

Chronic Absenteeism in Higher Education Institutions in Cameroon: The Case of the University of Buea

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Article Information

Received: February 20, 2023

Accepted: March 19, 2023

Published: April 29, 2023

Keywords: Chronic
Absenteeism, lectures,
University of Buea, Higher
Education Institutions

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the cause of chronic absenteeism and provide possibly effective solutions and preventive measures to minimize absenteeism amongst students in the University of Buea. The relevant literature was reviewed to secure the methodology and the findings. A qualitative research design was employed using a case study approach. The study group consists of 20 Class Coordinators drawn from six establishments selected through purposeful sampling technique. Data of the study were collected by using semi-structured interview technique and focused group discussion. In this study, the researcher used thematic analysis to analyze the data generated. The findings of the study revealed four main causes of chronic absenteeism amongst students. The main themes are student, school, and teacher, socio-economic and family related factors. The study also examined and provided possibly effective solutions and preventive measures to mitigate student absenteeism. These solutions are early warnings and monitoring systems, robust attendance policy, teacher effect and student engagement and motivation. In conclusion, absenteeism has considerable unfavorable effects on students and educators alike, it is worth exploring the causes of absenteeism in order to help raise concerns for educational institutions and help them act on these factors to improve attendance rates. Based on the findings, the study recommended that teachers are encouraged to keep attendance records and send alerts to regularly absent students as well as Use positive reinforcement to improve student attendance.

Introduction

The greatest investment that any country can make is thought to be in the education of its people, who will subsequently advance the country because education is a priority of priorities, a means to an end rather than an end in itself. (Mbua 2003; Ojong 2008; World Bank 2009; Doh, 2012; United Nations 2015). Based on the aforementioned, UNESCO (1998) earlier noted that a nation's education system is essential to its ability to develop. Through embodied knowledge, research, training, and capacity-building, higher education has historically been assigned

multiple roles to develop human capital for national development, increase access, provide citizen education, promote national social inclusion policies, and develop the agricultural, mining, health, women's emancipation and gender equality, national defense, the lower educational cycles, and many other sectors. Recent pressures on higher education (HE) to demonstrate its value and deliver high-quality education and research for national innovation and competitiveness while concurrently meeting its urgent needs for regional development have been introduced by globalization, changes in the structure of economies, and national policies like Cameroon's Vision 2035. Additionally, HE improves graduates' employability profiles and opens doors for their integration into academic careers (SUP INFOS 2010). If the assessments made above are accurate, higher education must raise the bar if the nation is to develop economically (Meek, 1993). For students/graduates to have the required high-quality skills, knowledge, and attitude, which are sustainable and advantageous to the individual and the nation's development generally, higher education objectives (HEO) must be clear, comprehensive, realistic, and effectively implemented.

Higher education institutions across the world, particularly in Cameroon, place a high priority on educational quality. In recent years, this focus has increased with the creation of three state universities in Ebolowa, Bertoua and Garoua. In universities, there is an increasing issue with students not attending classes, which can lower the standard of instruction (Fasihi, et al. , 2007). Students can learn from professors' experiences and gain a deeper understanding of the course material in the classroom. By identifying with the professor and taking after how they act, students who participate in the class and communicate with the professor typically work to improve their actions, choices, and long-term objectives (Fasihi, et al. , 2007). The dynamic teaching-learning process is disrupted when students are absent from class, and the atmosphere in the classroom becomes dull and unpleasant (Nikbakht and Parsa, 2001).

Universities are the primary institutions for the dissemination of knowledge, through teaching, and for the generation of new knowledge, through research but unfortunately these tasks are greatly handicapped by chronic student absenteeism. Faculty and University top management have become increasingly concerned about the issue of student absenteeism in general and, in particular, chronic absenteeism. Absenteeism is not only an epidemic peculiar to the universities but to all higher education institutions in Cameroon. Absenteeism inhibits students from attaining appropriate information and contact with relevant materials (tutorials, lectures, and practical sessions) that are required for effective learning to occur (Sharmin et al., 2017). The rate of student absences is quite high and increasing, and is highly observable in lecture halls. School absenteeism is now a worsening and continuing problem in the University of Buea, making it chronic. Chronic absence, on the other hand, includes all absences: excused, unexcused absences, completed absences, and expulsions. Tracking chronic absences focuses on the academic consequences of missing time and preventing absences before students fall behind in school. It is an early indicator that a student may fall behind in the classroom. The chronic absenteeism, in the opinion of Balfanz and Byrnes (2012), is typically based on the total number of days of university lectures missed, including both excused and unexcused absences. Absence from school is defined as the justified or unjustified absence of a child from school (Reid, 2005). Kearny (2008) presents this as the persistent, habitual, unexpected and unexplained absence from school of a child of compulsory school age. This means that absences occur when the child is away from school for some reason or when ongoing learning is interrupted.

The attendance policies and procedures are unique to each higher education institution (HEI). Some HEIs require it, while others do not. Although attendance is not required, many professors still think it affects students' academic performance. Numerous studies have been done on the connection between in-class participation and academic achievement, and they have come to the conclusion that there is a positive correlation between the two (Kirby and McElroy, 2003).

Many studies have shown that students who attend classes regularly are more likely to achieve higher grades than those who attend poorly. Lukkarinena et al. (2016) said that class participation is indeed related to performance. However, other researchers have argued that the physical presence of students in the classroom does not necessarily equate to student performance. Not attending class does not necessarily mean poorer performance. Engaging students in course content and providing feedback on their performance improves the effectiveness of these summative assessments. As a number of studies have shown, absenteeism disrupts a dynamic teaching and learning environment. Chronic absenteeism damages the learning environment of teaching, creating a dead and tiring unpleasant classroom that makes the students who come to class uncomfortable and irritable. Absences can be associated with poor academic performance and dropping out of school. Chronically absent students are more likely to have learning difficulties and drop out (Smink and Reimer, 2005; Cash and Duttweiler, 2005; Matsimoto, 2000; Attwood and Croll, 2006). In other words, those who miss classes for any reason are missing out on the opportunity to gain the skills and knowledge to be academically successful, thus missing out on long-term benefits. Leavers are less likely than their peers to get a job; they live in poverty, receive public assistance, are in prison or police custody, are in poor health, are divorced, are early single parents, and are likely to drop out of school (Shadreck, 2013). Abandonment is also associated with depression and anxiety, and often leads to drug use and other problematic and risky behaviors (Kearny 2008; Antwi-Danso and Edet, 2011). Achalu (2003) cited drug use as the biggest reason for discontinuation. Given that absenteeism has been linked to poor academic performance (Robert, 2007), Chen and Lin (2008) suggested that school attendance should be closely monitored, encouraged and controlled.

Student class attendance is important because students are more likely to succeed academically if they attend class regularly. It is difficult for teachers to make their lessons interactive and increase student participation when many students are often absent. In addition to being more likely to receive poor grades, students who do not attend school regularly fall behind academically and believe that attendance is a key factor in student success (Great Schools, 2017). It is important for students to participate in learning opportunities in classrooms so that students can experience being a student. Allen (2016) said that attending classes is a way to achieve academic success. At the same time, he believes that students can miss classes from time to time. Since college classes have fewer sessions than high schools, missing class means more work. Being in class improves class efficiency because physical presence allows students to participate in all classroom activities. Teacher-assigned classwork or guided learning tasks usually help students apply them to final assessments. Another advantage of attending classes is that students can interact with their teacher. If the topic is explained, students can ask questions that may be the same for everyone. Thus, attending class gives students the opportunity to learn from the teacher and classmates. Asking the teacher questions can give students a clear understanding of a subject that is missed when away from class. Participating in the course also improves learning. Even some of the coursework is done outside the classroom, which makes the class hours even more valuable. Class time is used for the most difficult discussions. It is important to know what these are so that students have a clear idea of what is likely to appear in final assessments.

Some HEIs, attendance is required at all lectures and tutorials for the modules in which the student is registered. Punctuality also constitutes a very important part of the educational process. As per attendance policy of the University of Buea, the students have to attend classes at least 70% of the total attendance in a semester. Students who accumulated total number of absent below the required number of attendances maybe excluded from further teaching and denied access to taking examinations and refused the opportunity to submit assessment for the module, (UB Student Handbook, 2019).

Despite a clear policy on attendance at lectures, tutorials and practical sessions, absenteeism is a

constant problem not only at the University of Buea but also in higher education institutions in Cameroon. Absenteeism as a problem becomes a concern for all members of society because it has negative consequences at both individual and societal levels (Wadesango & Machingambi, 2011). In addition, the authors argue that lecturers who spend time in remedial classes take study time away from regularly attending students and this negatively affects faculty planning periods, as the time spent on remedial teaching can be used for personal assistance (Wadesango & Machingambi 2011). Student absences affect the faculty as they struggle to keep up with a new subject if the student lacks prior knowledge. In addition, other top performers get frustrated with repeating the work, and in the opinion of the teaching staff, this process is unproductive and time-consuming (Otto, 2016). Students need valuable information and the use of specific examples to explain certain concepts that arise from interactions. Therefore, absentees inevitably miss out on these rich educational resources, and the loss can negatively affect students' academic performance and duration of studies (Abdelrahman & Abdelkader 2017).

Attendance is a key part of student retention, progress, achievement and employment. It is therefore of utmost importance that universities have effective mechanisms to monitor the attendance of at-risk students in order to positively engage with them early (Fayombo et al, 2012). Student absenteeism has a negative impact on educators' morale, resulting in faculty anger (Baloyi, 2014). Absenteeism at the higher education level affects the learning process of students and can affect and hinder their professional growth (Khalid & Khalid, 2017). Faculty members are increasingly concerned about students' professional skills and ability to serve in their positions. There is evidence that the student-teacher relationship and communication has a positive impact on student outcomes, from cognitive skills and behavioral changes to attitudes (Sandilos, 2012; Gehlbach et al, 2012). Students learn by observing lecturers and imitating their behavior to the extent that their decisions and future goals are shaped by the role models of the lecturers (Benbassat, 2014). Role modeling has been shown to be a positive teaching method valued by students (Jack and Claire, 2017). The absence of students creates a dead, tiring and unpleasant classroom, which makes the students coming to class uncomfortable and the lecturer irritated (Wadesango & Machingambi 2011). In addition, it disturbs the dynamics of the teaching-learning environment and has a bad effect on the general well-being of the classes. According to the authors, absences are a waste of educational resources, time and human potential in terms of quality. Student absences also lead to rework and wasted faculty time (Wadesango & Machingambi 2011). It should be noted that every student has unique needs as well as characteristics. Therefore, universities make use of teaching, learning, and evaluation strategies that highly take into account such differences (Bati et al, 2013). A central assumption in the learning process is that an individual student's presence in an educational environment is a pre-requisite for the student to gain from such an environment (Richard, et al, 2015).

Some researchers have identified absenteeism as a complex and heterogeneous problem that can be influenced by many factors (Kearny, 2008; Kim & Streeter, 2006; Lauchlan, 2003). Romero (2008) cited negative school environment, fear, personality traits, phobias, race/ethnicity and learning disabilities, parental attitudes, parental involvement, and family poverty as reasons for absenteeism. Poor teaching skills, interpersonal conflicts, school dissatisfaction, school disciplinary practices, and school bullying were the reasons why students miss school (Antiwi-Danson & Edet, 2011). Ubogu (2004); Estey (2005); Wither (2004) found that absenteeism is due to illness and disease. A co-influence, socio-economic housing was the reason for some children dropping out of school (Reid, 2005; Sarkodie, et al., 2014). Deficiencies in teaching, disconnection of school experiences, insufficient teaching staff both quantitatively and qualitatively, lack of infrastructure necessary for quality education (Barlow & Fleischer 2011; Balouga, 2009; Idumange, 2012) are possible reasons for absenteeism.

University students are regarded as young adults who are capable of making informed decisions and accepting the results of such decisions. A good number of these students specifically the

freshmen, are from schools with broaden facilities where they regularly monitored to attend class and the others from day schools where there were parental influence on school attendance. Given their enrollment into the university lesser enforcement rule on class attendance, these students view class attendance as demanding and stressful as compared to relaxing at their residences and engaging in other activities that are more enjoyable and attractive, like going to parties.

The rising rate of chronic absenteeism among students at the University of Buea (UB) is a subject that interests educational leaders in particular. One of the challenges in UB today is the absence of students from lecture halls. There are many professors who are concerned about this issue and think that students lack the interest and drive to participate in class because of how widespread it is. It is crucial for school administrators to look into and identify variables that might be associated with rates of chronic absenteeism. As per the University of Buea Student Guide (online), a minimum of 70% lecture attendance is required for students to gain access to the summative examination. The students are also oriented and made aware of these policies at the beginning of the academic year during the general, faculty and departmental orientations. Consequently, is the student did not meet the 70% of class attendance; he/she will not be permitted entry into the summative examination.

Despite the measures out in place to enforce attendance, absenteeism is now a worsening and continuing problem in UB. A noticeable problem in UB is the fact that during regular lectures for a particular level of students enrolled for a program, the class attendance is less than 50% compared to the class attendance during the Blocked Weeks for Continuous Assessments (CAs). It is usually within this Blocked Weeks for CAs, that most of the lecturers come to realize he/she has been dealing with less than 50% of students during regular lectures giving the explosive student turnout during CAs.

The purpose of this study was to combine the various factors that influence student absenteeism. The aim was also to find out the factors of student absences, which are more frequent in UB. At the same time, it would help lecturers and school leaders to understand the reasons for student absences and devise strategies and action plans to motivate students to attend classes. In addition, possible effective solutions and preventive measures to minimize student absenteeism are provided, and faculty members have the opportunity to know what and how to improve student attendance.

Research Objectives

The objectives of this study were to:

1. To find out the causes of school absenteeism amongst students in UB
2. To examine possibly effective solutions and preventive measures to minimize absenteeism of students in UB.

Research Questions

Research questions of this study were:

1. What are the causes of school absenteeism amongst students in UB?
2. What are the possibly effective solutions and preventive measures to minimize absenteeism of UB students?

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

Ecological Systems Theory

The comprehensive theoretical framework of the current study is heavily influenced by Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological system theory, which placed a strong emphasis on how a child

develops in relation to the social systems that make up his environment (Paquette and Ryan, 2001). In-depth conceptual justification for how significant social contexts in a child's life affect key outcomes, such as social and emotional adjustment, academic performance, and engagement, was provided by Bronfenbrenner's model (Taylor & Gebre, 2016). Each of the four environmental tiers in Bronfenbrenner's model -- microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem -- has a unique impact on how each person develops (Onwuegbuzie et al. , 2013). Fundamentally, evolution is the process by which humans deal with and adapt to the environment as they undergo biological change (Shelton, 2018).

A child's behavior is significantly influenced by the social environments in which he or she lives, such as those in classrooms, schools, homes, and the local community, according to the bio ecological model (Taylor and Gebre, 2016). According to Bronfenbrenner, researchers and practitioners must pay particular attention to individual development in complex interactive systems (Hayes et al., 2017). In addition, according to Bronfenbrenner's theory, researchers should look into how a developing person interacts with his or her environment, his or her relationships with other people in the same setting, the personality traits of the person and the people with whom he or she typically interacts, how that person develops over time and within a cultural context, and the mechanisms that control that development (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). According to Bronfenbrenner, these systems or environments must first be comprehended on their own, and only then can they be understood in terms of how interactions in one environment can influence interactions in another environment. As a result, what happens or doesn't happen in one setting may be greatly influenced by the relationships and events that occur in other, comparable settings (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Bronfenbrenner's Microsystem. According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), the microsystem, or first level of the model, is described as the sequence of activities, roles, and relationships that a developing person encounters in a particular environment with a particular set of physical and material characteristics. For instance, a child's classroom, a school playground, a home, a place of worship, or a local organization could all be considered microsystems. According to research, the family, the home environment, and the school are the three microsystems that are most crucial for elementary school students (Sugrue, et al., 2011). Beyond arrangement, every interaction a child has with another person is a microsystem interaction; as a result, in effective microsystems of interaction, everyone is expected to learn in a high-quality, amicable, and versatile manner (Tahir et al., 2019). The microsystem includes factors like the school and classroom climate, the home environment, and student relationships with parents, peers, and teachers that have a direct impact on children and youth's mental health, well-being, and engagement (Burns, 2013).

In order to conceptualize individualized learning environments, Urie Bronfenbrenner's child development theory identifies significant student characteristics, significant social relationships, and significant social contexts that affect students' social, emotional, and physical well-being (Taylor & Gebre, 2016). One of the characteristics of a diverse learning environment is individualized learning, which includes differentiated, paced, and tailored instruction that takes into account the needs, learning styles, and interests of the learners. Understanding the learner's developmental needs and activities, as well as the environments and forces that influence their experiences and adaptations, is crucial when creating adapted learning environments. By increasing student autonomy and self-direction, personalized learning aims to increase motivation and engagement (Pane et al., 2015). According to Taylor and Gebre (2016), personalized learning involves teachers being aware of their students' needs and characteristics in order to support their learning, encourage self-direction and self-efficacy, and enhance social and emotional skills.

In a study on the school microsystem, staff members noted that a child's relationship with his or

her teacher specifically, how the child felt and how the teacher treated or felt about him or her was a significant influence on the child's decision to skip school (Sugrue et al., 2016). Lippard et al., (2017) used teacher reports and classroom observations to examine teacher-child relationships in an effort to test Bronfenbrenner's theory of relationships at the microsystem level. Strong supportive relationships are crucial for a child's development, according to the researchers, who discovered that the quality of teacher-student relationships was significantly related to school attendance, classroom behavior, and academic achievement. For Black youth who must navigate between school, home, and neighborhood in various cultural and ecological landscapes and deal with prejudice and differential treatment at school, supportive relationships with adults at school may be especially crucial (Bottiani et al., 2014). In fact, research shows that Black youth may have lower levels of support and engagement than other marginalized groups, which may contribute to racial disparities in school attendance (Furlong et al., 2016).

In a related investigation, Allen et al., (2013), researchers tested the prediction of future student achievement based on observed teacher-student interactions in the classroom with students enrolled in middle grades by using multilevel modeling techniques. After taking into account prior test results and baseline proficiency, the researchers discovered that traits of teacher-student communication predicted students' performance on end-of-year exams. Additionally, they discovered that classrooms with a positive emotional climate, sensitivity to the needs and perspectives of young people, and the use of a variety of personalized teaching methods are linked to higher levels of student engagement and achievement. Comparable research (Spilt et al., 2012) that focused on teacher-student relationships in elementary grades discovered that persistent classroom conflict was strongly associated with underachievement, and the likelihood of disengagement and failure increased as a function of timing and length of time when children experienced relationship problems.

Mesosystem of Bronfenbrenner. The mesosystem is the second tier in Bronfenbrenner's model of ecological systems. The definition of a middle system is "the relationships between two or more environments in which the developing person actively participates." In other words, a mesosystem refers to the connections between microsystems or contexts, such as the connections between experiences in the home and at school, in the neighborhood and at home, and in the family and with peers (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2013). The most crucial use of the bioecological model in developing tailored and interesting learning environments for students may be in understanding the operation of mesosystems (Taylor & Gebre, 2016). When relationships are in the immediate disintegration of the family, according to Bronfenbrenner, the child lacks the necessary tools to explore and interact with other parts of his mesosystem (Paquette & Ryan, 2001). This is because the child is unable to predict or control the instability and unpredictability of modern family life. An in-depth understanding of children's home lives and experiences can give teachers advice on how to foster family-school ties and create environments and learning contexts that cater to their students' special needs (Taylor & Gebre, 2016). Students' engagement and success in school are partially influenced by their home experiences.

Taylor and Gebre (2016) hypothesized that a positive school climate can act as a protective barrier against the damaging effects of negative home experiences. O'Malley et al. (2015) looked into how school climate affected the link between academic achievement and family structure. No matter the type of family (e.g. two parents, one parent, foster family, etc.), the authors found that students reported lower absenteeism and higher grade point averages when their opinions of the school climate were more positive. Similar findings were made in a statewide study of Georgia's high school students' academic achievement (Huang et al., 2017). The findings demonstrated a positive correlation between student perceptions of discipline structure, academic rigor, and the caliber and support of teacher-student relationships, as well as school attendance and grade point averages.

Bronfenbrenner's Exosystem. The exosystem, which represents the third level, refers to one or more environments in which the developing person is not involved as an active participant, but in which events occur that affect or affect what happens in the environment containing the developing person (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In other words, the exosystem describes the connections between the person's immediate context and the social environment in which they do not actively participate (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2013). These contexts include the parents' workplace, the neighborhood or community context, and the family social network, and just as relationships at home can be reflected in the classroom, events and interactions in social contexts where students do not live can influence their teaching. (Taylor & Gebre, 2016). Taylor and Gebre (2016) also point out those children's home lives can spill over into school settings and show up as misbehavior and withdrawal, and that parents' stressful or unstable work experiences seem to have a negative impact on family life. Neighborhoods characterized by high levels of crime and low perceptions of safety can also affect a child's or family's commitment to that neighborhood's school.

Bronfenbrenner's Macrosystem. The macrosystem is Bronfenbrenner's model's highest level, located at level four. The macrosystem is the larger cultural context in which a person exists, which includes societal ideologies, cultural and subcultural norms, policies, and laws that have an immediate impact on the individual (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2013). The primary context of the macro system of families consists of their socioeconomic status and financial resources (Taylor and Gebre, 2016). Bronfenbrenner (1979) argued that when families have significant financial and material resources, they tend to function well; but on the contrary, if the availability of resources and materials decreases. Strong, encouraging relationships between teachers, students, and families are essential for schools to be able to implement policies that are intended to meet the needs of the most vulnerable students because of rising family stress levels and financial limitations. The ecological systems model offers a conceptual framework from which schools can organize and rationalize data to produce the best learning environment for students from the perspectives of teacher-student and school-family relationships.

Self-Determination Theory

Although the ecological systems theory serves as the study's main general framework, other theories are pertinent and connected to Bronfenbrenner's model. In the investigation of chronic absenteeism, self-determination theory and school refusal should be taken into account. According to self-determination theory, the effective functioning of an individual depends on the satisfaction of three basic psychological needs - autonomy, relatedness and competence - and self-determination theory states that the interpersonal context plays an important role in satisfying these needs (Filippello et al., 2019). A supportive and welcoming classroom environment, engaging teaching methods, and positive student-teacher relationships are some of the elements that this theory which is similar to ecological systems theory theorizes can motivate students to participate in class and lessen the likelihood of avoidant behavior.

Conceptual Framework

Chronic Absenteeism defined

Chronic absenteeism has evolved over the past ten years from being a nearly unknown concept to a national educational metric that gives each school crucial information about how many students miss school so frequently that their academic performance is at risk (Chang et al. , 2018). According to the US Department of Education (2017), a chronically absent student is one who misses more than 15 days of class in a year for any reason, whether legitimate or not. Similar to this, the Tennessee Department of Education (2020) defined a chronically absent student as someone who misses 10% or more of the days they are registered for school for any reason, including excused absences and out-of-school suspension. A chronically absent student is

one who misses 10% or more of the enrolled school days for any reason, according to Attendance Works (2020), a national initiative aimed at reducing chronic absenteeism. Absenteeism, according to Stoll (1990), is missing school without a valid excuse. On the other hand, Webber (2004) defined absenteeism as a student's failure to show up for class without a valid reason. Kearney (2008) asserts that attendance at primary or secondary schools does not depend on whether a student has a disability or not. Absenteeism, according to Clark (2008), is "not attending school without a justified reason. Lannegrand-Willems et al. (2012) defined absenteeism as "a student's absence from class, with or without justification". By defining the behavior as "not attending the school with or without an excuse, missing some classes, or being late for class," Robinson (2009) considered absenteeism. A student who missed 10% or more of the days they were registered for school is considered chronically absent for the purposes of this study.

Reasons for Chronic Absenteeism

Student absenteeism is caused by several factors. The students' absenteeism may be a reflection of their dissatisfaction with school. The development of the absenteeism problem and its persistence may be influenced by a variety of factors. These elements could be things like: a lack of community support, a hostile learning environment, a dysfunctional family, poor weather and transportation issues, health issues, and personal shortcomings (Teasley, 2004). According to McCray (2006), social inadequacies, unsupportive school environments, poor family dynamics, and irresponsible family behavior can all contribute to absenteeism. Based on a review of related studies, four dimensions of the factors that contribute to student absenteeism are discussed in this study.

Student-related factors: According to reports, the following are the main student-related factors that influence student absenteeism: students who work to support their families financially; students who lack motivation to learn; students who are anxious about their academic performance; students who dislike school; students with low self-confidence; students with low academic success; students with limited social skills; students who are afraid of receiving poor exam grades; students with low academic performance (Barlow & Fleischer, 2011; Galichon & Friedman, 1985; Kablan, 2009; Kadi, 2000; Kinder et al., 1995). Other outcomes include not wanting to get up in the morning, sleeping late, not finishing homework, being in a grade that is one above or below the regular grade level, finding classes boring, feeling extreme test pressure, feeling constantly ill, and having siblings who are frequently absent, according to Reid (2000) and Gentle-Genitty (2008). Other factors include engaging in enjoyable activities and socializing with peers outside of the classroom (Williams, 2001). It's interesting to note that some students skip class because they find it challenging, while others skip class because they find it boring and monotonous, as Clark (2008) pointed out. Health issues, whether they pertain to the student's health or that of their families, are recognized as a significant factor in student absenteeism because they prevent students from attending class. Even though they shouldn't, students frequently choose to skip school when they are only mildly ill even though they are still able to learn in the classroom (DeSocio et al., 2007). Students' associations with non-students have an adverse effect on their attendance in class (Oghuvbu, 2008; Pehlivan, 2011). Students will want to go out during college hours, so friends who are not students will suggest entertainment options, and the students won't want to miss out. Wadesango and Machingimbi's (2011) study provides evidence to support this claim, showing that students in higher education miss a lot of class because they hang out with non-students. Once more, college students claim that they influence one another to miss or cancel classes due to other social obligations.

Teacher-related factors: While teachers' attitudes in the classroom have a positive impact on students' commitment to the school, teachers' authoritarian attitudes and oppressive behaviors, poor teacher-student communication, high expectations for student performance that are

inconsistent with students' actual abilities, and teachers' lack of interest in students are reported as the causes of teacher-induced absenteeism (Ataman, 2001; Özbaş, 2010). The importance of professors placing a premium on attendance and the allure of course materials were found to be the two main factors instigating student participation in classes, according to a study by Gump (2004) involving 220 students. Soleimani et al., (2002), investigated the views of students at the Faculty of Medicine of Tehran University of Medical Sciences regarding absences and class attendance, as well as the causes of those absences. They discovered elements that led to students not participating in class (absenteeism), including ineffective teaching strategies, useless course materials, and crowded classrooms. Jodi (2003) came to the conclusion that ineffective teaching practices contributed to student absenteeism because they made students bored. Monkie (2009) found that many students chose to be absent because of their poor relationships with teachers. Regarding student absenteeism, lecturers have a crucial role to play. In these situations, a lecturer's critical comments about a student may cause that student to stay home instead of attending college. According to Sahin et al. (2016), there is a connection between a lecturer and students' absenteeism. Lecturers ought to respect students and treat them equally. According to Wadesango and Machingambi (2011), lecturers who exhibit favoritism toward their students may deter students from attending class. Non-attendance of classes in higher education institutions are at times influenced by a dislike of a subject or module, or a lecturer (Wadesango & Machingambi, 2011). These authors also indicated that students at times are not happy with teaching style or the way lesson is delivered in by a lecturer. Lack of attendance in higher education institutions can occasionally be attributed to disliking a subject, a module, or a lecturer (Wadesango and Machingambi, 2011). These authors also stated that occasionally, students are not pleased with the lecturer's method of delivery or his or her teaching style. Due to the boring nature of the material, students occasionally skip class (Edge Hill University, 2012). Students frequently lament how exhausting it is to sit through an entire day of classes, as Simelane (2013) points out. Students assert that their absence from class is caused by an abundance of work, trying to catch up on assignments, preparing for presentations, and getting ready for upcoming tests (Ginty & Boland, 2016).

School and school administrator-related factors: According to Reid (1985), school-related factors like the educational plan may contribute to student absenteeism. Student absenteeism can also be related to the caliber and effectiveness of the school's instructors, guidance counselors, and administrators (Strickland, 1998). Although not directly, school administrators are known to have an indirect impact on students (Balci, 2002). Schools are an organization with some distinct and different dimensions, as is well known. One of these factors is the environment at the institution. The level of student absenteeism is positively impacted by a positive and supportive school climate. Student absenteeism is impacted by a variety of factors, including administrative tasks, sports and extracurricular activities, scheduling breaks, and fostering a safe environment for students (Altnkurt, 2008). Inadequate school policies and a hostile school environment are also cited as contributing factors to student absenteeism (Baker et al., 2001). Demir and Akman-Karabeyoglu (2015) found that among the reasons students skipped school were lack of expectations for the subject, boredom, and lessons that were not tailored to their interests.

Students' choices regarding school attendance are influenced by factors related to the school. The attitude of a school and its policies against absenteeism are elements that contribute to the absenteeism problem (Eastman et al., 2007). Robinson (2009) contends that school practices are inconsistent and ineffective at lowering absenteeism. The school isn't communicating with students clearly enough about how important attendance is. Students and parents receive the wrong message about the significance of attendance when policies are tolerated or when existing policies aren't strictly followed (Clarke, 2008). Walls (2000) also stated that inconsistent policies, a lack of substantive outcomes, and shoddy record-keeping in schools have a negative impact on students. According to research, there are several significant factors that contribute to

absenteeism, including conflicts with peers and teachers, bullying experiences, and teacher dislike (Eastman et al., 2007; Gentle-Genitty, 2008; Reid, 2000). Students who do not want to attend class in a school setting would experience greater feelings of alienation. According to Hamm and Faircloth (2005), a student's perception of the respect, love, and values they experience at school shapes their commitment to the institution. Security will exist in the educational setting where there is a sense of perceived value and an emotional commitment. Students' attendance and participation therefore rise in such a school setting.

Socio-Economic and family related Factors: According to research, students of low socioeconomic status generally experienced more chronic absenteeism (Garcia & Weiss, 2018; Ginsburg et al., 2014; Maynard et al., 2012). Poverty and hunger can be seen as factor contributing to students' absenteeism. Chang et al. (2018) reported that higher chronic absences were much more likely in schools with a very high percentage of students living in poverty (75% or more) than in schools with a low percentage (25% or less). Economic conditions of families of students are considered as possible contributor to students' absenteeism. Many students come from households where parents and guardians are only seasonal workers or permanently unemployed. Circumstances force students to look for employment in order to support their families and studies (Şahin et al, 2016). Students who work part-time, their work schedule tend to impact negatively on their attendance pattern (Demir & Karabeyoglu, 2016). The health-related problems are among the major reasons for the student absenteeism (Çevik, 2011; Kadi, 2000; Yıldız, 2011). A student's own health problem or a family member's health problem may prevent the student from attending school. Students cannot attend the school when they have a serious illness.

Families play a role in influencing how children behave. One of the biggest influences on student behavior is the family environment. Since the family environment shapes the children's behavior from the moment of their birth, it has a significant impact on their development. Parents' parenting style, parents' educational background, conflicts in the family, the number of siblings, parents' time commitment to their kids, parental support for education, excessive parental pressure on the child, the parents' education level, the family's cultural characteristics, and the value placed on children in the family are some of the main family-related factors that affect student absenteeism, according to reports (Cüceloğlu, 1996; Gilmore, 1985; Özbaş, 2009; Senemoğlu, 2005).

The socioeconomic status of the family, the need for the student to work for the family, psychological issues, parental support or neglect, and alcohol or drug issues are further reasons for student absenteeism that are related to the family, according to research (McCluskey et al. , 2004; Clark, 2008; Reed, 2000); lack of consistency; inter-parental disputes; family structure, such as a single parent; interest in or level of control over the student's behavior; parents with low education levels; unfavorable prior school experiences; lack of participation in school or a failure to grasp procedures; and failure to provide a conducive environment for the student to complete homework. (Corville-Smith, et al., 1998; Rood, 1989; Corley, 2012; Gentle-Genitty, 2008, Eastman et al., 2007, 2007; Reed, 2000).

Outcomes associated to Chronic Absenteeism

Numerous issues and unfavorable outcomes associated with chronic absenteeism have been identified through research. Chronic absence has been a significant risk factor for school dropout, in addition to being closely associated with academic underachievement, delinquent behaviors, worse health, and constrained economic opportunities (Van Eck et al., 2016). Research has shown that classrooms with high absenteeism rates have spillover effects that affect all students in the classroom even those with good attendance resulting in lower test scores (Gottfried, 2014). This is in addition to the effects on individual outcomes. According to research, attendance and grade point averages in middle school students provide the best

indication of how they will perform in their high school courses when compared to other potential indicators, such as test scores (Allensworth et al., 2014). Students who frequently missed school or consistently failed classes in the middle grades were very likely to be off track by the ninth grade, before they even entered high school. In fact, studies have shown that the best predictor of passing classes and earning high grades in high school is a combination of just two indicators: grades and attendance. According to statistical models that looked at the GPA gap between eighth and ninth grade, attendance was a much better predictor of who was likely to struggle than test scores, even though grades were a good indicator of on-track performance (Allensworth et al., 2014; Stempel et al., 2017).

Numerous studies have pinpointed specific problems associated with extended absences, such as grave problems with students' social, mental, and physical health (Maynard et al. (2008); Kearney, 2012). For instance, extended absence is strongly associated with mental health conditions like anxiety, depression, and suicidal thoughts as well as higher rates of chronic illness, substance abuse, and even early death (DeWit et al., 2011; Stempel et al., 2017). Children from all socioeconomic groups experienced negative outcomes when their parents were chronically absent from work, but children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds experienced a greater economic and social disadvantage (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). Research has shown, for instance, that children who frequently skipped school were also at risk for later adulthood outcomes like unemployment, lower income, frequent absences from work, and worse health (Sugrue et al., 2016). According to the research, adults with less education and poorer schooling were less likely to report having a fulfilling job, feeling in control of their lives, and receiving a lot of social support (Rogers et al., 2014). The use of tobacco or marijuana, abuse of alcohol or other drugs, risky sexual behavior, and other risky behaviors have also been linked to chronic absenteeism (Robertson & Walker, 2018).

High school graduates and college degree recipients were much less likely to be persistent absentees (Rogers et al., 2017). According to a study that used data from Philadelphia Public Schools, attendance was the biggest predictor of dropouts. In particular, students who attended school less than 80% of the time had a 10–20% chance of finishing high school on time. Additional studies revealed that chronically absent students had a 68 percent lower chance of graduating than their peers who attended class regularly (Balfanz et al., 2007). Regardless of whether absences were legitimate or not, persistent absences frequently resulted in subpar academic performance (Allison and Attisha, 2019). It has also been connected to a number of negative health outcomes. Numerous studies have identified specific issues related to long-term absence, such as serious issues with students' social, mental, and physical health (Maynard et al., 2012; Kearney, 2008). For instance, prolonged absences have been linked to a number of mental health issues, such as a higher risk of suicidal thoughts, anxiety, and depression, as well as higher rates of chronic illness, substance abuse, and even premature death (DeWit et al., 2011; Stempel et al., 2017).

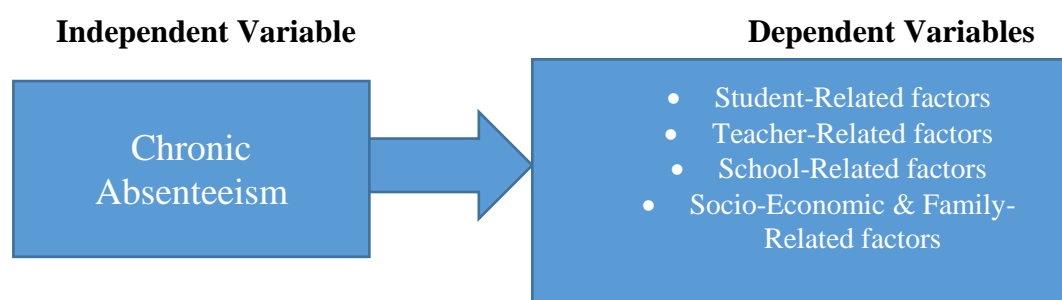


Figure 1: *Conceptual framework of the study*

Methodology

Design of the study

This study adopted a qualitative research design to investigate the cause of chronic absenteeism amongst students in the University of Buea. The qualitative research more specifically, the case study was beneficial as it offered the researcher the best way to elicit the required data and a better understanding of the phenomenon that was being investigated. Creswell (1998) defines a case study as a bounded system which entails in-depth exploration and extensive data collection. According to Creswell (1998), the following four steps define a particular case: identification of the case, the case bounded by time or place, multiple sources of data and a detailed report of the content and setting. A case study can therefore be regarded as a rigorous study of a particular individual or a particular context. This study focused on students in the University of Buea. The study targeted students Class Coordinators (CC) to elicit data on the causes of absenteeism amongst students in the University of Buea. Purposive sampling was used as the researcher selected 20 Class Coordinators from six Establishments (Faculty of Arts, Faculty of Education, Faculty of Laws and Political Science, Faculty of Social and Management Sciences, Faculty of Engineering and Technology and Faculty of Science). The Class Coordinators were seen as liaison between the teachers and the students and are principally charged with the enforcement of the attendance policy, thus they possess a better understanding on why their mates absence lectures. The researcher developed semi-structured interview questions to obtain qualitative information from the CC's to gather detailed information. A focused group discussion was organized where all the CC's of the six establishments were involved in FGD, the researcher prepared a discussion guide on the related factors of absenteeism. In this study, the researcher used thematic analysis to analyze the data generated. Seven steps were used to analyze the data (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Creswell, 2009). They were as follows: Preparing field notes and transcripts; Read through all the data; Theme identification/generation; Theme representation; Coding the data; Visualizing and displaying the data and Interpretation of data.

Ethical Considerations

The researcher addressed orally an informed consent to student respondents before starting data collection. The informed consent form was prepared based on the ethical principles of confidentiality, privacy and used only for the research purpose.

Results and Discussion

Reasons for Absenteeism

The research question one investigated the causes of school absenteeism amongst students in UB? The following themes were retrieved, which highlighted the causes of absenteeism amongst students in UB.

Theme 1: Student-related factors of chronic Absenteeism

The first theme discloses the CC's are in agreement of student-related factors as contributing to absenteeism. In this regards FDG₁ stated "*in most cases students don't come to class because lack of motivation and interest in the degree*". The result of the finding identified lack of interest and motivation school activities. It is in line with the findings of Elliot, et al., (2000) who claimed that a person's sustained interest in a certain activity or object is expressed through their interest. Therefore, it follows that a child who is uninterested in schoolwork will not be motivated to learn, and he will skip class to participate in whatever activity piques his interest. This finding suggests that student with high level absenteeism suffer from lack of motivation. This finding is consistent with other research indicating that absentees have negative attitude towards teacher and school (Adigüzel & Karadaş, 2013; Attwood & Croll, 2006; Valiente et al.,

2008). FDG₅ recounted “*peer pressure and inconvenient schedule of lectures i.e. early morning hours, evening hours, weekends and interval between lectures*” FDG₁₇ further states that “*majority of students don’t come for classes scheduled at 7-9am and 5-7 pm*” The results of this study identified peer pressure as cause of absenteeism. Peers are also found to have influenced students absenting themselves from school by the study conducted by Mohd et al., (2000) and Idris (2000). FGD₁₃ sickness *as well as poor time management i.e. always going to bed late*” These findings are similar to a study conducted by Desalegn et al., (2014) in Hawassa University Ethiopia where they found that missing early morning classes could be attributed to going late to bed. The findings are consistent with a study conducted by Dashputra et al., (2015) it was observed that common reason for absenteeism is sickness. This is also in congruent with the findings of Sharmin T et al., (2017) in which they documented that many college students have poor time management skills. The most obvious signs of poor time management skills are spending considerable time in extracurricular activities like browsing, hanging out with friends and sleeping. Participating in fun activities and interacting with peers outside of school are also reasons (Williams, 2001). Interestingly, as noted by Clark (2008), some students are out of class because they find the courses difficult and others are absent because they find the courses monotonous and boring.

Theme II: Teacher-related factors of Chronic Absenteeism

The second theme shows that the CCs agree that absenteeism is influenced by factors related to teachers. The results of the current study showed that a significant percentage of students agreed that they were uninterested in specific subjects, and that some students avoided lectures because they did not find the lecturing methods of a few teachers to be interesting. FGD₂₀ reported “*some teachers often come late or at times don’t come for lectures*” It is a fact that lecturer-absenteeism could discourage students from being absent from the class. Congruent with study findings is that when a lecturer is absent from the classroom, students’ absent classes (Galloway 2014). FDG₁₂ recounted “*teachers don’t apply a good teaching methodology and as a result students lack interest*” FDG₁₈ recounted “*teachers don’t mind to be understood and don’t explain with clarity*” These findings are supported by study conducted by Wadesango and Machingambi (2011) South Africa where it was documented that ineffective teaching methods and absenteeism are related. This is further supported by study conducted by Tripura, et al., (2015) in which poor teaching strategies were responsible for student absenteeism. FDG₄ mentioned of “*teachers personality got a lot to do with attendance*” In a study conducted by Sharma, et al., (2017) Haryana, it was observed that fifty percent of students agreed that teachers’ personality affects their understanding. FDG₁₇ detailed “*lectures are monotonous and very theoretic*” These results support those of López-Bonilla and López-Bonilla (2015), who looked into the reasons for absenteeism provided by 139 third-year tourism students. They used factor analysis to identify different absenteeism dimensions, with 'Teaching Style' receiving the highest average rating. The primary cause of the students' absences was attributed by the students to the teaching strategies and abilities of the teachers (lesson repetition, classroom management, and demotivation of the teachers). These findings are consistent with the current study in which majority of students responded that teacher’s personality influences teaching – learning process and definitely contributes to absenteeism. FDG₅ recounted “*some teachers do not motivate students and don’t encourage class participation*” This corroborates the findings of Fjortoft (2005) who conducted a research at the University of Chicago on pharmacy students and found that students show great interest in classes where the professors present new materials and use practical methods in their teaching. In order to encourage students to attend class, professors must take the appropriate steps. Among these measures are engaging teaching strategies, innovative instruction, cooperative learning, and active student involvement. FDG₂ expressed the view that “*most students don’t come to lectures because of lack of interest and teaching styles*” Similar conclusions were reached by Wyatt (1992), where a lack of interest in the subject and ineffective

teaching methods were linked to absenteeism. According to Wyatt's (1992) research, first-year college students at for-profit institutions are more likely to miss classes they detest than those they enjoy. Students expressed "dislike" for lectures where the lecturers were unprepared and when they did not think the course material was relevant. (López-Bonilla & López-Bonilla 2015; Méndez-Suárez & Crespo-Tejero 2021).

Theme III: School-related factors of Chronic Absenteeism

Still another cause of frequent student absenteeism are school related factors, which positively or negatively, shape student's commitment towards school attendance. FGD₁₂ commented *"in most of the cases, the lecturers and administrators are not laying much emphasis on attendance"*. FGD₁₇ further states *"most often you don't see the administration implementing the rules as implied this makes others not to take the attendance policy serious"* FGD₉ narrated *"given the lack of firmness in implementing the attendance policy, a good number of students are discouraged from coming to class"* FDG₁₀ narrated *"most often, at during the publications of CA marks, the irregular students seem to have higher marks compared to the regular students, meaning marks for attendance doesn't reflect in the final marks and this sets a very bad example giving reasons why some get discouraged and don't further come to class"* The above comments are consistent with the observations of Eastman et al. (2007) regarding school attitude and rules against absenteeism as two major school-related factors influencing absenteeism.

Furthermore, Robinson (2009) points out that inconsistent school procedures regarding student attendance often do not lead to satisfactory results in reducing absenteeism. This inconsistency in school rules does not send a clear message about the importance of participating in code contests for students. Thus, lax policies or indecisiveness in implementing existing policies mislead students and parents about the importance of attendance (Clark, 2008). Moore (2003) pointed out that many students believe that regular attendance should reward some degree of academic achievement. So if you don't get grades, your attendance rate will drop. Educational institutions do contribute to the issue of students' absenteeism, if absences are not properly prioritized, students may receive the wrong message and take advantage of the situation, which may lead to higher absenteeism (Demir & Karabeyoglu, 2016). University administrators sometimes do not know how to conduct truancy disciplinary hearings related to absenteeism (Otto, 2016). In fact, they lack a strategy to implement policies and procedures for managing student absences. Also, teachers are sometimes inconsistent in managing absenteeism, and those who hide take action. Majority of the participants agreed to the fact that poor facilities also contributes to absenteeism. FDG₁₂ and FDG₁₆ commented on *"poor physical facilities, overcrowded classroom and poor sitting arrangements in the amphitheaters are some of the reasons some stay off classes"* FDG₈ further stated *"a class of 250 students is scheduled in an amphitheater 150 wherein there are not enough seats, those who come late most preferably decide to go back home than standing to takes lectures"* FDG₃ narrated *"in cases where classes are scheduled in Open amphitheater, there are no seats so most often students have to seat on the floor such situations forced others not to come to such classes."* The above statements are congruent with the findings of Dasputra et al., (2015), Fisher & Larkin, (2008), McElroy, 2003, and Rao et al., (2016) wherein the indicated poor ventilation, overcrowding, sitting arrangement, insufferably hot, noise, spatial elements, classroom equipment (e.g. desks, chairs, rugs, chalkboards, tack boards, easels, counters and computer equipment), classroom acoustics and poor infrastructure as factors contributing to absenteeism. For example, Haertel et al. (1981) revealed that students' perception of the classroom is an important factor in student attendance and some others found that students do not attend school because of poorly ventilated classrooms and uncomfortable seating (Dasputra et al., 2015). The findings are regular with the work of Otto (2016) who revealed lack of resources such as teaching facilities; relevant technology might have an impact on class attendance. The findings also align with a research study by Mello (2017) who exposed that adult learners do not attend classes especially where the institution lacks facilities.

Theme IV: socio-economic and family factors of Chronic Absenteeism

The fourth theme of the factors determining students' absenteeism is "socio-economic and family related factors" FDG₂₀ stated "*Most students are involved in an abuse of alcohol and excessive internet usage*" This finding is consistent with Austin's (2012) study of a sample of high school students (aged 14-17), which provided evidence that alcoholism and drinking have a very detrimental effect on school attendance (Saar and Trasberg 2021). A similar conclusion was reached by Wyatt (1992) in his research among freshmen. Wyatt emphasizes that administrators and teachers should be aware of how alcohol affects absenteeism and should communicate that to students. FDG₁₇ narrated "*Students sleeps late and spend more time on their phones as a result often, they miss early morning lectures*" This is consistent with a study by Nalwa and Anand (2003) that examined the effects of Internet use on the performance of 16- to 18-year-old Internet-addicted youth. The authors found that these students spent less time sleeping and put off other work to spend more time online (Kindt, Szász-Janocha, Rehbein and Lindenberg 2019). Both factors can possibly lead to increased absenteeism. FDG₃ stated "things are very difficult for some of us" FDG₉ further reiterated "poverty is a major cause why some of our mates to come to class since they come from low-income families" This strong correlation between low-income status and chronic absenteeism. This finding is supported by Lorenzo (2007) who revealed that students from lower economic status had higher absenteeism rates than students from middle and higher economic status families; such families were at greater risk of having absent students. This is also in agreement with Monkie (2004), who concluded that low socioeconomic status (SES) families contributed and was a predictor of school Absenteeism due to failure of affording school needs. This finding is also in line with the study of Tash (2018) among high school students, where poverty was found to be one of the key factors that triggered chronic absenteeism. This finding supports the link between absenteeism and socio economic status as found by Rotham (2001), Ingul et al. (2012), Morrissey et al. (2013), who noted that having a higher percentage of students from low-SES families was associated with a higher school absence rate. FDG₈ noted "given the hardship a good number of students engage in part-time jobs to support their education" A possible reason for students' absence is considered to be the economic situation of the students' families. This is consistent with a study by Şahin et al, (2016), in South Africa which reveals giving economic status of their families; students had to look for employment in order to support their families. The work schedule of part-time students usually negatively affects their attendance pattern (Demir & Karabeyoglu, 2016). FDG₁₄ cited "some students have psychological problems, lack of support and neglect" This aligns with the findings of Mello (2017) and Ndahepele, et al (2018) where they stated students lack of family support to advise them results into poor class attendance.

Measures on how to Mitigate Chronic Absenteeism in the University of Buea

The present study also aims at examining possibly effective solutions and preventive measures to minimize absenteeism of students in UB. Based on the data that were garnered from Focus group discussion, the results reveal four themes on how to mitigate chronic absenteeism in UB.

Early Warning and Monitoring Systems

Based on the findings, majority of the participants insisted on an intensive monitoring system to curtail school attendance. FDG₁₂ cited "*to curb absenteeism, there must be a rigorous monitoring system and warning by lecturers and the administration.*" FDG₁₅ noted "*we need and effective monitoring system to track those who don't come to class so as to find out reasons why they do not come to school to see how we can be of assistance*". School attendance data is an important resource for school officials to raise awareness and take action to address chronic absenteeism. Early warning systems are one way in which data collection; reporting and intervention can play a key role in achieving positive outcomes (reducing chronic absenteeism). The US Department of Education (2014) defines an early warning system as "a system that,

based on student data, identifies students exhibiting behaviors or academic performance at risk of dropping out of school." Consistent with the findings, the U.S. department of education (2014) introduced an early warning and monitoring system across all high schools in the country to identify students who were at risk of educational failure.

The early warning and monitoring system allows schools to monitor student attendance, behavior and progress using data (eg attendance, grades, absences, disciplinary incidents, suspensions or expulsions). A validated scorecard that activates interventions based on school poverty levels and other demographic characteristics. Once a student is identified through the system, the most common services provided to the student are teacher and administrative meetings, parent meetings, and development of a student intervention plan. Faria et al (2017) piloted a version of their Early Warning Monitoring and Intervention System (EWIMS) in 73 high schools in three Midwestern states. They claimed that, compared to non-EWIMS participating schools, schools using the EWIMs approach saw a decrease in the percentage of students who were chronically tardy, a decrease in the percentage of students who failed one or more courses, and a decrease in the percentage of students with low GPAs (2.0 or lower).

Robust Attendance policy

Given the fact that student attendance in higher education is based on the decision by the student whether to attend or not, majority of the respondent insisted on a mandatory attendance policy. Mandatory attendance has a substantial benefit on learning and performance. FGD₁₂ noted *"the university should strictly enforce the attendance policy as most often, it is not respected"*. FGD₁₅ further stated *"I can't remember seeing a student stopped from writing exams because he/she didn't attend 70% of lectures, in such cases no one takes the attendance policy serious"*. Considerably, the responses of the participants in this study indicate *"lack of enforcement of the attendance policy encourages absenteeism"*. The results of this study are supported by Romer (1993) who explored the relationship between mandatory attendance and improved learning through a controlled experiment in an American college. His analysis concluded that there was a strong statistical relationship between attendance and performance that could be causal. With this in mind, Romer (1993) suggests that institutions first consider measures to increase attendance by encouraging word of mouth, and then consider policies that require attendance. Supporting students to take responsibility for their own actions (Barlow and Fleischer 2011) attendance policy must be clear and explicit (Marburger 2006; Menendez Alvarez-Hevia et al. 2021). The findings of this study are also supported by Moore (2003), who stated that many students believe that regular attendance should reward some degree of academic success. So if you don't get grades, your attendance rate will drop.

Teacher effect

Teacher effectiveness greatly contributes to student class-attendance. Majority of the respondents agreed on the impact of the teacher to class attendance. FDG₁₀ noted *"the lecturers should make their lessons interesting"*. FDG₁₇ and FDG₉ further stated *"the lecturers are not motivating at all"*. The findings of this study reveal that university students will not miss lectures that are interesting and those considered important to their degree, those in which there was a lot of material given out, those where they liked the subject content or in which the teacher was good, while those that they will not attend due to reasons like the availability of lecture material in online forms, and failure to connect the content of the lecture to the real world. These findings corroborated the earlier studies by Hunter and Tetley (1999); Gump (2006) and Nicholl and Timmins (2005). The findings of this study are also supported by Mulryan-Kyne (2010) who concluded that an effective strategy for increasing student participation and attendance is for teachers to engage in active learning which gives students the opportunity to reflect, analyze, synthesize and communicate the materials they learn during class. Active learning increases attendance because students are more engaged in the material and therefore more motivated to

attend class (Deslauriers et al., 2011).

Student Engagement and Motivation

Motivating students is one of the biggest challenges teachers face every day. Motivation and engagement, conceptualized as students' energy and desire to be active, learn, work effectively, and achieve their potential, play an important role in students' interest and enjoyment of school (Martin, 2006). Thus, highly motivated and engaged students perform significantly better academically and behave better than their disengaged or disengaged peers (Fredricks, Bulumenfeld, & Paris, 2004). Most of the participants were of the opinion students should be engaged and motivated as a means to curb student absenteeism in the university and teachers have a great role to play in motivating and engaging students. FDG₁₆ commented “*when students are motivated by teacher, they will always like to be part of the class*” FDG₃ narrated “students enjoy lectures that they are fully engaged in the learning process”. The above assertions are supported by Fredricks, et al., (2004) who compared less engaged peers and engaged students and found that engaged peers demonstrate more effort, experience more positive emotions, attend classes and pay more attention in the classroom. Connell, et al., (1994) further supported that, engagement has also been associated with positive student outcomes, including higher grades and decreased dropouts.

Conclusion

Absenteeism is a complex and multifactorial phenomenon. In the light of the fact that absenteeism can have considerable unfavorable effects on students and educators alike, it is worth exploring the causes of absenteeism in order to help raise concerns for educational institutions and help them act on these factors to improve attendance rates. Research demonstrates that chronic absenteeism has harmful and lasting impacts on students' academic success. Research also indicates that students can reverse their academic difficulties if they improve their attendance. This study examined the cause of student absenteeism in the University of Buea. And in addition, the study examined and provided possibly effective solution and preventive measures to minimize absenteeism of students in the University of Buea. The research identified there are many different reasons why student do not make it to lectures each day. This research identified four main circumstances for poor attendance amongst students in the University of Buea. Based on key findings from the research, the four main themes/components were associated to student absenteeism that is student, teacher, school and socio-economic and family-related factors. The research findings also revealed possibly effective solutions and preventive measures to minimize student absenteeism and identified the respective themes: early warning and monitoring systems, robust school attendance policy, teacher effect and student engagement and motivation. In light of the findings of the study, the researcher identified the following major recommendations:

Recommendations

Teacher skills should be developed through various training programs and seminars to change their orientation from traditional lecture method to interactive and innovative lecture method. Teachers must ensure that the lectures are interesting, relevant, positive and in a respectful and equal environment for everyone and in an atmosphere conducive to learning.

It is imperative that teachers try to respond to the problem of student absenteeism by exploring creative techniques to increase class participation. One way to achieve this is to let students know that their lecture attendance is important because they play a crucial role in achieving the learning objectives through class participation. Teachers should therefore see students as business partners, whose efforts are also necessary for the teaching-learning process to be effective.

Teachers should be good role models by lecturing regularly and accurately. Teachers should be

well prepared for lectures, capture students' attention by presenting a good problem, using animation, sound, graphics that stimulate learning and make students curious and motivated to learn the subject/skill, course addresses.

Teachers are encouraged to keep attendance records and send alerts to regularly absent students as well as Use positive reinforcement to improve student attendance.

The university should review the current policy and practice in relation to attendance; identify strengths, gaps and challenges in current policy and practice; develop new or additional measures needed to promote and support attendance in line with the guidelines; ensure that the school is observing all its obligations in relation to attendance, as set down in the University Student Guide.

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