Absenteeism and Non-Enrolment in Uganda's Primary Schools: An Investigation of Home-Based and School-Based Factors

November 2023

Research Team and Collaborators

Principal Investigator: Mary Goretti Nakabugo
Co-investigator: James Urwick
Data Managers: Joseph Kateregga and Joseph Kasasa
Analysts: Joseph Kasasa, Robert Mugambwa, Simon Peter Olinga, and James Urwick
Other supporting staff: Judith Nyakaisiki Tumusiime, Azamu Mulikiriza, Faridah Nassereka & Vincent Kalibbala

Field researchers
Pius Akol, Jocelyn Amongin, Joseph Kasasa, Joseph Kateregga, Emmanuel Mafabi, Ronald Mpala, Robert Mugambwa, Sara Okoth, Simon Peter Olinga, Fenekansi Sabiiti, Godfrey Sendyose, Judith Nyakaisiki Tumusiime.

Collaborating organisations
Child2youth Foundation, Mukono District
Giving Children Hope Initiative, Mityana District
Kole Intellectual Forum, Kole District
Lake Albert Children and Women's Advocacy and Development Organisation, Buliisa District
Pathways for Development Initiatives, Bududa District

Funder Support

Uwezo Uganda's work is supported by Echidna Giving, Wellspring Philanthropic Fund (WPF) and a consortium of other funders including the Lego Foundation, Porticus, Co-Impact, Imaginable Futures, FCDO and GPE/KIX who fund some of our work through other organisations and initiatives such as RELI Africa, ALiVE/Zizi Afrique Foundation & PAL Network.

Citation Information

Uwezo Uganda (2023) *Absenteeism and Non-Enrolment in Uganda's Primary Schools: An Investigation of Home-Based and School-Based Factors*. Kampala: Uwezo Uganda

Copyright
Uwezo Uganda 2023

Any part of this publication may be reproduced for non-profit purposes. Please cite the source and send a copy to the address below.

Contact

Uwezo Uganda, Corner House, Suite B1, Plot 436/437,
Mawanda Road, Kamwokya, Kampala
P.O Box 33275 Kampala, Uganda
+256 393 193 441
info@uwezouganda.org

Website
www.uwezouganda.org

X (Formerly Twitter]: @UwezoUganda
Facebook: UwezoUganda
LinkedIn: Uwezo Uganda

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES iii

ABBREVIATIONS iv

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY v

1. INTRODUCTION 1

2. LITERATURE REVIEW 3

2.1 Structure of the Review 3

2.2 The Journey from Home to School 3

2.3 School Quality 3

2.3.1 Staff and physical structures 4

2.3.2 Provision for pupils' health and welfare 4

2.3.3 Responses to children's difficulties 5

2.3.4 School ethos 5

2.4 School Costs and Household Resources 5

2.5 Cultural Links and Barriers 6

2.6 Individual Attributes of Children 6

2.7 Theoretical Perspectives: Social Exchange and Children's Agency 7

3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS 7

4. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS 7

4.1 General Approach 7

4.2 Sampling 8

4.3 Pilot Study 9

4.4 Methods of Data Collection 9

4.5 Research Instruments and Procedures 9

4.6 Approach to the Analysis of Data 10

5. FINDINGS 11

5.1. Sequence and Structure of the Findings 11

5.2. The Local Environments 11

5.2.1. Kole District 11

5.2.2. Buliisa District 12

5.2.3 Bududa District 13

5.2.4. Mukono District 14

5.3. Combined Home and School Factors 14

5.4. Factors in the Home Environment 15

5.5. Factors in the School Environment 16

5.6. Individual Child Factors 17

5.7. Survey Evidence about Pupil Absenteeism 17

5.7.1. The school sample and the measurement of attendance rate 17

5.7.2. The design effect and the finite population correction 17

5.7.3. Screening of possible influences on the attendance rate 18

5.7.4 Regression findings for socio-economic and school factors 19

5.7.5 Implications of the survey evidence 21

6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS 21

6.1. Responses to the Research Questions.....21
6.2. Policy Issues and Recommendations.....23
6.2.1. How to clarify and limit 'school requirements'.....23
6.2.2. How to achieve adequate feeding of children at school.....23
6.2.3. How to regulate the engagement of children in work.....23
6.2.4. How to support children with disabilities, orphans and other vulnerable children.....24
6.2.5. How to maintain pupil discipline without encouraging absenteeism.....24
6.2.6. How to reduce the conflict between school hours and agricultural activities.....24
7. References.....25
8. Annexes.....29
ANNEX I: INFORMATION ON LOCAL COMMUNITIES AND PRIMARY SCHOOLS.....29
ANNEX II: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR PUPILS WHO ARE FREQUENTLY ABSENT.. 31
ANNEX III: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR PARENTS/GUARDIANS OF PUPILS WHO ARE FREQUENTLY ABSENT.....34
ANNEX IV: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR PARENTS/GUARDIANS OF CHILDREN WHO ARE NOT ENROLLED IN SCHOOL..... 36
ANNEX V: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR CHILDREN WHO ARE NOT ENROLLED IN SCHOOL.....38
ANNEX VI: QUESTIONS FOR PRIMARY SCHOOL MANAGER-TEACHER FOCUS GROUP, OR FOR INTERVIEWS WITH STAFF AND SCM MEMBERS, ON CHILDREN'S ABSENTEEISM AND NON-ENROLMENT..... 40
ANNEX VII: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR DISTRICT EDUCATION OFFICERS, DISTRICT INSPECTORS OF SCHOOLS AND A NATIONAL OFFICER REPRESENTING SCHOOL INSPECTORS..... 42

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE 1: ESTIMATES OF ABSENTEEISM AND NON-ENROLMENT OF CHILDREN AGED 6-14 IN 32 DISTRICTS, 2018 2

TABLE 2: SELECTION OF DISTRICTS 8

TABLE 3: TYPES AND NUMBERS OF INFORMANT SELECTED PER DISTRICT 9

TABLE 4: SCHOOL ATTENDANCE RATES ACCORDING TO DOMINANT TYPES OF OCCUPATION IN THE COMMUNITY 19

TABLE 5: REGRESSION FINDINGS FOR SCHOOL ATTENDANCE RATE IN TWO STEPS 20

TABLE 6: ADDITIONAL REGRESSION FINDINGS WITH TEACHER ABSENCE 21

Abbreviations

CFS	Child friendly schools
CSO	Civil society organisation
CRE	Child rights education
ILO	International Labour Organisation
LC1	Local Councillor 1
PTA	Parent-teacher association
SEN	Special educational needs
SMC	School Management Committee
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UPE	Universal primary education

Executive Summary

Evidence from Uwezo Uganda's household-based surveys shows that rates of pupil absence from primary school continue to be high in Uganda and that a small but persistent minority of children of primary school age are not enrolled at all. This study seeks to achieve an improved understanding of these participation problems, so as to contribute to a more efficient delivery of primary education. The school closures during the Covid-19 pandemic have added to relevant factors such as poverty and over-age enrolment.

Despite the goal of universal primary education (UPE), the actual levels of attendance and enrolment are influenced both by 'supply' factors in the provision of schools and by 'demand' factors, represented by the behaviour of households and individuals. Previous research has tended to focus on particular interventions or supply problems and only on one type of outcome. But, to some extent, attendance, enrolment and academic achievement are all influenced by the same supply and demand factors: hence the need for a more comprehensive approach.

For the review of relevant literature, we group the potential influences on absenteeism and non-enrolment into five categories: (a) the journey between home and school, (b) school quality, (c) school costs and household resources, (d) cultural links and tensions and (e) individual attributes of children. Important aspects of the journey are the time required and the risks (Daly et al. 2016; Marshall et al. 2020). Four dimensions of school quality that we consider are staff and physical structures, provision for pupils' health and welfare, responses to children's difficulties, and school ethos. We note especially the potential effects of teacher shortage and teacher absenteeism (Kremer et al. 2005), school feeding programmes, hygiene in general and provision for girls' menstrual hygiene (Miiro et al. 2018), and remedial teaching. Households interact with schools financially, in the use of children's time, and on cultural dimensions. The age and sex of the individual child interact with other factors (Kabay 2016) and some have personal disadvantages such as orphan status or a disability (Kameyama 2021). On the relationships between families and schools, social exchange theory is helpful (Blau 1996), while recent studies of child agency raise questions about child-adult relationships.

The research is designed to identify the major factors that account for pupil absenteeism, late entry to primary school, dropout and non-completion of primary education, in settings where these problems are most prevalent. The districts, schools and communities selected were ones that were expected to illustrate the problems. Qualitative case studies were conducted in the selected primary schools and their host communities. The field researchers interacted with a range of informants: children, their parents, school managers and teachers, and education inspectors.

In each of four selected districts – Mukono, Bududa, Kole and Buliisa – absenteeism was studied in one government-funded primary school and its host community. In each school we selected a purposive sample of seven children who were frequent absentees and held semi-structured interviews with them and one parent of each. In Kole and Buliisa Districts, which had relatively high levels of non-enrolment, a second school and community were selected for research on non-enrolment. In each of these communities, we arranged, with the aid of the school, to interview four out-of-school children and one parent of each. In each of the six schools, a focus group discussion was held with the head teacher, at least one other teacher and members of the School Management Committee (SMC) representing the community. Focus group discussions (when possible), or interviews, were held with the District Education Officers and Inspectors of Schools in each district, and an interview with one national representative of inspectors. The instruments for school data, the various interviews and the school focus groups are available as annexes to the

report. All procedures at community and district level were piloted in another district (Mityana) in November 2022. The main field research was completed in March 2023.

Additional evidence about absenteeism was obtained from a national survey of primary schools that had been conducted in 2018. Possible influences on the school attendance rate were screened and five measures of these were used in a quantitative analysis, completed in September 2023.

The presentation of survey findings begins with sketches of the local environment in each district. Kole District illustrates the traditional involvement of children in agriculture and markets. Buliisa District shows the combined influence of traditional economic roles of children and a new commercialisation, related to oil extraction and processing, which offers low-skilled work opportunities. Bududa District, in a mountainous area, illustrates rural poverty as a constraint on school attendance. Mukono District is generally more prosperous but with poor enclaves, and the selected school was in a community that had suffered economic decline because of the restriction of fishing. In all four districts the schools had shortages of teachers. In Buliisa, few teachers were able to use the Alur language as the medium of instruction.

The subsequent parts of the analysis distinguish between factors that are jointly attributable to the home and the school, and other factors that relate only to the home or the school. The levies and fees that are paid to support the school (in a context of under-funding), the provision of scholastic materials, uniforms and shoes, and provision for feeding, are all matters in which the home and school interact and share responsibility. The qualitative evidence suggests that interactions in all these areas are important factors in absenteeism and contribute to non-enrolment in some cases.

The evidence about factors in the home environment shows that the absence of biological parents, dependence on children's work or earnings, and a low value attached to schooling, contribute both to absenteeism and to non-enrolment. In addition, family events and crises, the assignment of children to care for siblings, and negligence in the care of children, contribute to absenteeism.

In the school environment there was an underlying problem of insufficient public funding, both for staff and for non-salary items. Related challenges, with potential to encourage absenteeism, were teacher absenteeism, overcrowded classrooms and poor provision for water, sanitation and hygiene. In two districts, there was evidence that schools neglected non-examinable subjects and sports, which could have encouraged attendance as children enjoy them. Harsh treatment of pupils by some teachers was mentioned in all districts as a factor in absenteeism, corporal punishment being common in Kole District.

Some circumstances of individual children also played a part. Poor health was an important factor in non-enrolment as well as absenteeism. One non-enrolled child interviewed was affected by a physical disability as well as poverty. However, a low interest in school was only seen in two of the non-enrolled children interviewed and most of them were willing to attend school if given the opportunity. Parental agency was dominant in their non-enrolment.

The qualitative evidence on absenteeism is complemented by a quantitative analysis of the attendance rates of a national sample of 786 primary schools. The main findings are those of regression in two steps, showing the effects of socio-economic factors alone and then in combination with school factors. The significant negative effects on the attendance rate are those of the sub-regional poverty rate and the official pupil-teacher ratio. Agricultural male occupations in the community, non-treatment of drinking water in the school, and a low level of teacher presence in classrooms, also have negative effects, though not statistically significant. The most important survey finding is the relationship between staffing level and pupil absenteeism, which was not obvious from the case study data.

The last section of the report provides responses to five research questions and then discusses six policy issues that are relevant. The research has identified a wide range of factors in pupil absenteeism, relating to communities, the interaction of home and school, home and school environments and individual children. On the relative importance of the sets of factors, we draw attention to the interaction of home and school about 'school requirements', including levies, scholastic materials and feeding arrangements, as being very crucial. However, the absence of one or both biological parents in the household is also important, from the interview evidence, both for absenteeism and for non-enrolment.

The evidence about the effects of the school environment is in general less direct, coming mainly from the interactions with officials, the school focus groups and the survey. We infer that children's motivation, as well as their learning outcomes, is influenced by the level of staffing, the availability of teachers, the physical condition of schools and the range of activities (too narrowly academic in some cases).

Non-enrolment of young children occurs in situations where extreme poverty is combined with the poor health of a child or parent. We did not learn of any attempts to rescue such children. The availability of low-paid employment encourages some older children to drop out.

The recommendations on selected policy issues may be summarised as follows:

1. In relation to 'school requirements', the responsibilities of the Government and of parents should be clarified by new legislation or regulation, so that the right to free tuition is respected in government-funded primary schools.

2. Schools should be encouraged to re-start and expand school meals, with contributions in cash or kind by parents. Schools must also have a supply of safe drinking water.

3. The Children's Act should be modified to allow limited employment of children aged 14-15 outside school hours.

4. A system of grants to families for children with disabilities, orphans and other vulnerable children would improve their attendance at primary school.

5. To support the ban on corporal punishment in primary schools, school managers should be advised about alternative approaches to maintaining discipline.

6. A reduction in the academic hours of primary schools could be considered, as these are relatively long. District authorities could be given some scope for modifying the school calendar to reduce conflict with agricultural activities and local festivals.

1. Introduction

For many years Uwezo's reports on children's learning of reading and numeracy in Uganda have included some background information on participation in primary education, reporting evidence from household-based surveys. This evidence shows that, 25 years after a policy of universal primary education (UPE) was introduced, rates of pupil absence from primary school continue to be high and also that a small but persistent minority of children, of primary school age, are not enrolled in school at all. In our 2018 national assessment, for example, we estimated the national level of absenteeism, for pupils aged 6-14, as 24.3% (see Table 1). For the same age group, about 2.9% of children, nationally, had never been enrolled in school and another 1.7% had dropped out. A further analysis using the data from 2018 has also shown pupils' absenteeism to be one of the factors explaining variations in their levels of reading in English, in a multivariate context (Urwick 2022). In the same vein recent research in the USA shows pupil absenteeism to be predictive of long-term academic difficulties (Liu, Kufield and Lee 2023). It is clear that absenteeism and non-enrolment continue to detract from efforts to improve the conditions and processes of teaching and learning in Uganda.

Pupil absenteeism is a challenge for educational systems world-wide, including those of high-income countries. But, from the available evidence, the causes are considerably different in high-income and low-income countries, with stronger elements of child agency in the former (see, for example, Hinsliff 2023). The consequences, too, may be even more detrimental in low-income countries, where children depend more on schools for access to learning materials and contact with well-educated adults. Complete non-enrolment is also rather more prevalent in low-income countries, despite laws of compulsory attendance. This research therefore seeks a comprehensive view of the reasons for partial and total non-participation in schooling in the particular context of Uganda.

The planning for this study began when our inaugural strategy was formulated, before the Covid-19 pandemic, as we recognised that a holistic and in-depth analysis of the participation problems, especially in the districts that are most affected, could contribute to a more efficient delivery of primary education. The pandemic and the closures of schools that accompanied it delayed the implementation of the study but also added to the problems of participation that are studied. The pandemic increased the financial pressures on many households. The school closures magnified the pre-existing problem of over-age enrolment in primary education (see Uwezo 2021, 5), which is a potential factor in absences and dropout. Some school managers and teachers left the education service for alternative work and replacing them takes time. By the time of the field work, in mid-2023, the educational system had recovered but was still contending with the effects of the pandemic.

Three types of measurable outcome – measures of children's learning, rates of absence and non-enrolment – are influenced by many of the same characteristics of schools, households and individuals. To give just one example, physically dangerous journeys from home to school have been touted as a cause of non-enrolment, but they could also be a cause of absenteeism. Hitherto, researchers in Uganda and comparable settings have looked into important but limited aspects of the participation problems: limited both in the type of outcome and in the inputs or influences that are considered. We see the need for a more comprehensive approach at the conceptual level, as we shall argue in the next section.

TABLE 1: ESTIMATES OF ABSENTEEISM AND NON-ENROLMENT OF CHILDREN AGED 6-14 IN 32 DISTRICTS, 2018

District name	Sub-region of selected districts	Region of selected districts	Percentage primary pupils absent	Percentage never enrolled	Percentage dropped out
Adjumani			23.1	1.8	0.1
Amuru	Acholi	Northern	22.2	5.8	6.6
Arua			28.9	1.1	1.1
Bududa	Bugisu	Eastern	33.7	1.1	0.1
Bugiri			25.4	1.3	1.6
Bukomansimbi			10.7	0.3	0.7
Buliisa	Bunyoro	Western	24.8	4.1	2.7
Bundibugyo	Tooro	Western	30.3	1.4	0.3
Jinja			24.0	1.3	0.6
Kaabong	Karamoja	Northern	17.0	36.3	1.9
Kampala			18.7	0.4	0.2
Kasese			27.7	0.6	0.8
Kibuku			24.5	2.7	0.7
Kole	Lango	Northern	38.3	6.7	4.7
Kumi			21.0	1.4	0.4
Lira	Lango	Northern	20.7	3.2	3.1
Luuka			27.5	0.3	1.5
Luwero			22.3	0.8	1.5
Mayuge	Busoga	Eastern	33.5	0.1	0.1
Mitooma			12.4	0.8	1.5
Mityana	Central 2	Central	35.7	0.3	0.4
Moyo	West Nile	Northern	15.5	3.2	0.4
Mpigi			21.3	0.8	1.3
Mukono	Central 2	Central	45.4	0.3	1.3
Ngora			16.3	1.9	0.7
Ntoroko	Tooro	Western	30.0	2.4	2.9
Ntungamo			20.9	1.2	2.5
Rukungiri			12.5	0.0	2.6
Tororo			25.3	1.7	1.5
Wakiso			16.8	0.0	0.1
Yumbe	West Nile	Northern	14.9	3.1	1.3
Zombo	West Nile	Northern	30.7	9.7	7.4
Uganda est.			24.3	2.9	1.7

Colour codes	
	Districts with absenteeism above 30%.
	Districts with more than 3% never enrolled.
	Districts with more than 3% dropped out.

Source: Uwezo 2019

2. Literature review

2.1 Structure of the Review

Uganda and comparable low-income countries have policies of UPE, but in general they have low capacity to enforce compulsory participation in primary education, even if on paper it is compulsory for children of a certain age group. To a certain extent, enrolment in schools, and attendance by those who are enrolled, is influenced by 'supply', as represented by the availability, accessibility, costs and quality of schools and by 'demand', as represented by the educational decisions and behaviour of households and individuals. Beneath the rhetoric that primary education is compulsory and free, there is an element of negotiation between schools and households as to how far children will attend the schools and on what terms.

Small research studies have been done on many potential influences that are relevant to school attendance and enrolment in Uganda, but these have tended to focus on particular interventions or supply problems (e.g., feeding programmes or menstrual hygiene) and on only one type of outcome (e.g., absenteeism). In some cases, this was because of a donor agenda; in others, just a choice of the researchers. Some sources on factors in academic achievement have also been consulted, as they have relevance for understanding the participation problems. Drawing on a wide range of sources, therefore, we group the potential influences into five major categories: (a) the journey from home to school, (b) school quality, (c) school costs and household resources, (d) cultural links and tensions and (e) individual attributes of children. We recognise that the first four categories reflect local community characteristics to some degree. Within each category, we shall focus on specific aspects or themes. Relevant literature will be discussed for each category and aspect. Lastly some theoretical perspectives will be mentioned.

2.2 The Journey from Home to School

The journey from home to school is closely related to the question of school supply: whether school locations have been well planned in relation to settlement patterns. The journey has two important dimensions: firstly, the time required and, secondly, any obstacles and risks that are involved for children, such as crossing rivers or walking on dangerous roads. Both aspects have been well researched in relation to non-enrolment in the Gambia (Daly et al. 2016) and Guinea-Bissau (Marshall et al. 2020). These two mixed-method studies have similar findings that in some areas a long or difficult journey causes over-age entry to primary school. For the youngest children, a walk to school of more than half an hour seems to be undesirable. The studies fail to provide evidence about absenteeism, in which the journey could also be a factor.

2.3 School Quality

We use the term, 'school quality', as an umbrella for a number of aspects of the school's resources, facilities, organisation and image that may or may not encourage enrolment and attendance. Does it have the essential staff and physical structures? Does it have services to support the health and welfare of pupils? How does it respond to difficulties in learning? Does it have a 'child friendly' environment? The literature provides relevant, but patchy and incomplete, evidence about the links between these characteristics and the problems of absenteeism and non-enrolment.

2.3.1 Staff and physical structures

To begin with teachers as an essential resource, their quantity, qualifications and presence or absence in the classroom are all potentially relevant. Qualitative data from Guinea-Bissau shows widespread concern among educators and parents about the insufficient number and training of teachers and insufficient classrooms and a perception that these problems contributed to non-enrolment (Marshall et al. 2020, 7). This issue is relevant to the Northern and Eastern Regions of Uganda, for which Uwezo's school surveys have shown some extreme shortages of teachers and of classrooms and toilets (Uwezo 2021, 26-27).

Teachers' absence from the school and from the classroom has been quite widely researched (e.g., Chaudhury et al. 2006; Wane and Martin 2013) and a snapshot observation in our own school survey of 2018 showed that about 21% of Uganda's primary school classrooms had no teacher present (Uwezo 2019, 33). But the relationship between teacher and pupil absenteeism has not been sufficiently researched: a significant association between them found in India is one of the few pieces of evidence (Kremer et al. 2005, 666). Teacher absenteeism is a potentially important factor for our study.

2.3.2 Provision for pupils' health and welfare

Welfare services of schools that may affect participation include (a) feeding programmes, (b) provision of water and hygiene materials, (c) provision for girls' menstrual hygiene and (d) provision for disabilities and other special educational needs (SEN). There are some findings on the impact of feeding programmes in Uganda, but their relevance to the current situation is very limited. Alderman and others (2012) found donor-funded meals to have a positive impact on the school attendance and enrolment of internally displaced children at a time of civil conflict in Northern Uganda. A slightly later study (Acham et al. 2012) shows a positive association between children's consumption of breakfast and lunch and their learning outcomes, but in a situation where the meals were provided from their homes. This second study provides no evidence about the links between feeding and participation or about the cost of the meals to households. The current situation is one in which about 65% of primary schools are organising collective feeding programmes, but not at public expense and with voluntary participation. Evidence is therefore needed about whether such feeding encourages attendance in spite of the private costs. The cost implications are also different for children in Primary Grades 1 and 2, who may only need breakfast as they do not attend in the afternoon, and children in higher grades who need both breakfast and lunch. A recent study in Ethiopia (Desalegn et al. 2021) showed a school feeding programme to have beneficial effects both on attendance and on achievement, but the programme was donor-funded.

Water, hygiene and sanitation in schools were matters of increasing concern in Uganda even before the Covid-19 pandemic. A number of studies in different countries show benefits of hand-washing in schools for children's health (Mbakaya 2017). A field experiment in Kenya on interventions for water treatment and hygiene promotion showed beneficial effects on attendance by girls, although the effects on boys' attendance were not significant (Freeman et al. 2012). The authors were uncertain whether the gender difference related to menstrual hygiene issues, but this seems likely. More recently, a mixed-method study of menstrual health and absenteeism among girls attending secondary school in Uganda showed a strong link between absenteeism and menstruation management (Miiro et al. 2018). As a large number of adolescent girls are attending primary schools, it has been relevant for Uwezo to obtain data on their provision for menstrual hygiene. Our 2018 school survey found that 69% of primary schools had a supply of sanitary pads for emergencies, 48%

had a private room for girls to use and 75% had received training on menstruation hygiene in the past year (Uwezo 2019, 36). The Government of Uganda formulated a Menstrual Hygiene Management Charter (2015) and took action subsequently.

2.3.3 Responses to children's difficulties

Provision for SEN is very challenging for Uganda's primary schools and only about one-quarter of them have any teacher with some training in SEN (Uwezo 2019, 35). Disabilities are a possible cause of non-enrolment and absenteeism and in some cases they may not be recognised as the cause. Schools do not seem to have thorough records of pupil disability. But we are not aware of any literature that addresses these specific problems in Uganda.

Teachers and school managers often respond to children's learning difficulties by causing them to repeat a grade and the rates of grade repetition tend to be high in low-income countries including Uganda. Much as these high repetition rates are symptoms of inefficiency in educational systems, it is problematic to use them as negative indicators of school quality without reference to the circumstances. It is also logically unsound to use grade repetition by the child as a 'predictor' of achievement, as done by Hungi and others (2017), since repetition itself is usually a response to low achievement. The same point applies to assuming that repetition encourages dropout – a hypothesis that Kabay's research (2016) largely rejects. The perceived need for a child to repeat may have been a result of absenteeism or temporary dropout – as in the case of a long illness or where the family had relocated. Remedial teaching is often a more constructive response to learning difficulties, however, and could be treated as an element in school quality (see Schwartz 2012; Boone et al. 2015). It has acquired added importance as a result of the school closures of 2020-21.

2.3.4 School ethos

A less tangible, but important dimension of school quality is the philosophy and vision of the school (whether formally stated or not). It is relevant to ask whether schools in Uganda have adopted any of the major ideas of UNICEF's campaigns for 'child friendly schools' (CFS) and 'child rights education' (CRE), for which the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) provided a foundation (UNICEF 2006). In a number of high- and middle-income countries, these movements have gained considerable support (Jerome et al. 2015) and represent a contrast with the historical experience of intimidating schools and harsh treatment of 'truant children'. The CFS movement, however, may have carried idealism too far, in the global context, by trying to incorporate 'democratic participation' and constructivist pedagogy in the model, whereas the core idea is that of a safe, inclusive and welcoming environment. It has received a mixed reception from teachers in developing countries, partly because of the ambitious goals and tension with local cultural norms (King 2020; Zendah and Maphosa 2018). However, CFS indicators have been developed by Godfrey and others (2012) for three middle-income countries: Nicaragua, the Philippines and South Africa.

2.4 School Costs and Household Resources

Poor households have to make difficult financial choices. Unfortunately, parents sometimes have financial reasons for deciding that a child should not begin primary education at the correct age or should not complete a primary cycle that they have started. These decisions are also influenced by some of the aspects of school quality discussed above and by cultural factors. But the existence of school fees and 'PTA levies', even in government-aided schools, is an aggravating factor. The studies of non-enrolment in the Gambia and Guinea-Bissau already cited (Daly et al. 2016; Marshall et al. 2020) make it very clear that the combined burden of fees, uniforms, learning materials and feeding contributions was too much for some parents. The rigidity of the requirements varies, however, and

the private costs of basic education are to some extent negotiated between schools and families (Urwick 2002).

Another important issue is the interaction of children's work with their enrolment and attendance at school. 'Children's work' is extremely varied in the time it occupies and in its social and economic implications, ranging from unpaid daily chores in the child's home or on the home farm to exploitative, bonded work for long hours in other settings. Since its foundation, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) has campaigned against 'child labour', which it defines in a pejorative manner to indicate work that is potentially harmful to children, partly on the assumption that such labour impedes education. But there are different bodies of opinion among specialists about how far children's work (whether legally approved or not) impedes or prevents formal education and, indeed, the research evidence is inconsistent (Murray 2013; Okyere 2013; Omoike 2014). There are cases in which children's work appears to finance their education. It will be important, therefore, to consider what relationship between children's work and their schooling applies in specific local settings. Seasonal absenteeism is related to harvesting or movements of livestock in some rural communities.

2.5 Cultural Links and Barriers

With reference to the Gambia, Marshall and others (2016) mention different kinds of relationship of the local community with the primary school, some supportive and others less so. Communities that have a cultural commitment to modern education contribute material and labour for the establishment of early childhood development (ECD) centres, with support from NGOs or the government (p. 193). Preparation in such centres is likely to be helpful for children's timely participation in primary education. On the other hand, there are areas where many children attend traditional Koranic schools initially (p. 190) and then enrol in a primary school, but above the correct age. This problem is mitigated when 'madrassa' schools combine secular subjects with the Koranic curriculum (these being comparable to 'Islamiyya primary schools' in Nigeria). These examples are relevant to parts of Uganda's Northern Region.

The languages of instruction used by schools are another source of potential cultural barriers. Difficulty in adjusting to the use of English from Primary Four onwards is common for children who have had little exposure to the language outside the school – and could affect their motivation to attend school. Where the school uses a different local language from the one spoken at home, this could also affect a child's motivation.

2.6 Individual Attributes of Children

The sex and the age of the individual child tend to interact with some of the school quality factors and cultural factors that have been discussed, as problems for participation. Because of patriarchal attitudes, girls are more likely, in some communities, to be kept in a Koranic school only, or withdrawn from school early for marriage or domestic work. Over-age pupils, as Kabay (2016) notes, are more likely to drop out of primary school – and late entry as well as grade repetition accounts for their situation.

Some children have personal disadvantages as orphans, refugees, members of internally displaced families, or people with disabilities. A study of non-enrolment among children with disabilities in Mongolia (Kameyama 2021) shows that those with severe disabilities are less likely to be enrolled and that disability interacts with some other factors, such as preschool experience and availability of adult support in the home. But a limitation is that the study treats disability as a single construct and does not report on differences between the major types of impairment. In our 2021 national assessment survey, we found that, among dropouts aged 4-16, children with vision, walking and

memory difficulties were a larger proportion than they were in the general population (Uwezo 2021, 6). This did not apply to children with hearing difficulties, probably because primary curricula for deaf children require extended time.

2.7 Theoretical Perspectives: Social Exchange and Children's Agency

Two areas of theory that may be helpful for the interpretation of our findings deserve to be mentioned. The first is Peter Blau's (1996) formulation of social exchange relations, which is relevant to the relationships between families and schools (as represented by their staff). Over and above the formal, contractual relationship in which the school provides a service and the household equips a child for school in certain ways, informal reciprocal relationships are formed, often involving 'good will' and reputational advantages for the school or recognition of staff members in the local community. There could be tensions in such a relationship if the cultural expectations of school staff and of parents are very different, however. Blau's framework shows the importance of informal as well as formal reciprocity (pp. 88-114).

The second area of theory is concerned with children's 'agency' in their education – the extent to which they have a voice or influence in educational decisions. Children's agency in the classroom has been a popular topic of research in Scandinavian countries (e.g. Girdal and Sorbring 2018; Siirko et al. 2019), but here our concern is mainly with decisions about enrolment and attendance. The literature on UPE tends to assume that, in African households, parents make all the decisions. But there may well be differences in this regard between rural and urban areas, as well as age-related differences. Research by Bordanaro (2012) illustrates the moral ambiguity of child agency in an African urban context and the problem of political bias in the treatment of the concept.

3. Research Questions

Our research questions apply to the districts selected for study, which are disadvantaged in the national context, having high levels of absenteeism and/or non-enrolment.

A. What factors account for pupil absenteeism at the primary level?

B. What is the relative importance of local community influences, home environments, school environments and individual factors in pupil absenteeism?

C. What factors account for late entry to primary school (i.e. entry above the correct age) and of failure to enrol at all in some cases?

D. What factors account for dropout and non-completion in primary education?

E. How far do children have agency in decisions about their own enrolment and attendance in school and are their preferences different from those of their parents?

4. Research Design and Methods

4.1 General Approach

The research focuses on identifying the factors that account for absenteeism and non-enrolment and uses mixed approaches and methods. The main part of the findings is based on qualitative case studies of schools and their host communities in four selected districts, from field work completed in March 2023. The informants selected illustrate the situations of the minority of children who are enrolled but frequently absent, as well as the much smaller minority who, for various reasons, are

not enrolled. The districts, schools and communities selected are not necessarily 'typical' in the national context but selected because they were expected (from previous evidence) to illustrate the problems. In each selected school and local community, the researchers consulted informants with different roles: head teachers, other school managers, children and parents. We also observed and recorded characteristics of the schools, communities and families that are relevant for interpretation of the data.

To complement the qualitative research findings, a quantitative analysis of school attendance rates is also presented. This uses data from a national survey of primary schools that was conducted in 2018, alongside the Uwezo Assessment of children's learning (Uwezo 2019). The analysis, completed in September 2023, provides evidence about several community-level and school-level factors in absenteeism, supporting some of the hypotheses generated by the case studies.

4.2 Sampling

The sampling of districts, of schools with communities, and of children is purposive, but allows for representation of different regions and of rural and urban areas. From the data in Table 1, the four districts shown in Table 2 have suitable characteristics.

Within each district, a primary school and its host community was selected, with the help of district education officials, that experienced a high level of absenteeism. In addition, a second community (with school) was selected, in Kole and Buliisa Districts, where the level of non-enrolment was thought to be high. Thus, a total of six local communities were visited.

TABLE 2: SELECTION OF DISTRICTS

District	Region	Level of urbanisation	Relevant characteristics
Mukono	Central	High	High absenteeism
Bududa	Eastern	Low	High absenteeism
Kole	Northern	Low	High absenteeism; high non-enrolment
Buliisa	Western	Low	Average absenteeism; high non-enrolment

Within each school selected for absenteeism, the target was to select seven pupils in a purposive manner, from among those who have been recorded as absent for three days or more in the past four weeks. As far as possible one pupil was selected from each grade (Primary One to Seven) and we also sought to achieve a gender balance. Interviews were held with the selected children and with one of their parents, always with the agreement of those concerned. In practice, it was only possible to select six pupils in certain schools, but the response rate was generally high.

To identify and meet non-enrolled children, we consulted both school and community representatives, with different approaches for 'dropouts' and for those who had never been enrolled. To some extent dropouts could be traced through the school. Examples of non-enrolled children were known to some community leaders. Our target was to interview four non-enrolled children and a parent of each, in each community selected for that purpose. The four were to consist of two who had dropped out of the local primary school, and two who had never been enrolled and were aged seven or above. Where possible both sexes were represented, but other selection criteria had precedence. For non-enrolled children also, the response rate was high but not perfect.

Table 3 gives a summary of the various informants sought in the different districts. They include the head teachers and at least one representative SMC member and another teacher. Criteria for selecting the latter were their availability and, as far as possible, knowledge of the local community.

TABLE 3: TYPES AND NUMBERS OF INFORMANT SELECTED PER DISTRICT

In all four districts	Additional, in Kole and Buliisa Districts
In one school (and host community): ● 7 children (frequent absentees) ● 7 parents or guardians (of the above) ● Head teacher ● At least one member of the SMC ● One other teacher ● The District Education Officer ● At least one District Inspector of Schools	In one local community (with school): ● 2 children who have dropped out ● 2 children who have never enrolled ● 4 parents or guardians (of the above)

The sample used for the quantitative analysis consisted of 786 primary schools, each representing an enumeration area (EA) and distributed across 28 districts. From an initial sample of 834, the 786 schools had usable data both for official enrolment and for a headcount of pupils in P1-P7, conducted during the survey. Districts and EAs had been selected with probabilities proportional to size and all the 15 sub-regions of Uganda are represented.

4.3 Pilot Study

So that all data collection procedures could be tested before the main study is conducted, a fifth district (Mityana) was selected for the pilot study. Mityana District was known to have a high level of absenteeism and was easily accessible from Kampala, with a suitable CSO to assist. Two communities and schools were visited, one illustrating absenteeism and the other non-enrolment, in November 2022.

The pilot study was very effective in illustrating the situations and issues of interpretation that were likely to be important in the main case studies. It enabled final improvements to be made to the instruments and procedures, with slightly firmer direction of the focus groups to keep discussion relevant.

4.4 Methods of Data Collection

In each selected district, assistance was provided by a civil society organisation (CSO), based in the district, that is a regular collaborator in Uwezo Uganda assessment and research. We deployed three researchers to each of the districts where both absenteeism and non-enrolment were to be studied, and two to each district where only absenteeism was to be studied. These researchers were assisted, in each district, by two others provided by the collaborating CSO. The researchers provided by CSOs were competent users of the main local languages as well as English, able to act as interpreters where necessary.

4.5 Research Instruments and Procedures

Relevant information on each school and community was obtained from the district authorities and from the head teachers. A systematic data sheet was completed for each school, recording the resources of the school and the level of absenteeism in each grade (see Annex I).

With the help of the partner CSO, the research team made contact with the local councillor (LC1) as well as the head teacher, on arrival in each community, to explain the purposes of the visit and how we planned to select informants. Through the head teacher, members of the School Management Committee (SMC) were alerted and asked to assist.

To obtain information from children and their parents, we used semi-structured interviews. Interviews with children who are frequently absent were held in the school as far as possible, but in a manner that did not attract the attention of other children (in after class hours where possible). A parent of each child was interviewed in the home setting subsequently (see Annexes II and III). These arrangements were, by standard practice, subject to the agreement of the parents and children concerned. We endeavoured to interview children without their parents being present.

In the cases of non-enrolled children, the team negotiated to interview, first a parent and then the child, in the home setting (see Annexes IV and V). (The sequence was necessary to show respect.) Researchers visited the households in pairs, but only one conducted each interview.

To complement the data obtained from children and parents, it was important to consult the head teacher, at least one other teacher and at least one member of the SMC. For this purpose, a focus group meeting, including all these types of informant, was normally organised (see Annex VI). As far as possible these focus group discussions were held after the interviews with children and parents, so that researchers could follow up on emerging issues.

The last set of interactions was those with the District Education Officers and District Inspectors of Education (in combination, where possible) and with one national representative of inspectors (see Annex VII).[1] In most cases the district officers were able to form focus groups. The national representative was interviewed virtually by two researchers.

For the interviews with children and parents, translations of the interview questions and the consent forms into the dominant local language were made available and as far as possible interviewers were speakers of the local language. The school focus group discussions, however, and the interviews with inspectors, were conducted in English. The languages for which translations were prepared were, by district: Lumasaba for Bududa, Lugungu for Buliisa, Leb Lango for Kole and Luganda for Mukono.

Uwezo Uganda interviewing a Participant

The quantitative analysis of school attendance rates made use of an existing data set (from 2018), with SPSS software. It was the most recent data set available for the purpose, as the 2021 school survey had been conducted at a time when school attendance was restricted because of Covid-19.

4.6 Approach to the Analysis of Data

The primary task of the analysis is to identify the influences on behaviour, with regard to absenteeism and non-enrolment, that have the strongest evidence from a number of informants and

[1] The informant was the Chairperson of the National Association of Inspectors.

from various sources. In the qualitative case studies the element of triangulation is of key importance (Macmillan and Schumacher 1997, 520-521). Consideration is given to the range of evidence for each type of influence and its plausibility.

Beyond identifying major influences, we consider how far the same influences apply both to absenteeism and to non-enrolment, to rural and urban communities and to the behaviour of children and adults. Throughout the analysis we are attentive to the ways in which informants define and describe the problem: emic concepts that may be different from our own initial definitions and assumptions.

In the analysis of school survey data, the focus is on factors which, potentially, have negative effects on the school attendance rate, being possible causes of absenteeism. The selection of these factors for measurement is guided by the case-study work but constrained by the availability of survey data. However, as the school was the unit of analysis in the survey, it could not provide evidence about non-enrolled children or other direct evidence at the level of the individual child.

By illuminating the situations of individuals and schools, the analysis enabled us to identify some issues of policy and management and possibilities for remedial action. A summary of these is provided in the concluding section of the report.

5. Findings

5.1. Sequence and Structure of the Findings

To introduce the qualitative case studies, we first provide a sketch of each of the four selected districts, mentioning aspects of the local environment that are relevant to pupil absenteeism and non-enrolment. After this, we discuss four other major groups of factors, relating to the home and school in combination, the home, the school and the individual child. The discussion of the four groups of factors refers to evidence from all four districts. The last section of the findings provides additional evidence about absenteeism from a national school survey, as explained in Section 4.

In considering the qualitative evidence, we attach particular importance to the examples of children whose situations were described in the interviews with them and their parents. The perspectives provided by school, community and district representatives contributed to the interpretation of these cases and helped us to judge whether they were typical.

To preserve the anonymity of informants, we identify schools and local communities only by the district and, where necessary, a letter A or B. In Kole and Buliisa Districts, School A or Community A are the ones illustrating absenteeism, while School B and Community B are the ones illustrating complete non-enrolment. Individual children and parents are identified by the child's grade (class in Ugandan phrasing) or age and other adults are identified by their offices or roles.

5.2. The Local Environments

5.2.1. Kole District

Kole District forms part of the Lango sub-region of the Northern Region of Uganda and is in many ways typical of Lango. Most people's livelihoods depend on agricultural production and there are two planting seasons, from March to June and from August to November. The food crops include millet, sorghum, maize, potatoes and cassava, while soybeans and sunflower are grown as commercial crops. Towns such as Bala, Aboke and Anekapiri have important markets for agricultural produce.

Traditionally children have roles in planting, harvesting and the sale of produce, which easily conflict with obligations of school attendance. Absences tend to peak on market days and during the planting seasons. Other absences are caused by an important tradition of the area: the collection and consumption of termites when they are abundant, with special festivities. Many children are drawn into these activities.

The area has a mixture of religious faiths and denominations. At the two schools visited (both government-aided), the Anglican and Catholic Churches were cooperating in providing religious and moral instruction. Conservative attitudes to the status of women are common, however, including the perception that daughters are marketable assets to be married off profitably, as district officials informed us. In this part of Uganda there is still a high prevalence of child marriage of girls (African Union 2023). It was probably no coincidence that girls were outnumbered by boys in both the schools visited, being 45-46% of the enrolment. Polygamy still exists in some households and is thought to result in some parental discrimination between children in support for their education.

The district officials interviewed perceived that several limitations of the schools were contributing to absenteeism and non-enrolment in some cases. These included shortages of teachers, inability to organise feeding programmes, neglect of non-examinable subjects that children enjoyed (such as sports and music) and the use of caning and digging as punishments. The impression given was that only some head teachers respected the official ban on caning. Further evidence will be presented about these limitations.

Child protection committees, established at parish level in 2018, were thought not to be functioning effectively in the district to reduce the absenteeism of pupils and teachers. Partly for this reason, our research was welcomed by educational leaders in the district.

5.2.2. Buliisa District

On the shore of Lake Albert and partially included in nature reserves, Buliisa District has unusual challenges and opportunities because of its geographical position and the current development of oil extraction and processing. There are traditions of fishing and hunting for subsistence: but the development of the Tilenga Central Processing Facility and related infrastructure is creating a more commercialised economy. If the oil development is successful, opportunities for modern-sector employment will increase in the long run. The main effect at present, however, is to provide opportunities for low-skilled work and short-term work in construction, market trading and hospitality venues. The evidence from our informants is that this economic development, rather than providing an incentive for children to succeed in their education, lures many away from school to earn money through low-skilled work. It was also mentioned that parents who are employed for long hours in the new developments are less able to monitor their children's school attendance (a problem that is also common in more urbanised districts).

Two significant external interventions were mentioned. Total, the oil company, as a gesture to the district, had provided improved physical facilities and some scholarships for secondary (but not primary) schools. The NGO, World Vision, was providing some support for teaching and learning in primary schools. The withdrawal of UNICEF projects from the district was regretted.

Another challenge for Buliisa District is its linguistic diversity, coupled with the relatively late engagement of the Alur ethnic group in education. As an Alur SMC representative commented:

> Originally the Alur community never went to school. Even now we are being forced by modernity to go to school. That's why we have remained a small community always overlooked by other people.

As it happened, both of the schools visited had mainly Alur pupils and some teachers from elsewhere who had difficulty in speaking Alur: a factor that may have affected children's motivation.

Even more serious was the general shortage of teachers and of substantive heads, deputy heads and inspectors in the district. The schools visited had pupil-teacher ratios of 100.8 and 57.3 – and the first of these depended partly on supplementary staff employed by the PTA. The District Education Officer mentioned that only 13 out of 31 head teachers were on substantive appointments and that his own department only had four of the necessary seven inspectors. In these circumstances monitoring was weak at every level. As in Kole District, education officials wanted the local administrators to restrict the presence of children in markets and nightclubs, and they called for byelaws to be enacted. They expressed concern that girls of school age were involved in commercial sex in the urban area.

Here as in Kole District, educational officials were critical of local politicians, but for different reasons. In Kole, the issue was that some politicians were thought to discourage parents from paying any fees or levies. In Buliisa, however, they were thought to be protecting some teachers from disciplinary action for misconduct.

In relation to complete non-enrolment, Buliisa educators at the district and school levels tended to see dropping out of school as more common than late starting. But late starting was said to affect some girls who, even at the age of six, were retained in the home to look after younger siblings. From our selected cases, however, we cannot verify this. In the two schools visited girls' enrolment was lower than that of boys, at 47% in School A and 40% in School B.

The general impression is that, at the household level, Buliisa District faces both traditional obstacles to attendance and enrolment, similar to those in Kole, and some more modern ones related to oil extraction.

5.2.3 Bududa District

On the other side of the country, Bududa District is in a mountainous area on the border with Kenya. The physical challenges of the area include floods and landslides, which can impede access to schools in the rainy season. The district officials mentioned a pattern of small land-holdings that were hardly adequate for subsistence: a context for poverty as a constraint on school attendance.

Cultural barriers of two kinds were mentioned by the officials. One was the presence of small religious sects that had adopted negative views about modern education – although these were more active in the neighbouring Sironko District. Another was the popularity of bush schools for circumcision. However, local officials had made an effort to restrict bush school activities to times outside school hours.

The Bududa school visited was in a rural area and showed an extreme contrast between the official enrolment and the recorded attendance, throughout the grades, suggesting an average attendance rate of 31%. But the figures may have been unreliable: it was alleged that some schools inflated their enrolment statistics. For an official total enrolment of 567, there were only six teachers, giving a pupil-teacher ratio of 94.5, and only seven classrooms (two being temporary structures).

The school had sufficient land, with a play area and a sports field. But it offered neither a feeding programme nor drinking water, depending on a river for its water supply.

5.2.4. Mukono District

Adjacent to the Kampala metropolis, Mukono is one of Uganda's more privileged districts, with most of its primary education in private schools and above-average participation in secondary and tertiary education. But there are pockets of poverty at a distance from Mukono Town, the district headquarters.

The school selected to illustrate absenteeism is located in a small town which we shall call Old Port (not its real name), traditionally a fishing community and market centre. Old Port is on the shore of Lake Victoria, accessible by a road journey of about 25 kilometres south from Mukono Town. Since 2017 the community has suffered economic decline because of the stricter enforcement of fishing regulations, including patrolling of the Lake by the Uganda People's Defence Force. As the equipment and licensing of a 'legal' fishing vessel now requires an outlay of about UGX 12 million, the number of independent operators has been drastically reduced.

The other types of employment most readily available in this part of the district are, for men, sand-mining, quarrying and timber production and, for women, food-selling and petty trade. As the district education officials mentioned, such work is low-skilled and does not motivate young people to complete their primary education. Rather, as in Buliisa District, some reduce their school attendance to engage in casual work and others drop out. At the school visited, the enrolments by grade suggested a survival rate, from P1 to P7, of about 50%. But the head teacher estimated that, of those who completed P7, about 70% were admitted to secondary schools – an encouraging level of transition in the circumstances.

For a total enrolment of 437, this government-aided school had eight teachers: but the PTA employed five additional teachers on a part-time basis. The Old Port community is Luganda-speaking and female pupils were in a slight majority, at 54%.

5.3. Combined Home and School Factors

Households and schools share responsibility in three areas that are important both for absenteeism and for non-enrolment. Firstly, there are the fees and levies that are paid to support the school, supplementing government funding, but the size of these and the degree of compulsion is variable. Secondly, households are expected to provide 'scholastic materials', including uniforms and shoes, but the level of expectations varies. Thirdly, meals are sometimes provided, either through a school feeding programme to which parents contribute in cash or kind, or as packed food that parents provide daily: but in many cases children are going hungry.

With the current low level of public recurrent funding for non-salary items, public primary schools cannot easily operate without obtaining additional funding from parents. Head teachers therefore have to attempt a difficult balance in their relationship with parents: the 2008 Education Act encourages voluntary fund-raising by schools but expressly forbids the exclusion of any child from a government-funded school because of parents' failure to pay fees or levies (Government of Uganda 2008, 14-15). Excluding a child because of lack of uniform would also be a violation of the child's right to primary education. In practice, the protective legislation is frequently ignored and schools vary considerably in their handling of the issues. There is also an element of stigma that can frustrate the best efforts of teachers: even where the school is tolerant towards children who lack uniforms or writing materials, some children absent themselves through embarrassment.

From the various evidence, difficulty in paying school fees and levies was a highly important factor in absenteeism at the Old Port school in Mukono, applying to four out of six children interviewed there, and moderately important in the other schools visited. As a factor in non-enrolment, it was of high importance in the two schools that illustrated non-enrolment, applying to all but one of the out-of-school children interviewed (in Kole and Buliisa Districts). The size of the fee-and-contribution

package varied considerably, as illustrated by the Mukono school, where the total, including the cost of school meals, was UGX 50,000 per term and by Kole School A, where it was UGX 25,000 per term, with no feeding programme. The rather large package in Mukono included a levy to pay the five part-time teachers.

Non-provision of scholastic materials, as a factor in absenteeism, applied to four of the seven pupils interviewed at the Bududa school and was moderately important in the other schools that illustrate absenteeism. In the cases of non-enrolled children, the cost of uniforms and stationery combined with the other 'school requirements' to keep the children out of school. The fees mentioned included examination fees and 'PTA fees', which are often used to employ supplementary teachers. The extreme poverty of some households combined with the strict attitude of some teachers to reduce or prevent school attendance.

Of the schools visited, the Mukono school had the most successful feeding programme, although the food was limited to porridge and not all children were in the programme. Buliisa School A had a feeding programme, but it was only used by 35 children. Kole School A had recently tried to start a programme but it had not received enough parental support. It was mentioned in the focus group at Buliisa School B that the entry of some children to school was delayed, as those aged 6-7 could not easily go through the day without food. An educational official in Buliisa expressed concern about the inconsistent advice given by the Government, now calling for packed lunches whereas previously it had supported school feeding programmes.

5.4. Factors in the Home Environment

The interview data and relevant comments by focus group participants indicate seven aspects of home environments that contribute to absenteeism. In order of importance, these are (1) the absence of one or both biological parents and effects of polygamy, (2) dependence on children's work or earnings, (3) a low value attached to schooling, (4) family events and crises, (5) assignment of children to care for siblings and (6) negligence in the care of children. The first three of these aspects, together with the deaths of parents, are also, from our evidence, contributors to non-enrolment.

A few examples of the way these factors operate may be mentioned. At the Mukono school, two of the six 'absentee' children were in the care of grandmothers, who had insufficient support from parents to meet the school requirements. In the case of an absentee child at Kole School A, the mother complained about her polygamous husband, saying that she could not afford soap to wash the uniform. A boy interviewed at Kole School A explained that he was always sent to fetch water in the morning, but, as the well was at a distance and always had a long queue, he sometimes returned very late and ended up missing school that day. In two cases of absentees interviewed at Buliisa School A, the parent had to be away because of a family emergency – and in one case left the child to look after the home and harvest cassava.

At Kole School B, all four of the out-of-school children interviewed were affected by parental absences and in two cases the death or illness of a parent was a factor in the situation. In one typical case, the child reported, 'My Dad died and my mother left me with my grandmother, who is unable to enrol me in school because of the financial constraint' (English translation). One of the non-enrolled children in Buliisa Community B had been forced to assume the role of household head, looking after his sick grandfather.

Assignment of girls to care for siblings was another possible cause of non-enrolment. Educational officials mentioned extreme cases in which girls aged six were kept at home for this reason and other girls of school age were sent away to work as housemaids.

5.5. Factors in the School Environment

In addition to the areas where the school shares a responsibility with the home, there are aspects of the school experience that can encourage or discourage attendance and, in extreme cases, enrolment. One underlying factor, a low level of public recurrent funding for non-salary requirements has already been mentioned: in the 2023-24 financial year are receiving only UGX 16,455 per pupil on average, consisting of a capitation grant at UGX 14,500 and the fixed grant per school. Small additional grants are supposed to be paid for pupils with special needs: but Old Port Primary School, which had seven such pupils, was not receiving grants for them. A second underlying factor, equally important, is that too few teachers are on the public payroll.

Related challenges that can discourage attendance are, in order of importance, teacher absenteeism, overcrowded classrooms and poor provision for sanitation and hygiene. Children and parents were not very likely to mention these challenges in interviews: but there is evidence both from the school focus groups, district officials, the national representative and the direct observations of the researchers. The Buliisa District officials mentioned head teachers who lived outside the district and regularly arrived late at their schools. The national representative was critical of the selection of head teachers in general, and the quality of school management. At the Mukono school the researchers were able to observe the overcrowded classrooms, lack of a play area and dilapidated toilet structures, which were a source of infection and allowed little privacy. The entire physical plant of the Mukono school urgently needed replacement on a new site with more space. The Bududa school also had insufficient toilets; sanitation was slightly better in the other schools.

Uwezo Uganda meets with parents and teachers at schools

Aspects of the school culture could also encourage absenteeism, as the literature has suggested. Officials in Bududa and Kole Districts considered that schools were neglecting non-examinable subjects and co-curricular activities, which could encourage attendance because children enjoyed them. The focus group at the Mukono school reported that attendance was better at times when sports were taking place: but the school had to borrow a playing field at a distance. Instances of harsh treatment by teachers were also mentioned in each district, but bullying by pupils was only mentioned in one district. We did not come across any direct evidence of predatory behaviour by male teachers, although it was mentioned by one district official as a cause of dropout.[2]

The interviews with out-of-school children do not provide direct evidence that these limitations of schools contribute to non-enrolment. District officials in Kole District, however, considered that very large classes, insufficient furniture, corporal punishment and the neglect of co-curricular activities were likely to contribute to dropout. They were also concerned about lack of support for children with disabilities, such as ramps for wheelchair users.

[2] A specific instance of such behaviour was reported in the pilot study, however.

5.6. Individual Child Factors

The poor health of individual children was a factor of high importance in absenteeism: it applied to three 'absentees' interviewed in each of three districts and to two in the fourth district. There is a link with parental neglect, however, as malaria was frequently reported at the Buliisa and Mukono schools, which were in lakeside areas. It is likely that parents were not providing the children with mosquito nets.

Two of the absentees interviews in Bududa District showed a low interest in school. District officials in Mukono thought that children's indifference to school was sometimes encouraged by peers who had dropped out to enter low-skilled employment and by a lack of educated adults who provided positive role-models. Most of the out-of-school children who were interviewed, however, did not appear to be out of school by choice but because of circumstances beyond their control.

The children interviewed include only one case of disability: a child in Buliisa Community B with a damaged arm (possibly a polio victim). The injury had prevented him from starting school and then poverty, related to the death of his father, had kept him out of school. This case is significant in showing the failure of the school and community to support and assist the child. Because disabilities are so varied and require a range of interventions, however, the participation issues for disabled children require special study.

5.7. Survey Evidence about Pupil Absenteeism

To complement the above findings from the case studies of local communities and schools, we present some quantitative findings about school attendance rates and related factors, using data from the Uwezo school survey of 2018 (Uwezo 2019, 31-42). In the context, pupil absenteeism is to a large extent the inverse of the school attendance rate. The evidence is therefore useful in combination with the qualitative findings on absenteeism.

5.7.1. The school sample and the measurement of attendance rate

For this analysis we use a national sample of 786 primary schools, each representing an enumeration area (EA) and distributed across 28 districts. From a general sample of 834, the 786 schools have usable data both for official enrolment and for a headcount conducted during the survey, of pupils in P1-P7. Districts and EAs were selected with probabilities proportional to size and all the 15 sub-regions of Uganda are represented. The survey also measured a number of community and school characteristics that could be relevant to attendance.

The school's attendance rate is found from the headcount, as a percentage of its official enrolment. This was available for 809 schools but 23 extreme cases, with a score below 21 or above 120, were excluded. The few cases of 'surplus' headcounts (i.e., above 100%) may have reflected late admissions or transfers. Some official enrolment records may have been out of date: but, in general, the variable gives a good indication of schools' popularity from an attendance perspective. The variable has a distribution not far from the normal, with a mean of 72.05 and a standard deviation of 21.08.

5.7.2. The design effect and the finite population correction

For the use of inferential statistics, a design effect with two components has to be used. Variances are enlarged, firstly to allow for clustering in districts and, secondly, for the unequal sizes of the clusters in the sample. Because attendance rates vary considerably between districts, the first

component is quite large. However, the second component is relatively small, as the cluster sizes are all in the range, 24-30. Using the approach shown in Annex I, we calculate the two components as 7.86350 and 1.00499. The product of these gives a combined design effect of 7.90274, and the square root of this figure, 2.81, is applicable to standard errors in the main analysis. In the supplementary analysis, which has a smaller sample because of missing data, we compute a design effect of 7.46750, giving 2.73 as the square root.

The design effect is mitigated by the finite population correction (FPC), which can be applied because a substantial proportion of the districts (28 out of 135) is sampled. This correction allows us to reduce variances by a factor of 0.79259 (see Annex I). The square root of this figure, 0.89, is therefore applicable to standard errors. The product of the design effect and the FPC will therefore be applied to standard errors: 2.50 in the main analysis and 2.44 in the supplementary analysis.

5.7.3. Screening of possible influences on the attendance rate

Among the possible influences suggested by the literature, we are able to consider two groups of measurable factors: firstly, some socio-economic characteristics of the communities in which schools were located and, secondly, some aspects of school quality. Each group will be introduced in turn.

As a poverty indicator for the communities, we use the sub-regional poverty rate as measured in the *Uganda Poverty Status Report 2014*. The poverty rate was measured as the proportion of the population with a consumption per adult equivalent (CPAE) below the official 'poverty line' (Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, 2014, pp. 6-7).[3] No more recent or localised measure of this kind was available at the time of the research, but it is still a useful general indicator. As we would expect, this poverty rate has a moderate negative correlation with the school attendance rate ($r = -0.359$, $n = 786$). Household poverty reflects the poverty of the community to some degree. In addition, we reviewed variations in the attendance rate in relation to dominant types of male and female occupations in the local community, as recorded in the school survey. Table 4 shows the means of the attendance rate by occupational type. They provide some evidence that agricultural communities in general – as represented by farming, fishing and pastoralism, have lower attendance rates than non-agricultural communities: but this association is stronger for male than for female occupations. Therefore, we use a dummy variable for male agricultural occupations in the main analysis.

The survey measured many aspects of school resources, but those of primary interest relate to staffing, teacher presence in the classroom, drinking water, hygiene and additional services, especially feeding programmes. We screened the measures for possible associations with the attendance rate. As a result, we identified the official pupil-teacher ratio of the school, teacher absence from the classroom, and the non-treatment of water for drinking, as possible factors in pupil absenteeism – having negative effects on the attendance rate. These variables are used in the main analysis. Among them, the official pupil-teacher ratio has the most substantial correlation with the attendance rate ($r = -0.460$, $p < 0.01$, $n = 784$).

[3] The national poverty line was equivalent to USS$1 per day, but there were slight adjustments for the four regions and for urban and rural areas. The report provides poverty rates for the 10 sub-regions at the time (p. 12), some of which have now been sub-divided to give 15 sub-regions.

TABLE 4: SCHOOL ATTENDANCE RATES ACCORDING TO DOMINANT TYPES OF OCCUPATION IN THE COMMUNITY

Dependent variable: School attendance rate.

Dominant occupation in the EA	For male adults		For female adults	
	Mean	n	Mean	N
Farming	70.8	647	70.7	575
Fishing	72.8	23	76.8	13
Mining	91.5	4	70.1	5
Pastoralism	58.6	13	58.0	8
Salary earners	91.3	9	87.2	11
Trading	80.3	74	75.1	129
Other (mainly artisans)	76.4	8	67.4	5
Total	71.9	778	71.6	746

Teacher presence in the classroom was captured by direct observation on the day of the survey visit and measured as a percentage of the classrooms in the school. Here we use a dummy variable, distinguishing between schools that had no teacher in 40% or more of their classrooms and those with a smaller proportion of such classrooms. Schools in the former category were 18% of the sample. A limitation of the variable, however, is that a usable record was only obtained for 74% of the sample, so we use it only in a supplementary analysis.

Non-treatment of drinking water is as reported by school representatives. Rather less than half of the schools (43%) reported that they treated the water, by boiling, filtering or a chemical application. This was an important finding, as, in a sub-sample of schools, bacteria were found to be present in 38% of the samples drawn from boreholes, the most common type of source, and 48% of those from piped supply. In a few cases the water may have been safe for drinking without treatment but in general, treatment, as well as storage for drinking, was a desirable precaution. In some schools there was neither treatment nor storage.

An initially puzzling finding was that the existence of a school feeding programme (reported in 68% of the schools) did not show any significant association with the attendance rate ($r = -0.024$, $n = 783$). The main implication of this is that, as many pupils do not use a school feeding programme even where one is offered, feeding needs to be measured at the level of the individual child rather than the school. We also found that, among government-funded schools, feeding programmes are slightly more common in rural than in urban areas. Our case studies of absentee children, in the sections that follow, illustrate better the problems of insufficient provision of meals during the school day and their causes.

5.7.4 Regression findings for socio-economic and school factors

We seek to show the influence of key socio-economic and school factors on the school attendance rate through a regression analysis in two steps, as presented in Table 5. In the first step, the combination of the sub-regional poverty rate and dominance of agricultural male occupations explains 14% of the variance in the attendance rate ($R^2 = 0.140$), both having negative effects as

expected. In the second step the addition of two school factors – the official pupil-teacher ratio and the non-treatment of drinking water – increases the explanation of variance by a further 12% (R^2 = 0.267). After adjustment of the t values for the design effect and FPC, the regression coefficients for sub-regional poverty and for the pupil-teacher ratio in Step 2 are both clearly significant (p <0.001). The coefficients for agricultural male occupations and for non-treatment of water are not significant after the adjustment but are in the expected direction. The findings suggest that community poverty and school staffing levels are major factors in absenteeism and, therefore, in low attendance rates, while agricultural occupations and drinking water are minor ones.

TABLE 5: REGRESSION FINDINGS FOR SCHOOL ATTENDANCE RATE IN TWO STEPS

Whole equation

Step	R Squared	St. error of estimate	Df	F	Adjusted F	Sig.
1. Socio-economic factors	0.140	19.59957	$v^1 = 2$ $v^2 = 769$	62.640	25.056	<0.001
2. School factors	0.267	18.11936	$v^1 = 4$ $v^2 = 767$	69.840	27.936	<0.001

Coefficients

Variables	B	St. error	Beta	t	Adjusted t	Sig.
Step 1						
Constant	86.937					
Sub-regional poverty rate	-0.477	0.48	-0.340	-10.001	-4.000	<0.001
Agric. male occupations	-6.822	2.205	-0.105	-3.094	-1.238	Ns
Step 2						
Constant	97.604					
Sub-regional poverty rate	-0.287	0.048	-0.204	-5.948	2.379	<0.01
Agric. male occupations	-2.862	2.078	-0.044	-1.377	0.551	Ns
Official pupil-teacher ratio	-0.337	0.031	-0.363	-10.828	-4.331	<0.001
Drinking water not treated	-3.264	1.443	-0.076	-2.262	0.905	Ns

The teacher absence variable has not been included in the above analysis because its use considerably reduces the size of the sample. But Table 6 shows an additional analysis with the variable included and another design effect used for the smaller sample. The findings, although less robust than those of Table 5, show that teacher absence from the classroom has an effect distinct from that of insufficient supply of teachers, although it does not add much to the explanation of variance. The effect is not significant after adjustment of the t value but it is in the expected direction. This also applies to the non-treatment of drinking water. As the B coefficients for these dummy variables shows, teacher absence at 40% or more predicts a reduction of 4% in the school attendance rate, while non-treatment of the drinking water predicts a reduction of 2.7%

5.7.5 Implications of the survey evidence

The findings in Table 5 (based on the larger sample) show that the poverty level of the sub-region and the official pupil-teacher ratio of the school jointly explain about one-quarter of the variance in the attendance rate. A more localised measurement of the poverty rate could well increase the variance explained by poverty, but the general implication is that school quality - and especially the allocation of teachers by districts and by the central government – has an effect on attendance comparable to that of socio-economic factors.

Causal inferences require some confidence that there is no reverse causation, but the latter does not seem likely with reference to the school factors measured. Allocations of teachers are supposed to be based on official enrolments rather than attendance levels. Provision of treated drinking water depends on thorough school management. Teacher absence from the classroom is conspicuous whether or not a few pupils are absent and reflects on school management as well as teacher attitudes. The interviews with educational officials have shown that there is insufficient monitoring of teacher attendance in some districts and that some teachers live at a distance from their schools.

TABLE 6: ADDITIONAL REGRESSION FINDINGS WITH TEACHER ABSENCE

Whole equation

Specification	R Squared	St. error of estimate	Df	F	Adjusted F	Sig.
Five independent variables, n = 580	0.297	18.08478	$v^1 = 5$ $v^2 = 579$	48.595	19.916	<0.001

Coefficients

Variables	B	St. error	Beta	t	Adjusted t	Sig.
Constant	97.268					
Sub-regional poverty rate	-0.352	0.058	-0.240	-6.118	-2.507	<0.01
Agric. male occupations	-0.687	2.416	-0.010	-0.284	-0.116	Ns
Official pupil-teacher ratio	-0.349	0.037	-0.362	-9.470	-3.881	<0.001
Drinking water not treated	-2.718	1.668	-0.063	-1.629	-0.668	Ns
Teacher absence 40% or more	-4.072	1.976	-0.074	-2.061	-0.845	Ns

The conclusions about absenteeism will be based on the combination of the survey and case-study evidence. For evidence about non-enrolment, however, we depend on the case studies of local communities and schools, as it was beyond the scope of the school survey.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

6.1. Responses to the Research Questions

The research had goals of identifying all the main factors that account for pupil absenteeism at the primary level and of assessing the relative importance of different sets of factors relating to communities, homes, schools and individual children (Research Questions A and B). It has illustrated a wide range of factors, which tend to act in combination. For most of the children who were

interviewed about absenteeism, more than one reason was given: for example, poor health and difficulty in paying fees. In some cases the child and the parent emphasised different reasons: for example a P6 boy mentioned injury to his hand, whereas his mother said she could not afford the scholastic materials. The direct evidence related to specific families and individuals. But, from the school and district focus groups, direct observation and the survey data, we have learned of contextual factors that were not so likely to be mentioned by children or parents, such as cultural traditions and constraints on school resources.

The question about the relative importance of different sets of factors in absenteeism cannot be answered with great precision from the data available. The case study data, however, give the impression that the factors for which homes and schools had a shared responsibility – financial contributions to the school, the child's uniform and scholastic materials, and arrangements for food during the school day – were very crucial ones. It is clear that teachers had sent children away in some cases because of lack of fees or materials, contrary to the provisions of the Education Act. In other cases fear or stigma may have kept children away when 'requirements' had not been met or they had no uniform.

After the areas of shared responsibility, the home factor that stands out is the absence of one or both biological parents, as this was often associated with inadequate financial support and, in some cases, a low priority given to the child's school attendance. The fact that schools had too few teachers made it uncertain whether they would be informed about the child's situation and make concessions to encourage attendance.

This study has been limited to government-funded primary schools, but it is possible that their organisational culture is being influenced by the private sector, where head teachers have the right to exclude children whose fees and requirements have not been provided. The attitudes of SMC members, whose service is voluntary in government-funded schools, may be influenced by the fact that some private schools pay allowances for the service. Educational officials in Buliisa District felt that SMCs in the government-funded schools were not effective enough, although the research team experienced good cooperation from SMCs in all the districts visited.

The survey findings provide evidence that both the economic environment (especially the poverty rate) and the school's resources influence the school's level of attendance. In the analysis done, these factors have roughly equal weight, though it is possible that the poverty rate would produce a stronger effect if we were able to measure it more locally. The effect of the pupil-teacher ratio on the attendance rate is an important finding and strengthens the case for giving a high priority to enlargement of the teaching force. This survey evidence is consistent with the view of the national representative that insufficient pupil-teacher interaction, in large classes, contributes to absenteeism: a factor that was not obvious from interviews with children.

The examples of children who had never been enrolled (relevant to Research Question C) tended to reflect extreme poverty combined with health problems, either of the child or of the person caring for the child. In some cases the death of a parent was also involved. The cases of dropout selected (relevant to Research Question D) were influenced by similar problems. Inability to pay school fees was mentioned in one case. Entry to low-skilled employment applied to one case in the pilot study and is likely to be a frequent factor.

The last research question is about the agency of children and their parents in decisions about attendance and enrolment. It might be expected that, as children grow older, their influence on such decisions increases. The evidence from the interviews of children and parents, however, suggests that the decisions were nearly always taken by a parent, grandparent or guardian and that children had little influence. A partial exception is the boy who had to bring water from a distant source every

morning and decided to miss school on some occasions. The younger children who were not yet enrolled seemed to be willing enough to attend school when they were given the opportunity. We did not encounter any 'culture of opposition' to school among the older children or the kind of psychological 'school phobia' reported in some Western contexts (e.g., Hinliff 2023).

6.2. Policy Issues and Recommendations

6.2.1. How to clarify and limit 'school requirements'

The delivery of primary education is not as inclusive as the Education Act of 2008 indicates, partly because of inconsistencies and lack of clarity about the minimum provisions that parents must make for their children's attendance at a government-funded primary school and about the consequences of non-provision. On the one hand, school managers have tried to institutionalise examination fees as well as development levies and other sundry charges. Schools or teachers have sometimes charged fees for remedial teaching as well. On the other hand, many parents have been slow or unwilling to accept the need to contribute to school meal programmes and do not even provide the child with a snack when there is no school meal. Some too fail to provide their children with basic writing materials.

Part of the motivation for the schools' collection of examination and extra tuition fees is the competition for Division 1 results in the Primary Leaving Examination. The problem is compounded by the buying of question papers, for school examinations, from private entrepreneurs, which increases costs and deskills teachers who should be setting the questions. These practices appear to prioritise the interests of a few high-achieving pupils above those of the majority, and private interests over those of regular teachers.

The situation calls for a redesign of the Government's compact with primary schools, either by new legislation or by administrative measures. The principle that tuition is free should be fully respected by school managers and there should be a goal of raising completion rates. But, for a new compact to be successful, a higher level of recurrent expenditure on primary education is necessary. This applies both to the salary and to the non-salary components.

6.2.2. How to achieve adequate feeding of children at school

Public funding of school meals, although practised in many other countries, would be difficult to justify in Uganda in the current situation, given that improvements in staffing and learning materials are desperately needed. Any selective funding of meals, by the Government or donors, should prioritise the pre-primary (ECD) age group, where improved nutrition is even more vital to children's development.

For primary schools, we support an intensified effort to run school meal programmes, with contributions in cash or kind by parents. School meals tend to be more economical than snacks provided from home and in some rural areas snacks are less easy to provide. Renewed advocacy by MoES and support from local councillors could help SMCs to re-start and expand school meals.

Provision of safe drinking water should also be a priority. The Uwezo school survey of 2018 showed it to be lacking in about half of all primary schools. There is an obvious risk that lack of safe water will contribute to absenteeism through infection or dehydration.

6.2.3. How to regulate the engagement of children in work

On whether children's involvement in work is generally harmful or beneficial for their education, it was mentioned in the literature review that the evidence from other countries is inconsistent. The evidence from this research is also inconsistent on the issue, showing that in some cases children's work helps the family to meet school requirements but in other cases it leads to absenteeism or dropout. Some educational officials felt that the ILO stand against employment of children under 16 was unrealistic: but it is reflected in Uganda's Children's Act (Government of Uganda 2016).

In economies that have a large informal sector, most work given to children is likely to be undocumented even if it is paid for, and therefore difficult to regulate. For guidance purposes, the legislation could perhaps be improved by allowing employment of children aged 14-15 for up to 10 hours per week, only in the day-time and when schools are not in session. Employment in work that is physically or morally dangerous is already prohibited by the Children's Act.

6.2.4. How to support children with disabilities, orphans and other vulnerable children

The evidence of this research shows that there are many children with special difficulties or with insufficient parental care who could attend school more easily with the help of a grant paid to the household. Currently, however, the only grants available to individuals, offered by the Ministry of Labour, Gender and Social Development (MoLGSD), are for assisting young people with disabilities to prepare for an occupation. Special capitation grants are supposed to be paid to primary and secondary schools for children with special needs (in practice, disabilities) but in many districts these grants are not effective.[4] There is no system of support for orphans or other vulnerable children, even though MoLGSD has a register for such children.

We call for a single system of grants, covering children with disabilities, orphans and other vulnerable children, to support their attendance at primary school. In such a system the 'vulnerable' category could include children who depend on a single parent with inadequate means.

6.2.5. How to maintain pupil discipline without encouraging absenteeism

Corporal punishment is officially banned but some school managers and teachers continue to use it, believing that it is necessary. Primary school managers, too, are supposed to appoint a teacher to take action against all kinds of violence against children in school (a VACIS Focal Person), but not all have done so. Through this research we have learned indirectly that children sometimes absent themselves to avoid corporal punishment – for example, if they would be beaten for arriving late. Some children are also reluctant to enrol in schools with a reputation for caning.

We recommend that, to support the ban on corporal punishment, school managers should be advised about alternative approaches to maintaining discipline, such as counselling, referring to parents and using positive incentives. The NGO, Nurture Africa, has provided relevant ideas. Where there is misbehaviour by a group, detentions and cleaning tasks could be used as punishments to some extent.

6.2.6. How to reduce the conflict between school hours and agricultural activities

As the survey findings show, pupil absenteeism is rather more prevalent in communities where the dominant occupations are farming, fishing or pastoralism. From an early age children are trained to help in those activities and their tasks easily conflict with the rigid school calendar and timetable.

[4] MoES financial records show just one grant being paid to a district in a number of cases, including Mukono District.

To some extent, adjustments both to the school calendar and to the timetable could be used as inducements for greater cooperation over school attendance. By international standards (see Sager 2023), the school year is long in Uganda, at more than 200 days. The daily hours of primary school are also relatively long, being 8 hours (including the lunch break) for P3-P7 pupils. A reduction of the academic hours could be considered. Some license could also be given to district authorities to modify the calendar, planning shorter school weeks at times when planting is taking place or there is a local festival. The adjustments could be used as incentives for improved attendance.

Another issue related to agriculture is the involvement of children as carriers or sellers of produce at weekly markets. Bye-laws can help in preventing such work by children during school hours.

7. References

Acham, H., Kikafunda, J.K., Malde, M.K., Oldewage-Theron, W.H. and Egal, A.A. (2012) 'Breakfast, midday meals and academic achievement in rural primary schools in Uganda: implications for education and school health policy', *Food and Nutrition Research, 56*, 11217.
Doi: 10.3402/fnr.v56i0.11217

African Union (2023) *Uganda country profile on child marriages*, available: https://www.aucecma.org/uganda-country-profile-on-child-marriages [accessed 21 Nov 2023].

Alderman, H., Gilligan, D.O. and Lehrer, K. (2012) 'The impact of food for education programs on school participation in northern Uganda', *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, *61*, 187-218.

Blau, P.M. (1996) *Exchange and power in social life, 2nd ed.*, New Brunswick NJ: Transaction Publishers.

Boone, P., Camara, A., Eble, A., Elbourne, D., Fernandes, S., Frost, C., Jayanty, C., Lenin, M. and Silva, A.F. (2015) 'Remedial after-school support classes offered in rural Gambia (The SCORE trial): study protocol for a cluster randomized controlled trial', *Trials, 16*, 574.

Bordonaro, L.I. (2012) 'Agency does not mean freedom: Cape Verdean street children and the politics of children's agency', *Children's Geographies, 10* (4), 413-426.
Doi: 10.1080/14733285.2012.726068

Chaudhury, N., Hammer, J., Kremer, M., Muralidharan, K. and Rogers, F.H. (2006) 'Missing in action: teacher and health worker absence in developing countries', *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, *20* (1), 91-116.

Daly, A., Mbenga, B. and Camara, A. (2016) 'Barriers to participation and retention: engaging and retaining "out of school" children in the Gambia', *Education 3-13*, 44 (2), 181-196.
Doi: 10.1080/030042729.2014.929723

Desalegn, T.A., Gebremedin, S., Alemayehu, F.R. and Stoecker, B.J. (2021) 'The effect of school feeding programme on class absenteeism and academic performance of schoolchildren in Southern Ethiopia: a prospective cohort study', *Public Health Nutrition*, 24 (10), 3066-3074.
Doi: 10.1017/S1368980021000501

Freeman, M.C. et al. (2012) 'Assessing the impact of a school-based water treatment, hygiene and sanitation programme on pupil absence in Nyanza Province, Kenya: a cluster-randomized trial', *Tropical Medicine and International Health*, 17 (3), 380-391.

Godfrey, E.B., Osher, D., Williams, L.D., Wolf, S., Berg, J.K., Torrente, C. and Aber, J.L. (2012) 'Cross-national measurement of school learning environments: Creating indicators for evaluating UNICEF's Child Friendly Schools Initiative', *Children and Youth Services Review, 34*, 546-557. Doi: 10.1016/j.childyouth.2011.10.015

Government of Uganda (2015) *Menstrual hygiene management charter*. Online, available: https://www.ircwash.org/sites/default/files/menstrual_hygiene_management_charter_finalised_april_2015_1_.pdf

Government of Uganda (2016) 'The Children (Amendment) Act', *Acts Supplement No. 8 to the Uganda Gazette, No. 38, Volume CIX*, dated 1st June.

Gurdal, S. and Sorbring, E. (2018) 'Children's agency in parent-child, teacher-pupil and peer relationship contexts', *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Health and Well-Being*, 13, Sup 1, 1565239. Doi: 10.1080/17482631.2019.1565239

Hinsliff, G. (2023) 'Children are holding up a mirror to us: why are England's kids refusing to go to school?', *The Guardian*, 2 Sep, available: https://www.theguardian.com/education/2023/sep/02/children-are-holding-a-mirror-up-to-us-why-are-britains-kids-refusing-to-go-to-school [accessed 02 Sep 2023].

Hungi, N., Ngware, M., Mahuro, G. and Muhia, N. (2017) 'Learning barriers among Grade 6 pupils attending rural schools in Uganda: implications to policy and practice', *Educational Research, Policy and Practice*, 16, 129-155. Doi: 10.1007/s10671-016-9199-2

Jerome, L., Emerson, L., Lundy, L. and Orr, K. (2015) *Teaching and learning about child rights: A study of implementation in 26 countries*, Belfast and New York: Queen's University Belfast and UNICEF.

Kabay, S. (2016) 'Grade repetition and primary school dropout in Uganda', *Harvard Educational Review*, 86 (40), 580-606.

Kameyama, Y. (2021) 'Who are the out-of-school children? Children with disabilities in Mongolia', *Compare*, 51 (5), 670-689. Doi: 10.1080/03057925.2019.1664894

King, E. Implications of the CFS policy within Cambodia – cultural and primary school context', *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 48 (4), 375-388.

Kremer, M., Muralidharan, K., Chaudhury, N. Hammer, J. and Rogers, F.H. (2005) 'Teacher absence in India: A snapshot', *Journal of the European Economic Association,* 3 (2-3), 658-667.

Liu, J., Kuhfield, M. and Lee, M. (2023) 'Noncognitive factors and student long-run success: comparing the predictive validity of observable academic behaviors and social-emotional skills', *Educational Policy*, available: doi: 10.1177/08959048231209262.

Macmillan, J.H. and Schumacher, S. (1997) *Research in education: A conceptual introduction, 4th ed.*, New York: Addison-Wesley.

Marshall, J.H., Nicolai, M. and da Silva, R. (2020) 'Out-of-school children in Guinea-Bissau: a mixed-methods analysis', *International Journal of Educational Development*, 77, 1-13. Doi: 10.1016/j.edev.2020.102223

Mbakaya, B.C., Lee, P.H. and Lee, R.L.T. (2017) 'Hand hygiene intervention strategies to reduce diarrhoea and respiratory infections among schoolchildren in developing countries: A systematic review', *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 14*, 371.

Miiro, G., Rutakumwa, R. … and Weiss, H.A. (2018) 'Menstrual health and school absenteeism among adolescent girls in Uganda (MENISCUS): a feasibility study', *BMC Women's Health*, 18 (4), 1-13. 10.1186/s12905-017-0502-z

Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development (MoEFPED). (2014). *Uganda poverty status report 2014*. Kampala: MoEFPED.

Murray, U. (2013) 'Child labour: A complex problem requiring "joined up" responses', in O'Riourdan, J., Horgan, D. and Martin, S. (eds.), *Early childhoods in the Global South: Local and international contexts*, Oxford: Peter Lang, 47-66.

Okyere, S. (2013) 'An assessment of the impact of hazardous work on children's educational attainment', in O'Riourdan, J., Horgan, D. and Martin, S. (eds.), *Early childhoods in the Global South: Local and international contexts*, Oxford: Peter Lang, 67-81.

Omoike, E. (2014) 'In the best interests of the child: the case of child domestic workers in Ghana and Nigeria', in Imoh, A. T. and Ansell, N. (eds.), *Children's lives in an era of children's rights: the progress of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in Africa*, London: Routledge, pp. 123-138.

Sager, J. (2023) *School hours around the world: who has the longest or shortest day?* , available: www.teacherstarter.com/gb/blog/school-schedule-hours-around-the-world.

Schwartz, A.C. (2012) *Remedial education programs to accelerate learning for all*, GPE Working Paper Series on Learning, No. 11.

Siirko, R., Kyronlampi, T. and Puroila, A. (2019) 'Children's agency: Opportunities and constraints', *International Journal of Early Childhood, 51*, 283-300.
Doi: 10.1007/s13158-019-00252-5

UNICEF (2006) *Child friendly schools manual*, New York: UNICEF.

Urwick, J. (2002) 'Determinants of the private costs of primary and early childhood education: findings from Plateau State, Nigeria', *International Journal of Educational Development, 22*, 131-144.
Doi: 10.1016/S0738-0593(00)00082-1

Urwick, J. (2022) 'Dimensions of inequality in children's literacy and numeracy in Uganda: Evidence from a household-based assessment' *International Journal of Educational Development, 88*, 102525.
Doi: 10.1016/j.ijedudev.2021.102525

Uwezo (2019) *Are our children learning? Uwezo Uganda eighth learning assessment report 2019*, Kampala: Twaweza East Africa.

Uwezo (2021) *Are our children learning? Illuminating the Covid-19 learning losses and gains in Uganda*, Kampala: Uwezo Uganda.

Wane, W. and Martin, G.H. (2013) *Education and health services in Uganda: Data for results and accountability*, Washington DC: World Bank.

Zendah, K. and Maphosa, C. (2018) 'Examining teachers' understanding of child-friendly school environments concept: Implications for child safety in Zimbabwean schools', *Gender and Behaviour, 16* (1), 11113 – 11138.

8. Annexes

ANNEX I: INFORMATION ON LOCAL COMMUNITIES AND PRIMARY SCHOOLS

INTRODUCTORY

Note: The selected school should be a government-aided one in all cases.

Name of local community (village or EA)			
Name of primary school serving the community			
Main types of occupation for adults in the community (farming/trading, etc.)			
Year the school was established (approx.)			
Does the school have any connection with a religious organisation? (Yes / No. If yes, give details.)			
Total enrolment in the school (latest figure available), by gender	Boys	Girls	Total
Total number of teachers, by gender	Male	Female	Total
Total number of classrooms			

RECORD OF ABSENCES IN PAST FOUR COMPLETE WEEKS (20 DAYS)

Grade	**P1**	**P2**	**P3**	**P4**	**P5**	**P6**	**P7**
Official enrolment							
Average attendance over 20 days*							
No. pupils absent for 3 days or more							

*Show the average to one place of decimals, e.g. 35.1, 47.0. If the child missed half of a school day or more, it counts as an absence.

Any comments on the record (missing data, etc.)

.....

PROVISION FOR PUPILS' HEALTH AND WELFARE

Service / facility	**Quantity / description**		
Does the school have a feeding programme? (Yes / No)			
How many children use the programme for (a) breakfast and (b) lunch?	Breakfast	Lunch	
Does the school have any teacher with training in special educational needs? (Yes / No)			
Does the school have a unit for special educational needs? (Yes / No)			
Does the school have a VACIS focal person? (Yes / No)			
Does the school have a teacher as Senior Man (for male issues)? (Yes / No)			
Does the school have a teacher as Senior Woman (for female issues)? (Yes / No)			
How many toilet stances does the school have for pupils?	Male	Female	Shared
How many urinals does the school have (if any)?			
Does the school have facilities for hand washing (soap and water)? Give details.			
Does the school have water available for drinking? From what source? Give details.			
Does the school have a first aid kit and basic medicines? (Yes / No)			
Does the school have a supply of sanitary pads? (Yes / No)			

ADDITIONAL FACILITIES

Does the school have the following? (State yes or no and comment as necessary.)

A playground area?	
A sports field?	
A library?	
A private room for girls?	

ANNEX II: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR PUPILS WHO ARE FREQUENTLY ABSENT

Interview details

Date of interview …….
Start Time ……..
Name of interviewer……
Name of child……

Background information on the child to be provided by the school before the interview

Characteristic	Response
Age	
Sex (M/F)	
Grade (P1-P7)	
Religion (if known)	
Whether an orphan (Single/Double/No)	
Whether a refugee (Yes/No)	
Whether an internally displaced person (Yes/No)	
Whether disabled (Yes/No)	
If yes, type of disability	

Introduction

We are researchers and we are here to find out why some students are missing days of school. We have asked you to talk to us because you have been recorded as absent for some days in the past few weeks. But we are not going to use your name when we report and anything you tell us is just for our report. We would like you to answer our questions as honestly as possible.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

General

1. How many days of school have you missed in the past four weeks?

2. What were the main reasons why you were absent on those days? [Ask for clarification as necessary. Be prepared to record more than one reason.]

About the journey to and from school

3. How much time do you need to go from home to school?

4. Are there any dangers on the way? (E.g. crossing rivers, crossing busy roads, going through high-crime areas.)

About the school

5. Do you feel safe at school? [If not, ask for reasons.]

6. When you go to the class, is the teacher always there? [Generally there will be one class teacher.]

7. How many students are there in your classroom?

8. (a) If you need to use a toilet when at school, is it easy to find a toilet? Are there enough toilets?

   (b) **For girls aged 13+ only:** When you are at school and having your monthly period, does the school provide you with things you need? (E.g. sanitary pads, a place to wash.)

9. Does the school have a meal service?

10. Do you eat a breakfast and/or a lunch provided at the school? [Record which school meals the child has, if any. If he/she does not eat any school meals, ask whether he/she carries any food from home.]

11. Do you find the studies at school difficult? [If so, ask for details.]

12. If you have difficulties in your studies, can you get help from the teacher? [Children will generally have just one class teacher, but if they get help from another teacher they can explain.]

13. What language(s) does your class teacher use in the classroom? [Be prepared to note a mixture of English and a local language.]

14. Do you understand the language(s) that are used? What language do you speak at home?

About costs and work

15. Do your parents provide you with everything you need at school? (E.g. uniform, shoes, pen or pencil, exercise books.) [Schools may vary in what they require students to have.]

16. Do you help your parents in the house? (E.g. by cleaning, fetching water or wood, looking after younger children.) For how many hours per week?

17. Do you help your parents with farm work or other work (e.g. selling in a shop)? For how many hours per week?

18. Do you work for other people for money? If so, in what type of work? For how many hours per week?

About other education

19. Did you go to a nursery school/ECD centre before you started primary school? If so, for how many years?

20. **For Muslims only:** Have you attended a Koranic school? If so, for how many years? Are you still attending it (give details)? [In some cases a child could attend Koranic school outside primary school hours.]

Conclusion

21. Is there anything else you would like to tell us?

Thank you for helping us.

Interview end time…….

ANNEX III: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR PARENTS/GUARDIANS OF PUPILS WHO ARE FREQUENTLY ABSENT

Note on the parent responding

As far as possible, we shall let the parents determine which one of them will answer our questions. If both are available and wish to be present, we shall accept it. The interview will be arranged in the home setting, but the child concerned will not be present. We shall avoid mentioning any differences between the child's responses (already obtained in the school setting) and the response of the parent.

Interview details

Date of interview ……..
Start Time ……..
Name of interviewer……
Name of child……
Name(s) of parent(s) ……
Sex of parent(s) ……
Position of parent/guardian (If not a biological parent, note the relationship):
……

Introduction

We are researchers and we are here to find out why some students are missing days of school. We have asked you to talk to us because your child, X, has been recorded as absent for some days in the past few weeks. But we are not going to use his/her name or your name when we report and anything you tell us is just for our report. We would like you to answer our questions as fully as possible.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

General

1. Can you tell us the main reasons why your child, X, has missed some days of school recently? [Be prepared to record more than one reason.]

About the journey to and from school

2. How long does X's journey from home to school take?

3. Does X have any difficulties on the journey to and from school?

About the school

4. Has X told you of any problems that he/she experiences at school? [Prompt if necessary.]

5. Do you have any difficulty in providing the things that he/she needs for school (e.g. uniform, shoes, learning materials, school bag, PTA levy)?

6. Do you contribute to a school feeding programme for X? is it for breakfast, lunch or both? What amounts of money or foodstuffs do you provide each term for X? Do you have any difficulty in contributing? Is the food provided satisfactory?

7. Do you pay any fee or levy to the school? (This includes any levy by the SMC or PTA.) How much do you pay per term for one child (X)?

About the home

8. What is the main language spoken by your family?

9. What are the main sources of income of your family? [Find out the main occupations of the working adults.]

10. How many adults are there in the household (aged 17+)? And how many children (aged 0-16)?

11. What were the occupations of the child's father and mother and their approximate incomes in 2021? (Include part-time trading, etc.)

12. What was the market value (approximate) of the crops that you harvested in 2019? (This should include what was simply for consumption by the household.)

13. Do the possessions in the household include a TV set? [Yes/No]

14. How many mobile phones are there in the household?

15. What levels of education did each of the child's parents complete? [Record one of the following for each: (1) no formal education, (2) started primary, (3) completed primary, (4) completed lower secondary, (5) completed upper secondary; (6) completed tertiary, non-degree tertiary training, (7) completed university first degree, (8) completed university higher degree.]

Conclusion

16. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Thank you for your time and your help.

Interview end time……

ANNEX IV: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR PARENTS/GUARDIANS OF CHILDREN WHO ARE NOT ENROLLED IN SCHOOL

Note on the parent responding
As far as possible, we shall let the parents determine which one of them will answer our questions. If both are available and wish to be present, we shall accept it. The interview will be arranged in the home setting, but the parent and child will be interviewed separately (the parent first).

Note on the child
The child can be of any age from 7 to 16. But some questions have different forms for children who have never enrolled and those who have dropped out.

Interview details

Date of interview ……..
Start Time ……..
Name of interviewer……
Name of child……..
Name(s) of parent(s) ……
Sex of parent(s) ……..
Position of parent/guardian (If not a biological parent, note the relationship):
……

Introduction

We are researchers and we are here to find out why some children are not enrolled in primary education. We have asked you to talk to us because we have learned that your child, X, is not enrolled. But we are not going to use his/her name or your name when we report and anything you tell us is just for our report. We would like you to answer our questions as fully as possible.

Background information on the child, to be provided by parent/guardian:

Characteristic	Response
Age	
Sex (M/F)	
Grade (P1-P7)	
Religion (if known)	
Whether an orphan (Single/Double/No)	
Whether a refugee (Yes/No)	
Whether an internally displaced person (Yes/No)	
Whether disabled (Yes/No)	
If yes, type of disability	

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

General
For children never enrolled:
1a. What are the reasons why X has never started primary school?

For children who have dropped out:

1b. What are the main reasons why X left primary school without completing it?
[Be prepared to record more than one reason. Record in as much detail as possible.]

For all

2. Do you expect that X will enrol in school / return to school in the future? (Give details.)

About school requirements

3. Would you have any difficulty in providing the things that X needs for school (e.g. uniform, shoes, learning materials, school bag)?

4. How would you provide for X's feeding while he/she is at school? [E.g. paying or contributing maize etc. to the school for feeding, or providing X with food to take to school, or not providing at all because of the cost.]

5. Would you be expected to pay any fee or levy to the school? If so, how much would you have to pay per term?

About the home

6. What is the main language spoken by your family?

7. What are the main sources of income of your family? [Find out the main occupations of the working adults.]

8. How many adults are there in the household (aged 17+)? And how many children (aged 0-16)?

9. What were the occupations of the child's father and mother and their approximate incomes in 2021? (Include part-time trading, etc.)

10. What was the market value (approximate) of the crops that you harvested in 2019? (This should include what was simply for consumption by the household.)

11. Do the possessions in the household include a TV set? [Yes/No]

12. How many mobile phones are there in the household?

13. What levels of education did each of the child's parents complete? [Record one of the following for each: (1) no formal education, (2) started primary, (3) completed primary, (4) completed lower secondary, (5) completed upper secondary; (6) completed tertiary, non-degree tertiary training, (7) completed university first degree, (8) completed university higher degree.]

Conclusion

14. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Thank you for your time and your help.

Interview end time……

ANNEX V: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR CHILDREN WHO ARE NOT ENROLLED IN SCHOOL

Notes:

- A parent or guardian has already been interviewed. We shall avoid mentioning any differences between the child's responses and those of the parent/guardian.
- The child can be of any age from 7 to 16. But some questions have different forms for children who have never enrolled and those who have dropped out.

Interview details

Date of interview ……..
Start Time ……..
Name of interviewer……
Name of child……

Introduction

We are researchers and we are here to find out why some students are missing days of school. We have asked you to talk to us because you have been recorded as absent for some days in the past few weeks. But we are not going to use your name when we report and anything you tell us is just for our report. We would like you to answer our questions as honestly as possible.

General

For children never enrolled:

1a. We see that you are not enrolled in primary school. Can you tell is why you have not started primary school?

For children who have dropped out:

1b. Can you tell is why you left primary school without completing it? What were the main reasons? [Be prepared to record more than one reason. Record in as much detail as possible.]

For all

2. Do you want to go to school / return to school in the future? (Give details.)

3. Would it be difficult for you to go to school / return to school? (If so, give reasons.)

About work

4. Do you help your parents in the house? (E.g. by cleaning, fetching water or wood, looking after younger children.) For how many hours per week?

5. Do you help your parents with farm work or other work (e.g. selling in a shop)? For how many hours per week?

6. Do you work for other people for money? If so, in what type of work? For how many hours per week?

About other education and training

7. Have you attended a nursery school / ECD centre? If so, for how many years and when did you finish?

8. **For Muslims only:** Have you attended a Koranic school? If so, for how many years? Are you attending it now? (Give details.)

9. Have you attended any vocational training or non-formal education? If so, are you attending it now? (Give details.)

Conclusion

10. Is there anything else you would like to tell us?

Thank you for helping us.

Interview end time…….

ANNEX VI: QUESTIONS FOR PRIMARY SCHOOL MANAGER-TEACHER FOCUS GROUP, OR FOR INTERVIEWS WITH STAFF AND SCM MEMBERS, ON CHILDREN'S ABSENTEEISM AND NON-ENROLMENT

Participants

The following are suitable participants for a focus group in each of the selected schools:

- The Head Teacher and/or Deputy Head Teacher
- One or two members of the SMC from the local community, preferably ones who have held the position for three years or more and if possible one male and one female.
- One or two other teachers, preferably ones who has worked in the school for three years or more and if possible one male and one female.

If it is not practicable to hold a focus group discussion, individual interviews should be held with, at a minimum: the Head Teacher; one SMC member from the local community; one other teacher.

Facilitators

For focus group discussions, two researchers should work together as facilitators. One, **the moderator,** should function as initiator of discussions, prompter and time-keeper, while the other, **the note-taker**, observes all the interactions, takes notes and (if agreed) makes a recording. The initiator should try to ensure that all participants have an opportunity to contribute and should seek to recognise a consensus where there is one.

Points of guidance for the moderator: It is important that participants should be able to contribute spontaneously, but the moderator may need to steer the discussion to keep it relevant. He or she should also seek comments on any important issues that have emerged from the interviews held with children and parents/guardians.

Points of guidance for the note-taker: The task of the note-taker is to describe what took place and this is more than just a record of what was said. A mixture of reported speech and quotations of important statements is acceptable in the final record. It will be helpful if the speakers are identified (by their roles) in the record. The use of a code for each participant is recommended, as a means of identifying speakers in the notes.

Language: For all focus group discussions, the facilitators must request the use of English and maintain this, whether or not they are speakers of the local languages. If any community representative has difficulty with English, a team member from the collaborating CSO can be asked to interpret where necessary.

Introduction

Ladies and Gentlemen,

For some years Uwezo Uganda has been assessing children's reading and numeracy and at the same time gathering information on children's educational status and attendance. We are now trying to understand better the problem of children's absenteeism and that of a few children who are of school age not being enrolled in school. Some of those children are dropouts; others are being sent to school late or not at all. Your school is one of those we have selected to carry out some research and we thank you for agreeing to assist us and welcoming us to your school.

We would like to know how you see these problems in the school and in the local community that the school serves. With the help of the Head Teacher, we are also talking to small samples of children and their parents. We hope to learn from these different informants and from records that are available.

As you will be aware, these two problems – absenteeism and non-enrolment – may be related to the conditions in a child's home, to the conditions in the school, and to some disadvantages of individual children. We would like to focus on these three types of factors, first for absenteeism and then for non-enrolment, and to hear what you have observed or experienced.

Themes for discussion

The researchers will then try to structure the discussion in a sequence as follows:

What connections have you seen between:

1. Absenteeism and conditions in the home.
2. Absenteeism and conditions in the school.
3. Absenteeism and individual children's disadvantages.
4. Non-enrolment and conditions in the home.
5. Non-enrolment and conditions in the school.
6. Non-enrolment and individual children's disadvantages.

In discussing non-enrolment, it will be useful to consider late starters and dropouts specifically.

ANNEX VII: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR DISTRICT EDUCATION OFFICERS, DISTRICT INSPECTORS OF SCHOOLS AND A NATIONAL OFFICER REPRESENTING SCHOOL INSPECTORS

Note: In each selected district**, t**he District Education Officer and the District Inspector of Education may be interviewed jointly if this can be arranged. Otherwise, they can be interviewed individually. At the national level, we hope to interview the Chairperson of the National Association of Inspectors.

Introduction

Uwezo Uganda is carrying out research on factors that account for absenteeism and non-enrolment in primary education. As part of this work, we are asking some experienced education officers like you for their knowledge and views about some of the issues. Thank you for agreeing to help us.

About pupil absenteeism

1. In our national assessments of children's reading and numeracy, we have taken 'snapshots' of attendance by questioning the children assessed. Our data from 2018 suggest a national level of absenteeism, in primary education, of about 24%. This is an improvement on our figure for 2016 but still a high level. Why is pupil absenteeism a general problem in Uganda?

2. For our research we have selected some districts that have higher levels of absenteeism than most: Bududa, Kole and Mukono. Why do you think absenteeism is higher in these particular districts?

3. Are you aware of any initiatives taken by the Ministry (MoES), or by district authorities, or by schools to mitigate the problem of absenteeism? If so, please give details. Have these initiatives met with any success?

About non-enrolment

4. Despite the policy that primary education should be universal and free, a small number of children of primary school age continue to be out of school. For our research we have selected some districts that have relatively large numbers out of school – Buliisa and Kole – and there are others in West Nile and Karamoja. What do you see as the general factors in non-enrolment? [Prompt if necessary for comments on late starters and on dropouts.]

About child friendly schools and children's rights

5. UNICEF has conducted a campaign for 'child friendly schools'. Do you think that Uganda's primary schools have become more 'child friendly' in the past ten years? Are unfriendly schools a factor in absenteeism and non-enrolment?

6. The International Labour Organisation has promoted the goal that children up to the age of 16 should be engaged in education and not in long hours of agricultural or other labour. How far is this a realistic goal for Uganda? Does the demand for children's labour affect their attendance or enrolment?

Uwezo Uganda's work is supported by:
Echidna Giving, Wellspring Philanthropic Fund (WPF) and a consortium of other funders including the Lego Foundation, Porticus, Co-Impact, Imaginable Futures and GPE/KIX who fund some of our work through other organisations and initiatives such as RELI Africa, ALiVE/Zizi Afrique Foundation & PAL Network.

To cite this report
Uwezo Uganda (2023) *Absenteeism and Non-Enrolment in Uganda's Primary Schools: An Investigation of Home-Based and School-Based Factors*. Kampala: Uwezo Uganda

Copyright
Uwezo Uganda 2023

Any part of this publication may be reproduced for non-profit purposes. Please cite the source and send a copy to the address below.

Contact
Uwezo Uganda, Corner House, Suite B1, Plot 436/437,
Mawanda Road, Kamwokya, Kampala
P.O Box 33275 Kampala, Uganda
+256 393 193 441
info@uwezouganda.org

Website
www.uwezouganda.org

X (Formerly Twitter]: @UwezoUganda
Facebook: UwezoUganda
LinkedIn: https://www.linkedin.com/company/uwezo-uganda/

uwezo
UGANDA