

Abstract

This study investigated the perspectives of principals and teachers on chronic learner absenteeism in selected public high schools in Johannesburg. The research study established the incidence of chronic learner absenteeism, identified the causes and examined the possible implications of chronic school absence. The study also found out how public high schools responded to chronic absenteeism. Moreover, the literature review provided an understanding of the research study.

The study used a qualitative design. The data was collected at two public high schools of two different socio-economic environments in Johannesburg, that is, High school A and High school B. High school A was situated in an upmarket suburb and High school B was in a township. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with school principals and questionnaires were administered on the teachers.

The findings were compared between the two schools of different socio-economic backgrounds. It emerged from the findings that chronic learner absenteeism was more pronounced in schools that catered for children from low-income households compared to schools that served learners from high-income households. The high incidence of chronic learner absenteeism at High school B was attributed to socio-economic challenges, difficult family circumstances, school-specific factors, personal issues and the time or season of the school year or day of the week. On the other hand, at High school A chronically absent learners missed school because of personal matters and the time or season of the school year or day of the week. Chronic absence had an adverse impact on learning and academic achievement. The study also found that public high schools in Johannesburg responded positively to chronic learner absenteeism in terms of providing learning support to absent learners when they returned to school. The schools also collaborated with parents and the wider community to tackle chronic learner absenteeism.

It is recommended that the Departments of Education, Social welfare and Health, policy makers, schools, parents and the community should work together as a nation to address chronic learner absenteeism to make regular school attendance a priority. It is envisioned that the issues explored in this study will contribute towards addressing chronic learner absenteeism in public high schools.