school-related factors, lack of parental involvement, early marriages, teenage pregnancies, natural causes, lack of examination centre status, customs and traditional beliefs. The analysis revealed that there was a strong relationship between learner absenteeism in class and learner absconding from the final examination.

The findings of this study have shown that teachers and schools were contributing to learner absenteeism from public examinations by not curbing learner absenteeism from class, hence not preparing the learners adequately. Teacher absenteeism made learners to be discouraged as teachers were unable to cover the entire prescribed syllabus on which the learners would be assessed on. This finding is in line with studies by Bray (2003); Das et al. (2005) who stated that teacher absenteeism could influence the overall quality of education. They said that it could reduce the overall effectiveness of the school, diminish pupil's achievements, damage the school's reputation; induce pupil absenteeism and display negative role models for learners. This calls for the district education officials and school administrators to monitor learners and teacher attendance during the school year so that the learners were adequately prepared for the public examinations.

Teachers are supposed to be the advocates of promoting learner attendance in class and participation in public examinations. This is not only a part of their professional calling but also because learner attendance in class is a prerequisite for the writing for the final public examinations. Further, the revelation by learners (respondents) that they missed the final examinations because they felt inadequate, ill-prepared or did fancy certain subjects call to our attention the extent to which the teachers and schools contribute to learner preparedness.

Parental involvement in the education of their children cannot be over emphasized. Parents would play an important part in ensuring that their children attend class during the year and prepare adequately for the public examination. The study also revealed that early marriages and pregnancies were among the major causes of learner absenteeism. This issue can be remediated first by the parents in the home. Parents ought to support their children with basic school requirements as well encourage them to attend school and write the free public examinations. Legal provisions should be made to prosecute parents who marry off their children at an early age.

From the findings it emerged that absenteeism from public examinations has a socio-economic character that works adversely against learners whose families were at the bottom end of the economic spectrum. This was also in line with the findings by Bridgeland et al. (2006) who found that the learners absented themselves from class because they had to get a job. The study stated that money becomes a large issue for families in poverty because user fees, food and other necessities depend on it. However, the free education policy entails that the learners do not pay fees for the examinations. Once learners are retained in school, chances are that they will sit the public examination and proceed to higher grades. Cooperating partners and non-governmental organization in the education sector could compliment the efforts of government by helping out some learners with user fees and identification card costs.

5.0. Conclusion

Despite the free basic education policy and abolition of examination fees at both Grades 7 and 9 levels, absenteeism rates still remain high. Different stakeholders identify various causes for learner absenteeism. This means that there was need to sensitize all stakeholders on the importance of learners writing their final examinations. Failure to write examinations has far-reaching consequences on individuals, families, communities and the nation at large. Public examinations are not only used to evaluate pupil performance but also act as a measure of the performance of the curriculum and the education system as a whole.

The abolishing of payment of examination fees at grades 9 level did not see a reduction in absenteeism rates. The problem of learner absenteeism from public examinations needs to be given a lot of attention by stakeholders such as the Ministry of Education, cooperating partners, civil society and the general public at large. It is not just an educational problem but also a social and political issue with huge cost implications. Therefore, this study advocates that in order to address the problem in a meaningful way, efforts should be directed not only at the learner or school but at the broader socio-economic and political environments in which schools are located.

Learners' dropping out of school in large numbers had financial implications for the nation. For example, from the year 2000 the total system wastage resulting from learner absenteeism from examinations at all levels (inclusive of Grade 12) was estimated at K1,612,430,144.00 (**US\$ 293,169.12**). This then calls for a holistic and pragmatic approaches to mitigate the challenge of absenteeism from national examinations by learners.

The findings from the study bring to question a number of issues that can generate debate amongst stakeholders in the education sector. Firstly, there is the crucial finding that learners miss public examinations for a variety of reasons most of which have little to do with the learners themselves or their schools. This implies that efforts to stamp out the problem of absenteeism should be directed at addressing all the factors within the wider social, economic and political environment rather than merely concentrating at the learners. Secondly, the finding that attendance in class is related to being absent from public examinations calls for the attention of two critical stakeholders, namely the parents and the school. These can be instrumental in preventing and remedying the situation.

The partners in the provision of basic education in Zambia must endeavour to carry out their respective roles diligently. For instance, government needs to improve teachers' working conditions to boost their morale which could lead to less absenteeism from class. However, working conditions or salaries alone may not be adequate to address the problem of absenteeism without some sort of quality control or monitoring system in place. Therefore, district education offices and head teachers must ensure that their monitoring systems are effectively.

6.0. Recommendations

There was urgent need to reduce the large numbers of learners absent from public examinations at Grade 7 and 9 levels by coming up with pragmatic interventions by the relevant stakeholders in education. To address the identified causes of absenteeism, the following interventions are being proposed;

6.1. Learners and Communities

- 1) Children have a right to education. Those charged with the care of the children should be made aware of this right.
- 2) There was need for learners to see the full benefit of education through role models in their communities.
- 3) Parents and communities should be sensitized against withdrawing the learners from examinations to involve them in economic activities like herding cattle, collecting caterpillars, fishing, and selling merchandise and so on.
- 4) Sensitizations of parents against early marriages should be strengthened in order to curtail the scourge.
- 5) Sensitization on the “Re-entry Policy” for girls who fall pregnant and would like to go back to school after delivery.
- 6) Severe punishments should be meted out to men who marry or impregnate school going children.
- 7) In communities with higher levels of illiteracy among parents, there was need to campaign for alternative modes of schooling such as night school so that the opportunity for learning would help communities appreciate the importance of education in poverty alleviation.

6.2. Community-Related Recommendations

- 1) Strengthening of community social protection programmes so that children are not removed from school for economic reasons.
- 2) Strengthening the provision of social security schemes e.g. bursaries
- 3) Sensitization on the dangers of early marriages and teenage pregnancies.
- 4) Design programmes that can encourage parents to be more involved in the education of their children.
- 5) Encourage a reading culture among learners and the community at large to reduce cases of learner unpreparedness and general fear of the examinations.

6.3. Teachers and School Administrators

- 1) Head teachers as first line standard officers should ensure that learners are learning and that syllabuses are adequately covered to instil confidence in the learners to face examinations when the time comes.
- 2) Schools should be sensitized by the district offices on the procedures to follow to gain examination centre status.
- 3) Introduction of restrictions or strict measures that will avert double registration of learners within the district.
- 4) Learners need regular career guidance and counselling services.
- 5) The In-service colleges and Teacher Resource Centres should identify training needs such as school management for school Head teachers and Guidance and counselling programmes for teachers. This would enhance their skills in managing learner and teacher attendance and also improve on the counselling skills in handling problems learners are faced with.

6.4. Government and Cooperating Partners

- 1) Where possible, school feeding programmes should be introduced in schools surrounded by vulnerable communities.
- 2) There was need for concerted efforts to build more schools and improve infrastructure especially in most of the rural schools. This would help reduce the distance learners cover to write examinations.
- 3) The implementation of effective and functional learners orientation and student support programmes could be part of the intervention strategies that universities might need to consider among others.
- 4) Colleges of education should incorporate a module on guidance and counselling.
- 5) To review the free primary education policy and identify the “hidden costs” schools are incurring in running schools and examinations that are transferred to the learners. The hidden costs should then be factored in the funding of the schools.
- 6) Sensitization on the “Re-entry Policy” for girls who fall pregnant so that they go back to school after delivery.
- 7) Sensitize the schools on the procedures and guidelines for attaining status of examination centre.
- 8) MESVTEE to ensure that new school construction guidelines also provide for all the facilities for a school to be considered as an examination centre.

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Annex 1: Absenteeism Rates at District Level (2008 - 2012)

Province	District Code	District	Absenteeism Rates in %									
			Grade 7					Grade 9				
			2012	2011	2010	2009	2008	2012	2011	2010	2009	2008
Muchinga	102	Chinsali	11.81	14.20	13.09	13.02	11.30	20.93	10.44	9.71	0.92	1.62
Muchinga	103	Isoka	13.27	13.90	12.15	11.18	12.30	14.56	9.56	7.58	1.08	1.17
Muchinga	108	Mpika	11.77	14.60	15.38	15.09	13.86	17.16	11.59	7.41	0.53	0.53
Muchinga	110	Nakonde	10.01	11.79	12.53	11.51	7.58	15.76	9.46	9.05	1.28	1.58
Muchinga	402	Chama	9.36	12.97	9.56	10.65	11.47	12.37	7.41	4.86	0.86	1.57
	Muchinga*		11.25	13.49	12.54	12.29	11.30	16.16	9.69	7.72	0.93	1.29
Northern	101	Chilubi	9.78	11.27	10.82	9.92	7.29	18.76	8.62	4.19	1.04	3.98
Northern	104	Kaputa	15.93	18.58	18.78	18.70	8.85	22.12	9.52	9.13	2.10	4.11
Northern	105	Kasama	13.21	16.76	13.44	12.30	10.36	18.62	6.81	6.84	0.30	0.44
Northern	106	Luwingu	15.64	19.72	19.38	18.64	16.26	18.57	41.32	9.25	1.23	1.80
Northern	107	Mbala	13.45	15.51	13.36	11.12	9.91	18.75	11.60	12.02	0.89	1.36
Northern	109	Mporokoso	12.53	19.65	11.62	9.65	10.08	14.45	7.43	6.15	0.55	1.36
Northern	111	Mpulungu	10.83	14.42	10.98	9.02	14.08	17.15	12.82	9.61	1.45	3.76
Northern	112	Mungwi	12.97	15.27	10.83	9.85	9.60	15.56	13.95	7.11	0.77	1.17
	Northern*		13.04	16.40	13.65	12.40	10.80	18.00	14.01	8.04	1.04	2.25
Luapula	201	Kawambwa	8.82	11.73	10.92	9.48	7.15	11.52	6.31	7.16	6.40	8.14
Luapula	202	Mansa	12.54	14.19	15.24	15.84	9.93	18.21	10.67	8.05	8.45	8.29
Luapula	203	Mwense	9.70	14.38	12.84	8.79	10.97	16.28	9.67	6.39	4.57	4.28
Luapula	204	Nchelenge	9.66	14.03	15.23	12.44	10.99	13.45	8.60	6.17	7.66	4.87
Luapula	205	Samfya	13.64	17.01	11.33	16.73	11.69	20.50	9.97	7.24	7.61	8.01
Luapula	206	Milenge	7.32	8.30	9.47	11.18	14.15	13.42	8.21	6.53	11.06	12.49
Luapula	207	Chiengwe	5.96	6.94	10.04	9.07	9.32	12.03	10.24	9.38	8.15	8.33
	Luapula		10.64	13.60	12.8	12.8	10.6	16.06	9.32	7.32	7.70	7.77
Southern	301	Choma	8.00	9.41	9.61	0.00	8.32	15.07	9.15	7.63	8.19	8.08
Southern	302	Gwembe	5.23	5.49	7.62	11.34	0.09	16.54	10.47	13.77	11.11	15.74
Southern	303	Kalomo	7.83	10.14	10.43	8.44	9.26	17.22	11.77	12.22	7.58	9.93
Southern	304	Livingstone	3.43	4.96	5.29	7.45	7.00	9.37	6.52	5.60	5.81	5.27
Southern	305	Mazabuka	6.84	8.79	8.02	5.63	6.11	11.86	8.91	8.90	8.33	9.44
Southern	306	Monze	8.99	7.18	7.83	6.92	9.21	17.71	8.70	8.88	11.41	9.91
Southern	307	Namwala	12.24	16.69	15.22	13.09	15.84	17.90	12.10	17.03	12.57	13.93
Southern	308	Siavonga	8.70	7.43	7.65	8.15	7.97	31.19	8.49	8.47	4.84	6.10
Southern	309	Sinazongwe	6.43	8.18	9.52	8.17	8.50	10.85	9.46	11.49	5.94	5.85
Southern	310	Kazungula	7.82	12.48	9.87	9.78	11.57	13.04	9.05	11.57	7.17	7.09
	Southern*		7.55	9.07	9.11	7.90	8.39	16.07	9.46	10.56	8.29	9.13
Eastern	401	Chadiza	6.65	9.30	9.68	8.46	8.39	10.82	0.59	6.74	6.93	6.60
Eastern	403	Chipata	11.06	13.07	8.45	9.12	9.19	21.32	8.90	6.47	4.86	7.77
Eastern	404	Katete	13.37	17.50	13.25	9.39	8.71	19.15	12.32	8.27	5.42	8.15
Eastern	405	Lundazi	9.97	11.13	11.00	9.46	10.30	18.21	8.39	7.52	8.12	9.94
Eastern	406	Mambwe	11.33	12.94	12.07	8.32	9.52	15.93	8.91	7.97	7.05	10.90
Eastern	407	Nyimba	12.50	12.60	11.92	12.80	9.88	13.22	8.47	8.74	9.56	15.46
Eastern	408	Petauke	12.88	13.58	10.82	10.68	9.03	21.40	11.96	12.18	6.09	4.45
	Eastern*		11.11	12.87	11.03	9.75	9.29	17.15	8.50	8.27	6.86	9.04
Copperbelt	501	Chililabombwe	7.64	10.43	6.14	5.56	6.49	11.33	4.82	5.16	5.50	7.62
Copperbelt	502	Chingola	6.56	6.87	8.58	8.15	6.27	11.83	6.97	5.32	6.02	6.25
Copperbelt	503	Kalulushi	7.72	10.22	7.90	8.11	8.41	12.15	7.58	5.09	18.55	10.54
Copperbelt	504	Kitwe	7.48	8.58	6.74	7.30	8.40	10.13	7.03	5.94	7.37	6.89

Copperbelt	505	Luanshya	7.14	8.14	6.22	5.77	5.71	11.97	5.81	4.87	4.27	7.85
Copperbelt	506	Masaiti	11.59	11.17	10.95	9.94	10.89	23.18	10.43	7.02	9.46	5.87
Copperbelt	507	Mufulira	5.25	5.43	4.37	4.75	5.01	11.24	4.77	4.52	5.50	5.78
Copperbelt	508	Ndola	5.26	6.77	6.18	6.26	6.59	8.29	5.40	4.48	5.72	4.96
Copperbelt	509	Lufwanyama	10.28	11.57	13.83	15.06	13.55	18.49	14.07	13.69	8.74	7.79
Copperbelt	510	Mpongwe	12.30	12.85	11.41	12.66	9.45	18.47	10.44	9.08	7.49	4.68
Copperbelt			7.26	8.38	7.33	7.44	8.08	11.62	6.75	5.62	7.86	6.82
Northwestern	601	Chavuma	7.19	11.31	14.07	11.21	12.42	16.06	8.98	8.89	34.47	11.89
Northwestern	602	Kabompo	10.69	11.76	12.16	11.68	12.54	17.60	14.91	8.73	9.62	8.91
Northwestern	603	Kasempa	10.73	15.67	12.53	10.89	12.21	17.76	11.27	10.82	9.47	16.59
Northwestern	604	Mufumbwe	15.06	16.93	17.55	14.15	10.70	13.95	11.15	15.70	10.61	12.76
Northwestern	605	Mwinilunga	8.51	11.86	14.01	12.53	11.76	16.82	9.57	8.47	9.02	11.05
Northwestern	606	Solwezi	10.98	13.63	13.84	12.80	13.91	19.62	11.65	9.53	10.79	13.23
Northwestern	607	Zambezi	14.50	17.84	18.06	15.08	11.92	22.15	13.58	9.80	9.98	14.42
Northwestern			11.06	14.00	14.3	12.7	12.70	18.40	11.72	10.01	13.42	12.69
Central	311	Itezhi-Tezhi	12.42	16.96	16.18	14.03	13.44	23.47	14.99	13.02	15.01	24.08
Central	701	Chibombo	11.51	14.46	11.25	12.25	10.11	22.32	16.64	10.79	14.86	17.30
Central	702	Kabwe	7.62	7.03	6.71	6.43	5.96	13.64	7.31	3.99	6.57	8.14
Central	703	Kapiri Mposhi	15.04	13.54	9.70	12.31	11.18	23.74	17.07	7.65	9.65	12.31
Central	704	Mumbwa	12.93	12.56	10.42	11.05	11.13	24.10	14.55	11.37	11.62	15.03
Central	705	Mkushi	10.62	11.04	12.23	11.46	10.81	20.41	14.08	8.36	9.56	11.29
Central	706	Serenje	9.07	16.16	10.45	9.75	9.68	30.89	16.36	7.95	8.69	8.74
Central*			11.31	13.11	11	11	10.33	22.65	14.43	9.02	10.85	13.84
Western	801	Kalabo	16.60	22.86	17.64	18.71	17.13	23.14	16.52	10.03	11.02	11.00
Western	802	Kaoma	15.26	17.96	16.84	15.08	13.78	25.59	19.18	10.89	10.63	10.89
Western	803	Lukulu	17.51	21.89	14.90	14.76	14.55	20.25	10.03	10.87	10.65	15.07
Western	804	Mongu	13.48	21.08	11.79	10.45	10.09	21.42	10.75	13.05	8.18	13.02
Western	805	Senanga	14.67	22.44	15.30	14.19	13.45	26.48	11.20	10.85	9.72	18.54
Western	806	Sesheke	9.74	17.05	10.46	10.20	9.66	27.58	10.64	12.77	9.24	10.86
Western	807	Shangombo	13.05	17.00	19.03	16.20	16.00	16.92	10.20	12.50	9.82	12.43
Western			14.35	20.12	14.8	13.8	13.09	23.65	13.24	11.68	9.89	13.12
Lusaka	901	Chongwe	11.11	10.29	9.79	9.88	7.89	14.38	10.84	13.32	7.74	11.19
Lusaka	902	Kafue	7.76	8.28	7.07	6.89	8.01	11.14	7.68	6.08	4.60	9.47
Lusaka	903	Luangwa	6.88	7.67	9.85	8.68	8.57	8.75	6.11	9.39	8.86	7.86
Lusaka	904	Lusaka	7.62	7.23	6.98	4.56	6.76	11.06	7.84	6.18	5.45	8.59
Lusaka			7.98	7.69	7.32	7.68	7.07	11.34	8.08	6.97	6.66	9.28
National Total			9.85	11.59	10.1	9.75	9.28	15.87	9.65	8.56	8.54	10.21

(Source: Examinations Council of Zambia)

Annex 2: Schools Absenteeism Rates at District level (2008 - 2012)

Route 4 Eastern Province

Mambwe	No of Absentees	Katete	No Of Absentees	Chipata	No Of Absentees
Ncheke Pri School	12	Katete Basic School	23	Katopola Basic	47
Wazaza M. Basic	12	Mbinga	20	Chinunda	26
Chikowa'b'	14	Chimtengo	19	Walela Pri School	21
Kasamanda	8	Omelo Mumba	29	Chipata Primary	23

Route 4 Lusaka Province

Kafue	No Of Absentees	Chongwe	No Of Absentees	Luangwa	No Of Absentees
Shantumbu	39	Chimusanya	28	Mwavi	14
Tubalange	36	Chongwe Primary	38	Luangwa	7
Chanyanya	29	Lwimba	32	Janeiro	6
Mutendere Pri Sch	35	Kankumba	72	Kapoche	4

Route 3 Central Province

Serenje	No Of Absentees	Kapiri Mposhi	No Of Absentees	Chibombo	No Of Absentees
Serenje Boma	30	Kapiri Mposhi	32	Chibombo	47
Chibale	14	Kato	25	Ipongo	48
Kamwala	14	Imansa	32	Chipeso	35
Kabwe-Kupela	21	Chibwe	24	Momboshi	38

Route 3 Copperbelt Province

Chililabombwe	No Of Absentees	Kalulushi	No Of Absentees	Masaiti	No Of Absentees
Chililabombwe	19	Chambeshi	19	Kashitu	25
Kakoso	20	Chembe Primary School	20	Fiwale	17
Twafwane	38	Twayuka Basic	17	Kabwata	20
Konkola	13	Kafubu Depot Pri Sch	17	Chikumbi	20

Route 1 Western Province

Mongu	No Of Absentees	Lukulu	No Of Absentees	Kalabo	No Of Absentees
Kanyonyo Basic	31	Sitaka Pri School.	25	Sikongo 'A' Pri Schoo	13
Mongu Pri School.	26	Mwito Pri School.	11	Sikushi Pri School.	16
Katongo Pri School.	21	Chotela Pri School.	16	Likuyu	21
Mulambwa Pri School	38	Kakwacha Pri School.	16	Namupanda Pri School	10

Route 1 Southern Province

Namwala	No Of Absentees	Choma	No Of Absentees	Kazungula	No Of Absentees
Moobola Mid Basic	28	Sikalongo	20	Kauwe	17
Shababwa	29	St Patrick Basic	15	Malimba	26
Kabulamwanda	15	Kabimba	19	Sikachapa	16
Muchila	15	Namuswa	16	Kantumbi	10

Route 1 Northwestern Province

Zambezi	No Of Absentees	Solwezi	No Of Absentees	Mufumbwe	No Of Absentees
Zambezi Pri School.	21	Kimasala Pri School.	46	Kaminzekeenzeke Pri S	21
Liyovu Pri School.	22	Kangwena Pri School.	26	Wishimanga	19
Lunkunyi Pri School.	12	Kimale Pri School.	22	Chizela Co-Operative	16
Mpidi Pri School.	11	Rodwell Mwepu Pri Sch	34	Lumwe Basic	12

Route 2 Muchinga Province

Mpika	No Of Absentees	Isoka	No Of Absentees	Chinsali	No Of Absentees
Mundemwa	24	Chiwanda	24	Chinsali	12
Nyanji Middle Basic	21	Kaseya	31	Mundu	25
Kabale	23	Sanga	30	Kabungo	9
Katibunga	16	Mwenya	17	Kapimpa Basic	11

Route 2 Northern Province

Kasama	No Of Absentees	Luwingu	No Of Absentees	Mporokoso	No Of Absentees
Kasama	21	Kasunga	17	Chitoshi	29
Malama	53	Nsombo Basic	14	Mulenga Mapesa	12
Chiba	58	Shimumbi	25	Mukolwe	14
Mubanga Chipoya	22	Washeni	14	Mukanga Basic	14

Route 2 Luapula Province

Mansa	No Of Absentees	Samfya	No Of Absentees	Nchelenge	No Of Absentees
Mansa	27	Kafubashi Basic	24	Mubamba	24
Senama	23	Miponda	17	Nchelenge	19
Chakopo	34	Kasomabangweulu	18	Kabuta	25
Musaila	22	Munkwanga	18	Kafutuma	16

Annex 3: Instruments for the Study



Examinations Council of Zambia

UNICEF/ECZ STUDY ON CANDIDATE ABSENTEEISM DURING PUBLIC EXAMINATIONS AT GRADES 7 AND 9 LEVELS

Name of School:.....Date of visit:.....

District:.....Province:.....

Checklist

1. Pupils Present on the day of visit

Level	Number of Boys	Number of Girls
Grade 7		
Grade 9		
Total		

2. a Pupils Absent on the day of visit *

Level	Number of Boys	Number of Girls
Grade 7		
Grade 9		
Total		

2. b What reasons were advanced for the absent pupils by teachers and pupils?

3. Teachers Absent from class on the day of school visit

Level	Male	Female
Grade 7		
Grade 9		
Total		

4. b What reasons were/are advanced for teachers absenteeism?

Document type	Update for all grades	Update for some grades	Available but irregular	NONE
Registers				
Class lists				
Other				

6. General Comments

[illegible]

(A) Case Study

- ### (B) Focus Group Discussion

- School Administrators
- Grade Teachers / Guidance & Counselling Teachers
- Pupils in Examination Classes (i.e. Grade 7 & 9)
- Parents of Learners who were absent from the final Examinations

