



**EFFECTS OF TEACHERS ABSENTEEISM ON THE STUDENTS PERFORMANCE
AT OYIBI PRESBYTERIAN SCHOOL IN THE KPONG
KANTAMANSO MUNICIPALITY IN THE GREATER ACCRA REGION OF GHANA.**

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Abstract

Teacher absenteeism has a wide and influential effect on a country's educational system. High levels of absenteeism negatively impact student achievement, tarnishes the school reputation, contributes to the decline of the profession and precipitates in turn student absenteeism. UWEZO (2011), reported that widespread teacher absenteeism is generally acknowledged as a major obstacle to the effective and sustainable improvements of the country's education system. The report further highlighted that high rates of teacher absenteeism makes it is difficult for children to learn consistently and build on their skills throughout the school year. The general objective of the study is to examine the effects of teacher absenteeism on academic performance of students in the Oyibi Presbyterian School in Kpong Kantamanso Municipal Assembly (KKMA) . The study was descriptive study in nature. It employed both qualitative and quantitative approach methods. The total population for the study in the Oyibi Presbyterian Junior High School is 204. This population comprises both the teachers and the students. There are 18 teachers and 186 students. The analyses involved the use of tables, graphs and charts. The findings from this study have revealed that teachers' absenteeism is caused by a number of factors including family and social responsibilities; poor work conditions; poor health and lack of accommodation. The study has also revealed the extent to which teachers' absenteeism affects syllabus coverage in schools and assessed teachers' absenteeism affects students' academic performance in schools. The main recommendation of the study was that teachers should be highly motivated by providing incentives to increase regular attendance, revising absenteeism-conducive policies, and promoting a positive work environment.

Keywords: Teachers, Absenteeism, Students, Performance and education system.

1. Introduction

Teachers have a responsibility to impart knowledge to pupils. Ethically teachers are to avail themselves to pupils during the instructional hours. That is between 8.00am to 2.30p.m. When teachers are not at post during the contact hours of the school it is considered as being absent. Absenteeism is a situation of habitual absence from school. Absenteeism and truancy leads to the poor academic performance of students. Lockneed et al (1991) postulated that teacher's absenteeism from class is due to lack of motivation and professional commitment. This leads to poor attendance and unprofessional attitudes towards pupils(student) which in turn affect the academic performance. The declining academic performance of the students in the Oyibi Presbyterian Schools have been of concern to this study. The study seeks to assess the effects of the teachers' absenteeism on the academic performance of the students in the Oyibi Presbyterian Schools in Kpong Kantamanso Municipal Assembly (KKMA). Therefore, this study will answer the following research questions:

1. Which factors account for teacher absenteeism in Oyibi Presbyterian School in the Kpong Kantamanso Municipal Assembly (KKMA)?
2. How does teacher absenteeism influence syllabus coverage within the teaching and learning framework?
3. How does teacher absenteeism affect students' performance in Oyibi Presbyterian School in Kpong Kantamanso Municipal Assembly (KKMA)?
4. What measures should be put in place to control teacher absenteeism in the Oyibi Presbyterian School in Kpong Kantamanso Municipal Assembly (KKMA)?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Definition and concept of absenteeism and factors contributing to teachers' absenteeism

Education is a bed-rock to any nation in its development either socially, politically or economically. Teachers are the implementers of the educational curriculum and also play a great role in the attainment of educational goals in any given country. Teachers play a crucial role in the development of the pupil or student to promote their skills (Myra Pollac, 1997). Teachers therefore have a moral duty to train the young generation for the first guiding road map. In this regard, teachers are responsible for high standards in education and high quality. When one talks about quality education with high standards, it is very hard to leave behind teachers since are the ones who transmit knowledge to the learners and help learners to gain knowledge and skills. Teachers are the role models to their students. This partly explains why teachers are the basic element in producing quality education of a nation.

Teacher absenteeism is a global challenge and it has a negative implication on students like depriving learners an opportunity to learn. The absenteeism among teachers is a global challenge mostly facing developing countries as compared to developed countries. Hubbell, (2008) observed that, in developing countries, the teacher absenteeism rate is

above 40% while in developed countries it is as low as 10%. Asamoah (2001) also postulates that teachers' absenteeism has been a major problem leading to pupil's poor performance in our basic schools in Ghana.

Absenteeism by teachers contributes to lower student performance. Statistical evidence shows that students whose teachers miss more days of class have lower scores on state achievement tests. Raegen Miller looked at the impact of teacher absences on fourth-grade test scores in a large, urban school district and found that ten teacher absences within a school year causes a significant loss in math achievement. Though there is evidence from one older research study involving 700 New York schools in 1991 which concluded that the absences of teachers were not "largely associated with student test performance," the researchers state in their conclusion that "one should not conclude from this ...that teacher absenteeism has no impact on student learning. Our analyses focus on pass rates on a set of standardized tests, they thus do not permit one to conclude anything about how teacher usage of leave days' affects students whose academic performance is well above the minimum passing level on exams or how it affects aspects of learning not measured by the exams" (Ehrenberg et al., p. 99).

The remaining studies that I located support the hypothesis that higher teacher absenteeism contributes to lower student performance. Statistical evidence from several other studies shows that students whose teachers miss more days of class have lower scores on state achievement tests. Reagan Miller and colleagues looked at the impact of teacher absences on fourth-grade test scores in a large, urban school district and found that ten teacher absences within a year causes a significant loss in math achievement, reducing student performance by 3.3 percent of a standard deviation (Miller et al.). They also found that student performance is lowered by one or two percent for each ten days that a teacher is absent. Clotfelter et al. found that students whose teacher had ten days of absences showed a decline of 1.7 percent of a standard deviation in math and a .9 percent decline in reading, less than what was found by Miller, Murnane, and Willett (2007). These findings have a significant importance to students in the elementary school years, especially in kindergarten through second grade when they are learning the skills needed to be successful readers. Woods and Montagno (1997) studied the impact of teacher absenteeism on student reading scores on the standardized Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS). They found that students with teachers who had fewer absences had "significantly larger improvements in grade equivalency." They conducted research on third-grade students and found that the teachers with the highest number of absences had students with lower standardized test scores, thus concluding that teacher absenteeism does have a significant negative impact on student achievement. Another study found that there is a negative correlation between student performance and high teacher absenteeism, stating that the more days a teacher was absent, the more the level of student performance decreased (Uehara, 1999). Research conducted in Indonesia to study the performance of students in developing countries found that "higher teacher absence significantly correlates with lower student scores in the mathematics test" (Suryadarma et al. 2006, p. 423).

In studies conducted at Duke University, Charles Clotfelter and colleagues found that schools having more low socioeconomic and minority students also had higher teacher absence rates, and that then leads to lower student test scores. Clotfelter found that the teachers in the poorest schools in North Carolina took an average of one extra sick day per year compared to teachers in wealthier schools. Clotfelter et al. also found that absences affect low-income students more and that teachers at schools with higher free and reduced lunch recipients, also typically low-income schools, had more absences (p.15).

In an investigative article done for the Chicago Tribune, Darnell Little and Tracy Dellangela found through a six-year analysis of teacher absenteeism that the highest absenteeism problems were found in a certain cluster of failing schools. That district began publishing teacher absence rates in directories given out to parents. The absences ranged from 2 to 35 days per teacher among the 500 elementary schools. Miller and colleagues found in their research big differences in teacher absence rates among schools in the same district. In an interview in the Associated Press in 2009, Raegen Miller was quoted as saying the "professional culture of a school and the relationship between teachers and administrators affect absenteeism" (Zuckerbrod, 2008). Other researchers found evidence that an individual teacher's usage of leave is affected by the behavior of their peers (Bradley, Green, and Leevess, 2007).

In another study, researchers concluded that "students in a classroom eventually lose the desire to learn when the regular teacher is frequently absent and the delivery of instruction is by an array of substitute teachers" (Bruno et al., 2007). Differences in teacher absenteeism rates across large urban geographical areas threaten the promotion of equity and excellence in the schools involved. In an article titled "Are teacher absences worth worrying about in the US?" researchers examined teacher attendance in North Carolina, looking at how often absences occur, the number of days taken off, and the effect on student performance. This study drew a commonsense conclusion, supported by statistical evidence, that students whose teachers miss more days for sickness score lower on state achievement tests. Clotfelter and colleagues found that students in elementary grades have lower test scores when they have a teacher who takes more days off (Clotfelter et al.).

In another study by Miller, Murnane, and Willett (2002), they found that out of 2,594 teachers from 75 schools, teachers took an average of 5.13 sick and personal days off per year, with a range of 2.5 to 8 days per year. The range of Cobb County teacher absences for sick and personal leave for the 2007/2008 school year was from 2.25 to 57.5 days, with an average of sick and personal leave taken being 10 days (training leave is not included). In another area of their research, data was gathered on 285 fourth-grade teachers and their student's scores on the annual state mathematics test. Researchers found a small but statistically significant negative impact of teacher absences on the student math scores (Miller et al.).

In a report to the Wisconsin Association of School Boards, Craig Hubbell states that attendance improves when teachers are required to report their absences to their direct supervisor (2008). A report for the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction in May 2007 concluded that having teachers report in person instead of only calling in to an automated telephone system reduces absenteeism (Scott, Vaughn, Wolfe, and Wyant, 2007). Pitkoff also found that absenteeism rates are higher in schools where the principal does not require teachers to make personal contact with a supervisor to report an absence (Pitkoff, 1993).

A study conducted by Raegen Miller in October 2008 for the Center for American Progress titled “Tales of Teacher Absence: New Research Yields Patterns that Speak to Policy Makers”, reports that on average, teachers in the United States are absent between nine and ten days per school year. This results in an individual student having a substitute teacher for the equivalent of two-thirds of a school year during his school career from kindergarten through high school. In the twelve-year period, the total number of days missed by the teacher would be 108 to 120 days, which is two-thirds of a typical 180-day school year. Cobb County School teachers were absent from the classroom an average of 14 days during the 2007/2008 school year when training leave is included in the total.

Overall, Miller concluded that teacher absences do have a negative effect on student performance.

As noted, the benefits of reducing teacher absenteeism include better student discipline and student performance as well as savings to the school district for money paid to substitute teachers. In the Cobb County School District, substitute teachers who are not required to have a college degree and are not allowed to work longer than 29 consecutive days, are paid \$81.00 per day. Substitute teachers are only required to have a high school diploma or its equivalent (GED). Supply teachers, who work for thirty consecutive days or longer and are required to have a college degree, are paid \$102.00 per day.

A common theme throughout the research reviewed is that new teachers take less time off. After they gain tenure and therefore have more job security, they take more days off. As they approach retirement age, they then begin to save their sick-leave time to apply towards retirement credit. Beginner teachers use an average of 4.8 days of sick leave per school year and teachers with five to ten years of experience take an average of eight or more days. Female teachers took more leave time than males, attributing much of that time taken off to maternity leave (Clotfelter et al., p. 10). This study also showed that elementary schools had higher absentee rates than middle or high schools, with high schools having the least. They also found that when classes were covered by certified substitutes the decline in achievement was lower than when they were not certified (Clotfelter et al., p.16).

Of particular interest to me was that school level requirements about reporting absences can affect the rates of teacher absences. Each school in Cobb County differs in whether or not the principal requires teachers and staff to make personal contact with them when they will be absent. Some principals do require personal contact and some do not; there

is no consistency. I have seen in my experience that schools where the principal requires teachers and staff to make personal contact with them when they will be absent have lower rates of absenteeism than those whose principals only require teachers to contact the automated SubFinder system to arrange for a substitute to cover their classroom. According to Miller, principals who work in schools with more low-income and minority students will tell you that teacher absenteeism is a problem. In a study by Pitkoff, he found that teachers with lower job performance ratings as measured by principal ratings had higher absenteeism rates. Existing research shows that teacher absenteeism can affect student achievement which can have long-lasting and damaging effects on student performance. It is not unreasonable to expect that our staff report to work on a regular basis.

2.2 What is absenteeism?

Absenteeism is defined as ‘any failure of an employee to report for or to remain at work as scheduled, regardless of reason’ (Casio, 2003, cited in Rosenblatt and Shirom, 2006). There are various forms of absenteeism practiced by employees such as, coming late to work and leaving very early contrary to the stipulated time, attending personal issues like businesses, sick family members, taking a long time to collect working tools, some workers forge illness.

Literature shows that a large number of teachers and other educational administrators have been engaging in various undesirable practices across the world (Betweli, 2013). Teachers’ absenteeism can be encompassed in three main categories: authorized leaves, absences due to official duties and those without reason. The category one consists of female teacher’s maternity leaves, annual leaves, and medical leaves, among others. The second category covers academic duties such as in-service teacher training; administrative duties such as submission of reports, marking national examinations or supporting national elections; and absences due to collecting salaries. The third category consists of multiple issues such as tardiness, truancy, moonlighting, teacher strikes, ‘abscondment’, and ‘ghost teachers’.

2.3 Factors that contributes to teachers’ absenteeism

The problem of school attendance has afflicted educational systems in most parts of the world and Ghana is no exception. Podgursky (2003) conducted a study and found that in U.S. teacher’s absence rates are nearly three times those of managerial and professional employees. Numerous factors account for teacher absenteeism, the work environment, school characteristics such as educational level, size, and income level, teacher health, job-related stress, teacher experience, unclean school buildings, overcrowded classrooms, lack of respect for teachers, colleague attitude, teacher low morale and poor condition of service.

According to Lockheed et al (1991) lack of motivation and professional commitment of teachers produce poor attendance and unprofessional attitudes towards students which in turn affect the performance of students academically. Constructive professional culture

in a school builds a healthy relationship between administration and teachers. However, the absence of these cultures contributes to absenteeism among teachers (World Bank report, 2015).

Learning environment contributes much towards the teaching and learning process. Teachers need a relaxed and satisfied environment in order to work effectively. It is possible when a teacher enjoys a facilitated environment they put up there best in delivery. Rohrman (1993) stipulates that teachers must arrive at school on time, give students frequent praises, interact with the entire class, minimize verbal reprimands and other forms of punishment and de-emphasize competition in the classroom. Rohrman (1993) further pointed out that if the learning environment is not conducive for academic work, both teachers and learners are discouraged from going to school. Chaudhury, Nazmul, et al (2006) explores the relation between influences of teacher absenteeism on student education and found that better facilities and better infrastructure provides competitive teacher roles with low absentees.

Ballou (1996) also postulates that teachers' daily exposure to large numbers of children, some of whom are carriers for infectious diseases, are some of the contributing factors for high absenteeism among teachers. According to Ehrenberg, Rees, & Ehrenberg, (1991) teacher absences are discretionary as the result of some school heads and district policies. For example, teachers' rates of absence are positively associated with the generosity of available leave provisions and the number of contractually allowed days of paid sick- or personal-leave. Ehrenberg, Rees, & Ehrenberg, (1991) highlighted that teachers respond to changes in absence control policies. Teachers who are required to report absences directly to their principal by telephone are absent less often than teachers who report their absences indirectly, to either a centralized reporting center or a school-based message machine (Farrell & Stamm, 1988; Winkler, 1980).

2.4 Effects of teachers' absenteeism on pupils' academic performance

There are so many factors that impact students' learning and performances. The students' class attendance has an impact on teaching and learning, parental support has an effect on the teaching and learning process, and teacher's punctuality to class also contributes towards student's performances. Miller et al. (2008) conducted a study and found that when a teacher is absent ten days from class, students' performance in math is significantly reduced. Though mathematics as a subject requires constant practicing, the research result is applicable to most lessons. According to Bruno et al. (2007) students in a classroom lose the desire to learn when the regular teacher is frequently absent and the delivery of lesson is done by a substitute teacher. Absenteeism among teachers discourage pupils going to school. According to the U.S

Department of Education, National Centre for Education Statistics (1970) school age children and teens who are unsupervised during school hours are far more likely to use alcohol, drugs and tobacco, engage in criminal and other high risk behaviors. Teachers' absenteeism is detrimental to student's achievement, promotion, graduation, self-esteem,

employment potential and also reduces student achievement (Rundall, 1986; Turbeville, 1987).

2.5 The impact on syllabus coverage on teacher absenteeism

A high rate of absence of teachers from their posts is a serious obstacle to delivery of education in many developing countries. A report by UWEZO comments that widespread teacher absenteeism is generally acknowledged as a major obstacle for effective and sustainable improvements of the country's education system. Students who experience solid relationships with their teachers show up to class. They also understand how their coursework plays a role in their future life, and these students do better if the teacher avoids covering information in class that only repeats what is in the book. Teachers who encourage this type of atmosphere in class have a positive effect on their students' absences controlling measures to curb the absenteeism among teachers

2.6 Measures to control the absenteeism among teachers

To prevent and correct serious attendance problems schools need to change their way of structure, improve the quality of the curriculum and also intensify good interpersonal relationships between teachers and students (Epstein and Shelden, 2002).

Educational stakeholders, the school heads need to develop a tracking system to monitor teacher absenteeism. This will enable supervisors to identify patterns of absenteeism and establish a form of accountability in order to ensure appropriate measures for sanction. (Rogers and Vegas, 2009).

2.7 Disciplinary action as measure to reduce absenteeism

Most school systems prefer 'low-stakes' disciplinary interventions than real disciplinary sanctions that lead to dismissal (Mulkeen, 2010). Mulkeen (2010) further explains that various measures such as "teacher's salary" could be based on the number of days that they are present or make them pay a fine when they exceed the admitted leave days.

When a teacher is absent more than three days in the month a fine will be imposed on the salary. The committed teachers should earn bonuses for extracurricular activities they do (Duflo, Hanna and Ryan, 2012).

3.0 Research Methodology

Descriptive survey research design was used in this study because it enables the researcher to obtain information that describes existing phenomena by asking both teachers and students about their perceptions, attitudes, behavior and values. This design was therefore deemed appropriate, as it enabled the researcher to reach as many respondents as possible within a short time and obtain the real picture as at the ground. This study employed both qualitative and quantitative approach methods. Primary data was obtained using semi-structured questionnaires which have both open and closed-ended questions; while secondary data was obtained through journals and books. The data was

collected through the use of questionnaires. Two separate questionnaires were designed for both the teachers and for final year students. A questionnaire enables the researcher to collect information that can easily be analyzed. The questionnaire also allows for anonymity of respondents. The total population for the study in the Oyibi Presbyterian Junior High School is 204. This population comprises both the teachers and the students. There are 18 teachers and 186 students. The analyses involved the use of tables, graphs and charts. The data for this study were presented with brief explanations for clear understanding. Frequencies and percentages were used as statistical tools to present the results of the study.

4.0 Discussions

The discussion compares the results of the study with other studies. The research objectives entails causes of teachers' absenteeism in basic schools, the extent to which teachers absenteeism affects syllabus coverage in basic schools, and how teachers' absenteeism affects pupils' academic performance in basic schools.

Causes of teacher's absenteeism to school

The results show that teachers' absenteeism has been prevailing in basic schools. There is no single factor causing teachers absenteeism, although some factors have been noted to appear frequently in the school as were evidenced by respondents. Poor working conditions ranked first among other factors. It seems most of the teachers are always absent because they are sick or one of their close relatives such as children, wife/husband, or their parents. Moreover, lack of accommodation and regular missing classes as well as coming late and leaving early the working stations were noted to be other factors to have caused high rates of absenteeism in the primary schools. The results found that most of the teachers are sometimes at school but do not attend their classes or use a few minutes in their lessons.

The extents to which teachers' absenteeism affect syllabus coverage in public schools

The number of days each teacher loses due to absenteeism in a term is likely to affect lessons covered in a single month. It was discovered that the number of days each teacher loses due to absenteeism in a five-week month was about 5 days. Implying that a teacher is likely to lose an equivalent of one week of lessons covered in a single month. Furthermore, considering that a term runs for about four months on average, it means then that about one month is wasted due to teacher absenteeism every term and about three months annually. This trend if not reversed implies that learners are likely to lose a lot in syllabus coverage and consequently it may have a negative impact on

student achievement. Moreover, it can also be seen from table 1 that most of the teachers are likely to be absent from school on a particular day. This effectively means that students will not be learning most of their time in school due to absent teachers.

How teachers' absenteeism affects students' performance in public schools

It was evident that when teachers are not attending their usual lesson classes, most of the students said they cannot not concentrate, hence they end up performing poorly in class. The above evidence was also in line with UNICEF (2017), who conducted research in Tanzania on the impact of teachers' absenteeism to pupils performance who found that, large number of pupils in standard 1 up to 3 could not read, write and acquire basic arithmetic skills, for instance, the results from the 2014 primary school leaving examination in Mainland Tanzania revealed that only 8% of grade 2 pupils could read properly, 8% could add or subtract, and less than 1% showed high levels of life skills. Furthermore, teachers' absenteeism was found to have correlation with poor performance and uncovered syllabus. The more teachers were absent the more the decrease in pupils' academic performance in their subject since the students will not be able to cover the syllabus before end of term exams. It was evident that many teachers who missed classes several times in the specified academic year, their subjects performed poorly. The explained statement was as the same as Rogers and Emiliana (2009) as cited in Suryadarma et al (2006) who added more that an additional 10% points in the average absence rate of teachers at a school is associated with a -09- standard deviation decrease in Math scores of 4th graders in Indonesia.

5.0 Conclusion

The findings from this study have revealed that teachers' absenteeism is caused by a number of factors including family and social responsibilities; poor work conditions; poor health and lack of accommodation. The study has also revealed the extent to which teachers' absenteeism affects syllabus coverage in schools and assessed teachers' absenteeism affects students' academic performance in schools.

To minimize teachers' absenteeism in schools, teachers must be motivated so that they can actively be willing to attend at school as required. Motivations include rewards and allowances as well as recognition. Strict measures are to be observed by school administration and inspectors regarding teachers' laziness and unwillingness to attend schools.

5.1 Recommendations

The study came up with the following recommendations to policy makers, ministry of education as well as education stakeholders.

- (i) Teachers should be highly motivated by providing incentives to increase regular attendance, revising absenteeism-conducive policies, and promoting a positive work environment.
- (ii) School management should be encouraged to allow their teachers to keep a clean record of attendance rates and take strict disciplinary measures so as to discourage absenteeism.
- (iii) In view of the findings, the study recommends schools to institute policy changes like that of maintaining attendance roll for teachers wherein teachers log in and out every single day. The introduction of a biometric attendance register will be ideal to curb absenteeism.
- (iv) The government and other non-state actors should provide good financing schemes to facilitate for teachers needs to reduce the cases of teachers absenting themselves from school to go and carry out other businesses due to low remuneration.

Recommendations for further studies

The findings obtained in this study may not be totally reflective of the impact of teachers' absenteeism on students' performance in schools. The researcher therefore proposes the following suggestions for further studies:

- (i) Similar study should be replicated to other parts of the country or with a larger sample size.
- (ii) Further study should be carried out to examine the relationship between teacher motivation and work attendance
- (iii) A comparative study should be done to identify rates of absenteeism in private and public schools.
- (iv) Addendum: Educational officers including inspectorate division officers should be served with questionnaires / interviewed / engaged in focus group discussion so as to elicit information from them about their perspectives / views of the aforesaid study.

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