

Teacher Absenteeism: A Theoretical Review

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Abstract

Teacher absenteeism makes an unhealthy environment in educational organization. It is an issue that affects developing as well as developed countries, their economy, their schools and their students. It strongly affects school effectiveness, academic achievement of the students and it also lead to student's absenteeism. In India teacher absenteeism occurs due to different reasons. Some of the important reasons are lack of interest, illness of self and family members, family problems, qualification and lack of professional competence of the teachers. These are some important personal factors which influence teacher absenteeism. Besides personal factors, school factors and environmental factors also influence teacher absenteeism. School factors like, lack of adequate in-service training, poor leadership quality of headmasters, lack of effective supervision and monitoring by the school administration and ministry of education, and poor infrastructure facilities of school lead to the teacher absenteeism in India. Environmental factors are especially weather and community characteristics that in different ways contribute to teacher absenteeism. Some example includes distance of work place, unhealthy environment or weather conditions.

Keywords

Teacher Absenteeism, Issues and concerns, Measures.

Introduction

Declining school quality and efficiency are two of the serious problems in various developing countries. Over the last decade many countries have experienced a rapidly increasing demand for education, a decline in national resources available to support education, and a drop in the teacher quality and preparation – the result of expanding the education system faster than qualified teacher could be recruited or trained – high teacher absenteeism and high teacher

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turnover (Chapman, 1994). More recently, the World Bank carried out a series of national studies on patterns of teacher absenteeism, verified attendance through unannounced visits. In their report on six countries (Chaudhury, et al., 2006), the authors found that 19% of primary school teachers were absent at the time of study. The teacher absenteeism across countries varies from 11% to 17% (i. e. Bangladesh 16%, Ecuador 14%, India 25%, Indonesia 19%, Peru 11%, and Uganda 27%). For some countries in this study, more detailed result was available. For instance – in Bangladesh primary school teachers' absenteeism were about 15.5%, while secondary school teachers were about 17.6% at the time of study (Chaudhury, et al., 2004). In Peru, researchers found a rate of 11% absenteeism in primary schools (Banerjee & Duflo, 2006).

A study in Kenya suggested that 20% of teachers from rural schools were absent at the time of study (Glewee, et al., 2008). In Zambia, 18% teachers were absent and in Pakistan, the absent rate was 10% for teachers at primary level at the time of study (Rechards & Sheu, 1992). Finally in India the rate of teachers' absenteeism was found to be 25% for primary schools, with only half of the teachers present at schools in classrooms, at scheduled time. From the above information it is clear that teachers' absenteeism is one of the major issues in developing countries and especially in India.

Concept of teacher absenteeism

Absenteeism refers to workers absence from their regular task when he/she is normally schedule to work. According to Webster's dictionary – "Absenteeism is the practice or habit of being an absentee and an absentee is one who habitually stays away from work." According to Casio (2003), absenteeism is "any failure of an employee to report for or to remain at work as scheduled, regardless of reason" (as cited in Jacobs, 2007, p. 22).

There are generally two forms of absenteeism,

- (i) Voluntary absenteeism and
- (ii) Involuntary absenteeism.

Hackett and Guion (1985) distinguish between two forms of absenteeism; voluntary absenteeism refers to unjustified and illegitimate non-attendance of employee. This include not coming to work without providing any notice in advance as well as without giving any explanation as to the reason of the absence. On the other hand, they also account for involuntary absenteeism, which refers absence caused by factors which escape the control of the employee. Illness, personal problems, or any other event or situation preventing the

employee from coming to the work place (Roma Education Fund, 2012). Thus, absenteeism means physical absence of the employee from their work.

Like all others employees sometimes teachers too remain absent from their duties. According to Abeles (2009), absenteeism is a period of not attending to duty by the employee while for teachers, absenteeism means the teachers are in school but fail to visit class or are in an unfit condition to teach the children effectively (as cited in Caillods, et al., 2007). So, teacher absenteeism means that the teachers do not attend to their work place or school or class, when they are normally scheduled to work.

Issues and concerns of teacher absenteeism

Lack of interest

Interests in something can mean that we care about it, that it is important to us, and we have positive feeling about it. We often say things like “I am interested in playing cricket” and “I am interested in the well-being of my child” (Harackiewicz & Hulleman, 2009, p. 42). John Dewey once describe interest as “being engaged, engrossed, or entirely taken up with” an activity, object or topic (Dewey, 1913). Teachers could be lacking interest in teaching or to be in the school, which could be a result of their lack of interest in their profession. Cooper & Cartwright (1994) argue that relationship with superiors, colleagues, and other in the school emotionally affects the teachers. These researchers state that mistrust among colleagues can lead ambiguity, poor communication, low job satisfaction and poor psychological well-being. Furthermore, it is argued that strong emotion like, work place jealousy and envy among teachers has been framed negative psychological outcomes such as work place violence, harassment etc. (Danna & Griffin, 1999). All these causes are reducing interest of the teachers in their profession and it lead absenteeism. Steers and Rhoders (1987) argues that even if someone is highly motivated to their profession, but in some cases willingness and interest are not enough.

Poor health condition or injuries are important factors for teacher absenteeism, because if someone is willing to attend but physically not fit, then he/she would be unable to attend in the school or class (Steers and Rhoders, 1987).

Illness of the self and family members of the teacher

Injuries, illness and medical appointments are the commonly reported reason for teacher absence at the school (though not always the actual reason). Accident can occur in the school

or outside the school, as a result teacher can remain absent from duty. In addition to acute injuries, chronic injuries are common cause of teacher absenteeism. Sometimes teacher absenteeism indicate that teacher who are sick or have sick family members will not attend school and stay at home to take care of the sick person. At the time of death of family member or colleague, teacher seeks permission to attend the funeral ceremony. In case of female teachers pregnancy and child care reasons are mainly associated with their absenteeism. Thus health status of the teacher and his/her family problems plays a lead role in teacher absenteeism and non-punctuality.

Family problems of teachers

Family is a social organization. According to the American Bureau of Census family is “a group of two or more persons related to blood, marriage, or adoption and residing together; all such persons are considered as member of one family” (Ahuja, 2013, p. 14). All teachers are living in their family and they are also responsible for proper maintenance of their family. In various researchers it is found that female teachers are absent more frequently than male teachers due to more family responsibilities (Ervasti, et al., 2012). It means female teachers absenteeism commonly associated with the household responsibilities. More than male teachers, female teachers are engaged to prepare their children for school; prepare breakfast for their family, clean their kitchens and compounds before getting ready for their job. As a result they are unable to attend the school at schedule time.

Low competence of the teacher

Competence are combination of practical and theoretical knowledge, cognitive skills, behaviour and values to improve performance; or as a quality having the ability to perform a specific role (Mulder, 2001). So competency is the ability to do something successfully or efficiently. It is the ability of an individual to do a job properly. In the case of teachers they need certain competencies for properly doing their job. For instance, teachers competence should include, systematic thinking, emotional intelligence, positive interaction with all students, ability to create a conducive learning environment, good at lesson plan designing, able to employ varied teaching strategies, able to identify student needs, good at communication, able to collaborate, monitoring, professional appearance etc. If teachers lack such competences then it can lead to teacher absenteeism. A study, found that school employees whose performance is poor are related as being absent more often than the average performer (Rockoff, et al., 2008). Thus, teachers who have low professional competence have

higher absenteeism rate than the teachers who have high professional competence. But, if teacher can get proper in-service training then they can develop their required competence and as a result reduce absenteeism.

Lack of adequate in-service training

In-service teacher training may be referred as the courses for teachers through which they get benefited for their professional development after joining in the service. In India in-service teacher training generally provided by various educational institution. Kothari Commission argue that the need of in-service training is important in teaching profession because of the rapid expansion of the knowledge and continuing changes of pedagogical theory as well as practice wants regular updating of teachers' knowledge (Vijayalakshmi, 2016). According to some teachers, those teachers are trained in pedagogy are more professionally interested and motivated than the teachers those are getting less pedagogical training (Akazar, et al., 2004). In India pre-service training is required to become a teacher, because it should provide basic pedagogical knowledge and practice, but according to Okobia (2013, p. 2), "pre-service training might not perfectly prepares them for effective job performance" and hence in-service training should be provided to all teachers. Adequate in-service training of teacher develops a higher level of responsibility among teachers and it also motivates them regarding their profession. Besides, it can be kept in mind that sometimes in-service teacher training lead to teacher absenteeism. Because in many a times in-service training for teachers usually conducted during the working hours of school, as a result they were unable to attend in class.

Poor leadership quality of head of the institutes

Researcher have defined leadership in various ways, according to Bryman (1992), leadership is the "ability to guide followers towards shared goals" (as cited in Evans, 2011, p. 18). According to Hersey (1984), leadership is a form of influence of an individual on others or leadership is considered as simply something a leader does (as cited in Madlock, 2008). So leadership is the ability or quality of an individual which help him/her to lead or guide others in an organization or institution. If head teacher of school having this quality than he should lead or guide other teachers. It is one of the essential qualities of head teacher because he/she is related to administration and management system as well as he/she is also related to implementation of all the practices and policies of school. A head teacher should have leadership quality to manage administration and effective implementation of all policies of school. Ehrenberg, Ehrenberg, Rees & Ehrenberg (1991), argue that, a school were the head

teacher does not involve teachers in decision making, that means does not allow them to participate in policy making it should demotivates the teachers and increase the rate of teacher absenteeism, but a school were the head teacher have good leadership qualities, teachers absenteeism has been reduced (Ehrenberg, Ehrenberg, Rees & Ehrenberg, 1991).

Lack of supervision and monitoring

Teacher absenteeism rate is high especially in rural areas due to the lack of supervision and monitoring. A large number of teachers in rural areas do not go to school regularly for the reason that they are aware about the time of visit of their supervisors. This can be articulated to the remoteness of the school and the lack of communication facilities (Kwesi, 2013). Musyoki (2015) observed that “the rate of teachers absenteeism tends to be higher when principals are not in school because of lack of regular monitoring of the teachers as they perform their duties” (p. 15). So, from the above mentioned, it is clear that, communication system in rural areas is not well developed and it leads to lack of supervision and monitoring which is turn leads to teacher absenteeism.

Poor infrastructure facilities in the schools

A school cannot properly run without good infrastructure. A good school infrastructure include, building in good shape with an adequate number of well-organized class room, chairs, tablets, desks, branches, medical assistance, sanitation facility, drinking water facility, canteen, recreation ground, library, laboratory, compound wall, computer facilities etc. In India infrastructure development of schools is one of the major functions of SSA (*Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan*) and RMSA (*Rastriya Madhyamik Siksha Abhiyan*). For infrastructure development government is giving financial support to government schools and private authorities are given financial support for private schools, but still infrastructure facilities are not sufficient especially in the government schools and it affect the whole teaching learning process as well as contribute to increased teacher absenteeism. According to researchers, “average schools with best infrastructure and equipment have much lower absence rate than those with worst infrastructure even after controlling other factors” (Chaudhury, et al., 2006, p. 91). Teachers prefer a comfortable work place, if infrastructure facilities are not comfortable then it can demotivate teachers which in turn results in teacher absenteeism.

Distance of work place from home

Many teachers live far from their work place or school, and transportation is one of the major problems. In some cases teachers may stay at nearby places to education institution, but to collect their salaries, they have to travel a long distance, since the banks are usually located at urban centers. The teachers have to skip the school at least a day to collect their remunerations. As a result they are unable to attend in the work place at scheduled time. According to Komoni, “Teachers who live far from the school have higher absence rate than those who live near the school” (as cited in Musyoki, 2015, p. 16). Teachers those stay far from their work place or school give excuses “such as funeral, rain and not having money to fare him” (kwesi, 2013, p. 12). It can be concluded that the teachers staying away from their schools may not attend the schools regularly and may lead to increased teacher absenteeism.

Unhealthy internal and external environment of school

In the broad sense school environment can be divided into two parts, internal environment and external environment. Internal environment of school consist with the entities, condition, events, and factors such as employee behavior, organizational climate, relation of teachers and students, leadership style etc. that exist within the school and influence teachers and students, and external environment of school consist of the entities, conditions, events and factors such as public opinion, government regulations, economic conditions etc. and the surrounding of the schools that influence teachers and students. Thus, internal and external environment of schools include all the elements that exist inside and outside of the school boundaries and affects teachers and students. If all these factors are not comfortable or affect the teacher in a negative way, then it can lead to teacher absenteeism. Besides, weather condition also affects teacher absenteeism, according to Musyoki (2015) bad weather conditions such as floods can dispute travel and communication system there by delaying the teachers from reaching the school on time. So, bad weather conditions like, heavy rains, flooded rivers, muddy roads, drought, storm etc. can make teachers remain absent from their work place or school.

Impact of teacher absenteeism

Teachers’ absence from school or class can have harmful effects on our educational system. Education is a process, through which we acquire knowledge, modify behavior and develop our skills. In our educational system there are three important components, students, teachers and content. It is represented with their inter-relation in the following figure. 1

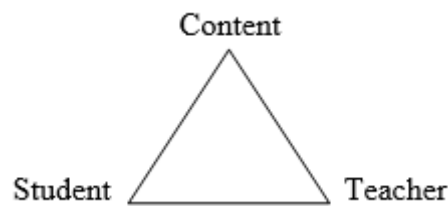


Figure. 1

All these three components are important for proper functioning of our educational system. Out of these three components absence of any one from our educational system can paralyze the entire process. Teacher absenteeism can also affect student behavior in various ways; according to Kristy “Teacher absenteeism can have an effect on student absenteeism, which ultimately means diminished capacity to learn due to limitations on time in the classroom” (as cited in Pitts, 2010, p. 12). Besides, teacher’s absence from the classroom can have a negative impact on student’s academic achievement as well as learning opportunities for students. If a teacher remain absent from the school, without any specific reason, it is their negligence and irresponsible behavior which not only affect the teaching learning process, but also affects the environment of the organization as a whole. It also affects the discipline of the organization and demotivates the student. For example, a teacher has given certain assignment or project to the students and they have done it with great interest, but on the next day when they went to the school and found that their teacher is absent, they may lose their enthusiasm. So, teacher absenteeism has two fold effects; it leads to lowering of students’ academic performance and may trigger student absenteeism.

The following measures can be adopted to overcome the issue of teacher absenteeism.

Increasing the frequency of inspection

In different parts of the country especially where teacher’s attendance is low in the school or classroom, there should be increased visits and supervision by the school inspectors or visitors.

Improving record keeping

School should keep all the records of the teacher with the help of computers regarding number of hours teacher should attend or work in the school as well as number of classes he/she has taken. So in this regard biometric machine should be introduce in each school. There should be proper mechanisms to maintain the leave records of the teachers.

Provide adequate in-service training to the teacher

In-service training is a better strategy than the pre-service training because the aim of in-service training is to provide up to date information and strategies to the teachers that can reduce the complexity of teaching and increase the competence of teachers (Chapman, 1994). So, in-service training is capacity building for school teachers. If it is provided in a proper way then that could help to enhance skills of teacher, improve their competencies and confidence, improve quality of teaching, increase interest in their profession and as a result it should reduce teacher absenteeism.

Improving infrastructural facilities of school

Better infrastructure facility can lead to increased satisfaction of the teachers about their school environment. It can provide a positive encouragement for teachers to be at school. Besides, a suitable maintenance policy should be introduced by the government for the improvement and maintenance of infrastructural facilities as well as appropriate person should be assigned for its proper maintenance.

Appropriate remuneration for the job

In our country (India) salary of teachers are not at par with their qualification or job responsibilities. As a result, teachers lose interest in their job. Besides, merit pay should be provided for the teachers and it should be provided on the basis of students achievement, punctuality in the work, regular attendance, number of classes taken etc.

Regular staff meetings

Research has shown that, teacher absenteeism can be reduced in an effective way by the implementation of a policy requiring that teacher should directly contact to the head teacher when they are unable to attend in the school (Keller, 2008). If the policy is implemented then the responsibility of the head teacher would increase and this may be compensated by providing a small honorarium to the head teacher.

Government should take some motivational steps in terms of policy decisions for improving the teacher attendance in the school such as providing monetary bonus or gifts certificate or other rewards for teachers those who are regular to their schools (Finlayson, 2009).

Conclusion

Teacher absenteeism is a major issue in India. There are various factors which lead to teacher absenteeism. The government has been already taken various steps for overcoming this issue. Some of them are the creation of CRC (Cluster Resource Center) at school level, BRC (Block Resource Center) at block level etc., which play vital role for reducing the teacher absenteeism. But, still teacher absenteeism is prevailing in Indian Schools. Recently WBNAS (World Bank National Absence Survey) conducted an authoritative study on teacher absenteeism and found that roughly 1 of 4 teachers are absent in rural areas (Narayan & Mooij, 2010). Now-a-days government of India has been emphasizing on quality education, but low attendance of teachers in school is one of the major problems which hinder the dissemination of quality education to our children. Without developing an awareness and responsibility among teachers, it is impossible to overcome this issue. The teachers should be trained in such a way that they should start loving their profession as well as the students whom they teach. Only if the teachers develop a value system which strongly founded on the professional ethics of teachers, the issue of teacher absenteeism can be solved.

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