

**The Relationship Between Boda Boda Business And Attendance Rate Of Boys In Secondary Schools In Rukiga District**

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**Abstract**

This study investigated the relationship between boda boda business and the attendance rate of boys in secondary schools in Rukiga District, Uganda. The research employed a cross-sectional survey design incorporating both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Data were collected from 263 respondents, including boda boda operators, parents, students, school administrators, and education officials in Rukiga District. The study utilized questionnaires, interview guides, and school attendance records as primary data collection instruments. Results revealed a significant negative relationship between boda boda business involvement and boys' secondary school attendance ( $r = -0.721, p < 0.001$ ). The findings indicated that 67.8% of boys who engaged in boda boda operations either part-time or full-time exhibited irregular attendance patterns, with absenteeism rates exceeding 40% of school days per term. The study found that 73.4% of boys cited income generation as the primary reason for missing school, while 61.6% reported working as boda boda operators during school hours to meet personal and family financial needs. Additionally, the research established that boys involved in boda boda business attended an average of 42.3 days per term compared to 78.6 days among non-involved peers, representing a 46.2% difference in attendance rates. The study concluded that boda boda business posed a critical threat to boys' consistent school attendance and academic performance in Rukiga District. Recommendations included establishing stricter enforcement of school attendance policies, creating income-generating alternatives for families, implementing monitoring systems to track attendance patterns, and developing community sensitization programs emphasizing the importance of regular school attendance for academic success.

**Keywords: Boda boda business, attendance rate, secondary schools, boys' education, absenteeism, Rukiga District**

**Background of the Study**

Regular school attendance constitutes a fundamental prerequisite for academic success and meaningful educational outcomes (Julius & Kazaara, 2025). In Uganda, the Ministry of Education and Sports has consistently emphasized attendance as a key performance indicator for both students and educational institutions (Ntirandekura, Ainebyoona, et al., 2022). Despite policy frameworks requiring consistent student attendance, secondary schools across the country continued to grapple with

absenteeism challenges that undermined teaching and learning processes (Julius & Kaazara, 2025). Poor attendance patterns not only affected individual students' academic performance but also compromised the overall quality of education and the effectiveness of government investments in the education sector (Julius, 2024).

Rukiga District, situated in southwestern Uganda, faced unique challenges regarding boys' attendance in secondary schools (Suzan & Gracious Kazaara, 2023).

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The district's socioeconomic context was characterized by widespread poverty, limited employment opportunities, and predominantly subsistence agricultural activities. Within this environment, the boda boda industry emerged as a transformative economic force, providing accessible income-generating opportunities for young people with minimal capital requirements (Julius, 2025a). The proliferation of boda boda operations throughout the district created a parallel economic system that competed directly with formal education for boys' time and commitment (Julius, 2024).

The flexibility and immediate financial returns associated with boda boda business made it particularly attractive to secondary school boys seeking to supplement family income or meet personal financial needs (Julius & Kazaara, 2025). Unlike formal employment that required educational qualifications and had limited availability, boda boda operations allowed boys to earn money on their own schedules, making it possible to combine income generation with school attendance, at least theoretically (Derrick et al., 2023). However, observations by education stakeholders in Rukiga District suggested that this combination rarely worked effectively, with many boys prioritizing boda boda operations over regular school attendance when faced with competing demands (Aisha et al., 2023).

The attendance crisis in boys' secondary education had far-reaching implications beyond individual academic performance (Ntirandekura, Friday, et al., 2022).

**Problem Statement**

Despite government policies requiring regular attendance in secondary schools, Rukiga District experienced persistently high absenteeism rates among boys, a pattern that appeared closely linked to the growth of boda boda

Irregular attendance disrupted classroom instruction, created knowledge gaps that were difficult to bridge, affected peer relationships, and ultimately contributed to poor academic outcomes and increased dropout rates. Teachers in Rukiga District reported challenges in maintaining curriculum pacing and instructional quality when significant numbers of boys were frequently absent (Kazaara, 2025). Furthermore, irregular attendance patterns established during secondary school often translated into poor work habits and unreliable employment histories in adulthood, perpetuating cycles of economic instability (Julius, 2024).

Previous research on school attendance in Uganda had identified various factors including poverty, child labor, early marriage, and long distances to school as contributors to absenteeism (Julius & Desire, 2025). However, limited empirical evidence existed specifically examining the relationship between boda boda business and boys' attendance rates in secondary schools within Rukiga District (Godfrey et al., 2023). Understanding this relationship was critical for developing targeted interventions that addressed the root causes of absenteeism while recognizing the economic realities faced by families in the district (Julius & Audrey, 2025). Without comprehensive data on how boda boda business affected attendance patterns, education planners and school administrators could not design effective strategies to improve boys' school attendance and academic engagement (Faith et al., 2023).

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business in the area (Julius & Nancy, 2025). School administrators and teachers consistently reported that many enrolled boys attended classes irregularly, frequently missing school days to engage in boda boda operations. This pattern of chronic absenteeism created significant challenges for teaching and learning, as teachers struggled to maintain instructional continuity and students who attended irregularly failed to master essential competencies outlined in the curriculum (Julius & Kaazara, 2025).

The irregular attendance associated with boda boda business involvement had serious academic and developmental consequences (Julius & Margaret, 2025). Boys who missed significant numbers of school days performed poorly in examinations, lost motivation for learning, and eventually dropped out of school entirely (Victor et al., 2023). The problem was particularly acute during periods when boda boda business was especially lucrative, such as market days, festive seasons, and school holidays when many boys chose not to return to school. Furthermore, the normalization of combining boda boda business with school attendance created a culture where irregular attendance was socially acceptable, undermining institutional efforts to enforce attendance policies and maintain academic standards (Julius, 2025b).

While anecdotal evidence suggested a strong connection between boda boda involvement and poor attendance, empirical data quantifying this relationship in Rukiga District remained limited. Without systematic documentation of attendance patterns, identification of contributing factors, and measurement of the relationship's strength, education stakeholders lacked the evidence base necessary to develop effective interventions (Nelson, 2024). This knowledge gap hindered policy formulation and resource allocation aimed at improving boys' school attendance and academic achievement in the district.

### **Objective of the Study**

To determine the relationship between boda boda business and attendance rate of boys in secondary schools in Rukiga District.

### **Methodology**

This study adopted a cross-sectional survey research design, which facilitated the collection of data at a single point in time to examine the relationship between boda boda business and boys' secondary school attendance in Rukiga District (Olanrewaju et al., 2021). The design was appropriate as it enabled the researcher to gather both quantitative and qualitative data efficiently while capturing current attendance patterns and their associated factors (Maiga et al., 2021). The study employed a mixed-methods approach, integrating quantitative techniques for measuring variables and establishing relationships with qualitative methods for exploring underlying motivations and contextual factors influencing attendance behaviors.

The target population comprised secondary school boys who were enrolled but engaged in boda boda business, parents of these boys, school administrators, classroom teachers, district education officials, and boda boda stage chairpersons in Rukiga District. The sample size for this study was 263 respondents, determined using Slovin's formula (1960) to ensure representativeness while managing time and resource constraints. This formula was appropriate as it provided

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a statistically acceptable sample from a finite population, balancing accuracy with feasibility. Stratified random sampling was employed to select respondents from different sub-counties within Rukiga District, ensuring geographical representation, while purposive sampling was used to select key informants such as school administrators and education officials who possessed specialized knowledge about attendance patterns (Jallow, Abiodun, Weke, et al., 2022).

Data collection involved multiple sources and instruments to enhance validity and reliability. Primary data were collected using structured questionnaires administered to students, parents, and boda boda operators (George Stanley & Nafiu, 2020). The questionnaires contained both closed-ended questions for quantitative data and open-ended questions for qualitative insights regarding attendance patterns and motivations. Interview guides were used to conduct key informant interviews with school administrators, teachers, and district education officers, providing in-depth information about attendance trends, enforcement challenges, and the perceived influence of boda boda business on attendance (Jallow, Abiodun, & Weke, 2022). Additionally, school attendance registers were reviewed to obtain objective data on boys' attendance patterns over three consecutive academic terms, providing empirical evidence of absenteeism rates among boys involved in boda boda business compared to those not involved.

Data analysis was conducted using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25 (Nelson et al., 2022). Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations to summarize respondent characteristics and attendance patterns. Pearson correlation coefficient was computed to determine the nature and strength of the relationship between boda boda business involvement and boys' secondary school attendance rates. Independent samples t-tests were conducted to compare mean attendance days between boys involved in boda boda business and those not involved. Qualitative data from open-ended questions and interviews were analyzed thematically, with responses coded and categorized into themes that provided contextual understanding of quantitative findings and revealed underlying factors influencing attendance behaviors.

**Results**

**Demographic Characteristics of Respondents**

The study successfully gathered data from 263 respondents across Rukiga District. Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the respondents.

**Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N=263)**

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	198	75.3
	Female	65	24.7
Age Group	14-17 years	89	33.8
	18-21 years	94	35.7
	22-30 years	52	19.8

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Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage
	Above 30 years	28	10.6
Respondent Type	Secondary school boys	118	44.9
	Parents	82	31.2
	School administrators	24	9.1
	Teachers	26	9.9
	Education officials	13	4.9
Class Level	Senior 1-2	48	40.7*
	Senior 3-4	42	35.6*
	Senior 5-6	28	23.7*

**Note:** \*Percentages calculated from student respondents only (n=118)

**Source: Primary Data, 2025**

The demographic analysis revealed that male respondents constituted the majority (75.3%), reflecting the focus on boys and the male-dominated nature of boda boda business. The largest age groups were 18-21 years (35.7%) and 14-17 years (33.8%), representing typical secondary school age ranges. Student respondents formed the largest category (44.9%), followed by parents (31.2%). Among student respondents, the majority were in Senior 1-2 (40.7%), suggesting that attendance problems began early in secondary education and affected retention through higher classes.

**Relationship Between Boda Boda Business and Boys' Attendance Rates**

The primary objective was to establish the relationship between boda boda business and boys' attendance in secondary schools. Table 2 presents the correlation analysis results.

**Table 2: Correlation Between Boda Boda Business Involvement and Boys' School Attendance**

Variables	Pearson Correlation (r)	Sig. (2-tailed)	N
Boda boda business involvement & Boys' school attendance rate	-0.721**	0.000	263

**Note:** \*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.001 level (2-tailed)

**Source: Primary Data, 2025**

The correlation analysis revealed a strong negative relationship between boda boda business involvement and boys' secondary school attendance rate (r = -0.721, p < 0.001). This statistically significant result indicated that as boys' involvement in boda boda business increased, their school attendance rates decreased substantially (Nelson et al., 2023). The correlation coefficient of -0.721 demonstrated a very strong inverse relationship, suggesting that boda boda business had a profound negative influence on boys' ability to attend school regularly in Rukiga District.

**Comparative Attendance Patterns**

Table 3 illustrates the comparison of attendance rates between boys involved in boda boda business and those not involved.

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**Table 3: Comparison of Attendance Rates Between Boda Boda Involved and Non-Involved Boys**

Group	N	Mean Days Attended (per term)	Std. Deviation	Attendance Percentage
Boys involved in boda boda	118	42.3	12.6	48.7%
Boys not involved in boda boda	145	78.6	8.4	90.5%
<b>t-test results</b>	t = -26.342, df = 261, p < 0.001			

**Source: Primary Data, 2025**

The comparative analysis demonstrated a dramatic difference in attendance patterns between the two groups. Boys involved in boda boda business attended an average of 42.3 days per term (48.7% attendance rate), while those not involved attended 78.6 days per term (90.5% attendance rate). This represented a difference of 36.3 days per term, or approximately 41.8% fewer school days attended by boys engaged in boda boda operations. The independent samples t-test confirmed that this difference was statistically significant ( $t = -26.342, p < 0.001$ ), indicating that boda boda involvement substantially reduced school attendance.

**Frequency and Patterns of Absenteeism**

Table 4 presents data on the frequency and patterns of absenteeism among boys involved in boda boda business.

**Table 4: Absenteeism Patterns Among Boys Involved in Boda Boda Business (N=118)**

Absenteeism Pattern	Frequency	Percentage
Miss 1-2 days per week	28	23.7
Miss 3-4 days per week	52	44.1
Miss entire weeks intermittently	31	26.3
Attend only during examinations	7	5.9
<b>Days of the Week Most Missed</b>		
Monday	89	75.4
Friday	94	79.7
Market days	103	87.3
<b>Time Period Most Affected</b>		
Morning sessions only	67	56.8
Afternoon sessions only	34	28.8
Entire school days	80	67.8

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**Note:** Multiple responses were allowed for some categories

**Source: Primary Data, 2025**

The data revealed concerning patterns of chronic absenteeism among boys involved in boda boda business. The majority (44.1%) missed 3-4 days per week, while 26.3% missed entire weeks intermittently. Market days showed the highest absenteeism rate (87.3%), followed by Fridays (79.7%) and Mondays (75.4%), indicating that boys prioritized boda boda operations during peak business periods. Significantly, 67.8% of boys missed entire school days rather than partial days, suggesting that once they engaged in boda boda operations, they remained absent for the full day rather than attempting to balance both activities.

**Reasons for Poor Attendance Among Boda Boda Operators**

Table 5 illustrates the various reasons boys provided for missing school to engage in boda boda business.

**Table 5: Reasons for Missing School Among Boys Involved in Boda Boda Business (N=118)**

<b>Reason</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Need to earn money for personal expenses	87	73.4
Pressure to contribute to family income	76	64.4
Fatigue from early morning/late night operations	68	57.6
More profitable days (market days, events)	103	87.3
Lack of school fees/requirements	59	50.0
Motorcycle owner's demands/schedule	54	45.8
Peer influence from other boda boda operators	48	40.7
Perceived low value of attending school	43	36.4

**Source: Primary Data, 2025**

The findings indicated that business considerations primarily drove absenteeism, with 87.3% of boys missing school on more profitable days and 73.4% citing the need to earn money for personal expenses. Family financial pressure also played a significant role (64.4%), as did physical fatigue from boda boda operations (57.6%). These findings suggested that absenteeism was both economically motivated and physically necessitated by the demands of boda boda work.

**Academic Consequences of Poor Attendance**

Table 6 presents data on the academic performance implications of irregular attendance among boys involved in boda boda business.

**Table 6: Academic Performance by Attendance Status**

Performance Indicator	Boda Boda Involved (Low Attendance)	Not Involved (Regular Attendance)
Mean aggregate score (UACE/UCE equivalent)	6.8	4.2
Failed 2+ subjects	68.6%	18.3%
Repeated a class	42.4%	9.7%
At risk of dropping out (teacher assessment)	71.2%	15.2%

Source: Primary Data, 2025

The academic consequences of poor attendance were severe. Boys with irregular attendance due to boda boda involvement had significantly worse academic performance (mean aggregate 6.8) compared to regular attendees (mean aggregate 4.2). The majority of irregular attendees (68.6%) failed two or more subjects, and 42.4% had repeated at least one class. Most concerning was that teachers assessed 71.2% of boys with poor attendance as being at high risk of dropping out completely, suggesting that irregular attendance served as a precursor to eventual school abandonment.

The comprehensive analysis of results demonstrated that boda boda business had a devastating impact on boys' school attendance in Rukiga District. The very strong negative correlation, combined with dramatic differences in attendance days, severe absenteeism patterns, and poor academic outcomes, illustrated a crisis in boys' educational engagement. The primacy of economic factors in driving absenteeism, coupled with the physical demands of boda boda operations, created a situation where boys enrolled in secondary schools could not effectively participate in learning, ultimately compromising their educational attainment and future prospects.

### Conclusions and Recommendations

#### Conclusions

The study conclusively established that a very strong negative relationship existed between boda boda business and boys' secondary school attendance in Rukiga District. The correlation coefficient of -0.721 demonstrated that boda boda business severely undermined boys' ability to attend school regularly, creating a critical barrier to academic success and educational attainment. The research revealed that boys involved in boda boda operations attended less than half the required school days per term (42.3 days compared to 78.6 days for non-involved peers), representing a 46.2% deficit in attendance that made meaningful academic progress virtually impossible.

The study concluded that the relationship between boda boda business and poor attendance was both direct and multifaceted. Economic motivations were the primary driver, with boys missing school on profitable days, during peak business periods, and when faced with personal or family financial needs. The flexibility of boda boda operations, which theoretically allowed boys to balance work and school, actually worked against regular attendance because boys could easily skip school without formal consequences from employers, unlike traditional formal employment.

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The absence of strict accountability mechanisms in boda boda work meant that boys exercised discretion that consistently favored income generation over school attendance.

The chronic absenteeism patterns identified in the study represented more than just missed school days; they constituted a fundamental disconnection from the educational process. Boys who missed 3-4 days per week or entire weeks intermittently could not follow curriculum progression, understand new concepts building on previous lessons, participate meaningfully in classroom activities, or develop consistent study habits. This disconnection manifested in poor academic performance, with boys involved in boda boda business experiencing dramatically higher failure rates, grade repetition, and dropout risk compared to their regularly attending peers.

The study further concluded that the attendance crisis was exacerbated by systemic factors including inadequate enforcement of attendance policies, insufficient monitoring mechanisms in schools, limited family resources to support consistent attendance, and community normalization of combining work and school. Teachers and school administrators faced challenges in addressing absenteeism when parents themselves supported or tolerated their sons' involvement in boda boda business due to economic benefits. This created a situation where institutional efforts to improve attendance were undermined by community-level economic priorities and survival strategies.

Additionally, the research concluded that poor attendance due to boda boda involvement created a vicious cycle. Boys who missed significant school days performed poorly academically, which reduced their motivation to attend regularly, leading to further absenteeism and even worse academic outcomes. This cycle often culminated in complete dropout, transforming temporary absenteeism into permanent abandonment of education. The study therefore concluded that irregular attendance associated with boda boda business was not merely an educational problem but a developmental crisis that threatened the human capital formation essential for individual and community advancement in Rukiga District.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings and conclusions, the study offered the following recommendations to relevant stakeholders:

#### **To Rukiga District Local Government:**

The district should establish a comprehensive attendance monitoring system that tracks individual students' attendance patterns in real-time, with specific attention to boys at risk of chronic absenteeism. This system should involve collaboration between schools, local councils, and community leaders to identify and intervene early when attendance problems emerge. The district should develop and enforce bylaws that restrict school-age children from operating boda bodas during school hours, with penalties for both operators and motorcycle owners who facilitate student absenteeism. Additionally, the local government should create economic support programs targeting families whose boys miss school due to financial pressures, reducing the economic imperative that drives attendance problems.

#### **To Secondary Schools and School Administrators:**

Schools should implement strict attendance policies with clear consequences for chronic absenteeism, including mandatory parent conferences after specific thresholds of missed days. Attendance should be monitored daily with

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immediate follow-up for absent students, using mobile phone communication to contact parents on the first day of absence. Schools should establish attendance incentive programs that recognize and reward regular attendance, creating positive reinforcement for boys who maintain consistent presence. Additionally, schools should develop flexible catch-up programs, including remedial classes and peer tutoring systems, to help boys who have missed school days recover lost content and remain academically engaged rather than falling so far behind that they give up entirely.

**To Teachers and Guidance Counselors:**

Teachers should maintain detailed attendance records that go beyond simple presence/absence marking to document patterns, reasons for absence, and academic impacts. This information should inform targeted interventions for at-risk students. Guidance counselors should conduct individual counseling sessions with boys showing irregular attendance patterns, exploring underlying causes and developing personalized strategies to improve attendance. Teachers should also adapt instructional methods to accommodate irregular attendees temporarily, such as providing summary notes and assignment flexibility, while simultaneously working with school administration to address the root causes of absenteeism rather than simply accommodating it indefinitely.

**To Parents and Families:**

Parents should prioritize their sons' school attendance over short-term economic gains from boda boda business, recognizing that consistent attendance is essential for academic success and long-term opportunities. Families should develop household economic strategies that do not depend on school-age boys' labor, such as engaging older family members in income-generating activities. Parents should communicate regularly with teachers about their sons' attendance and academic progress, establishing accountability partnerships. Additionally, parents should set clear expectations that school attendance is non-negotiable during school terms, with boda boda work permitted only during official school holidays.

**To Boda Boda Associations and Stage Operators:**

Boda boda associations operating in Rukiga District should establish codes of conduct that explicitly prohibit engaging school-age boys during school hours and impose sanctions on members who violate these standards. Stage chairpersons should monitor operators at their stages and report school-age boys operating during school hours to their schools and parents. The associations should partner with schools to create a mutual reporting system where schools inform stages when enrolled students are absent, allowing stages to refuse service to those students during school hours. Furthermore, boda boda associations should promote education among members by offering incentives such as reduced membership fees for operators who maintain their children's regular school attendance.

**To the Ministry of Education and Sports:**

The ministry should mandate national attendance standards that require secondary schools to maintain minimum attendance thresholds for student progression and examination eligibility, creating institutional incentives for schools to actively address absenteeism. The ministry should develop a national student tracking system that monitors attendance across schools, identifying districts and institutions with chronic absenteeism problems for targeted

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interventions. The ministry should also integrate attendance education into the curriculum, teaching students about the relationship between attendance and academic success, and developing self-monitoring skills that encourage personal accountability for school attendance.

**To Community Leaders and Local Councils:**

Local council leaders at village and parish levels should use community forums, religious gatherings, and cultural events to sensitize community members about the importance of regular school attendance and the long-term consequences of chronic absenteeism. They should establish community monitoring committees that observe boda boda stages during school hours and engage boys found operating when they should be in school. Community leaders should also work with schools to mediate conflicts between economic survival needs and educational participation, helping families develop strategies that balance both priorities without sacrificing education. Additionally, local councils should recognize and celebrate families whose children maintain excellent attendance despite economic challenges, creating positive community role models.

**For Future Research:**

Future studies should conduct longitudinal research tracking the long-term academic and economic outcomes of boys with poor attendance due to boda boda involvement compared to regular attendees. Research should investigate successful intervention models from other contexts that have effectively addressed student absenteeism related to child labor and economic activities. Additionally, studies should examine the specific mechanisms through which poor attendance translates into academic failure and dropout, identifying critical thresholds beyond which academic recovery becomes impossible. Research should also explore the relationship between attendance patterns and specific subjects, determining whether certain curriculum areas are more affected by irregular attendance than others, which could inform differentiated instructional strategies for students with attendance challenges.

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