

Exploring Teacher Absenteeism Dilemma in Public Secondary Schools in Delta State, Nigeria

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Abstract This investigation explored teacher absenteeism in public secondary schools in Delta State, Nigeria. Three research questions were answered. The study is a survey, ex-post-facto in nature. The sample of the study comprised sixty teachers and twenty principals, selected through simple random technique from the entire population of public secondary schools in Ethiope East and Ethiope West local government areas of Delta Central senatorial districts of the state. Data collected through questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The findings revealed that demographic variables such as age, gender, marital status, qualification and experience were responsible for teacher absenteeism. Teacher related and school related variable were identified as possible causes of teacher absenteeism among public secondary schools in the two local government areas of Delta State. The study recommended that principals should improve in their leadership and implement school attendance policies to help check mate and reduce absenteeism among teachers.

Keywords: Absenteeism; Causes; Teacher; Secondary schools

1. INTRODUCTION

Teachers occupy a very significant position among the human resources required for proper functioning of the education system. As a result of the critical position teachers occupy in the education system [2] described teachers as the main stay of any institution that are crucial inputs in the transformation of students. Teachers are one of the most significant human resources in any education system whose roles towards building an effective school cannot be compromised. They act in “loco parentis” which is translated to mean “in place of parents”. Consequently, teachers are the parents of the children under their care while at school. The students in their classroom look up to their teachers, model after their behaviour and attitudes whether it is good or bad.

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Teachers help in nurturing learners, impacting values, skills, knowledge and other attributes needed for useful living in the society into them. They are to provide the students with the encouragement, motivation and academic support to enhance their academic achievement.

The attainment of quality education system depends largely on teachers who implement education programmes. Hence teachers being regularly present in school and classroom, their active participation in educational activities, their commitment and dedication to school goals would enhance the quality of education students receive. Teacher's regular presence at school and active participation in academic activities could help to enhance the academic bond between students and teachers. Academic connectedness between students and teachers is a powerful tool that could boost students' emotions about schooling and thus trigger off improved academic performance. Students' emotional feeling about school can be improved by the teacher's regular presence in school and this could give emotional order and social adjustment to students in their learning. Teachers of good quality who are highly dedicated to their duties could help to attain excellent school system.

Teacher absenteeism appears to be a global issue. In Zambia, [7] cited in [26] revealed 18% rate of teacher absenteeism stressing that this situation accounted for reduced teaching and learning effectiveness in schools. [14, 17] noted that teacher absenteeism rates was more in developing countries (above 40%) than in developed countries (lower than 10%). [6] revealed the rates of teacher absenteeism in some countries as 27% in Uganda, 25% in India, 19% in Indonesia, 16% in Bangladesh, 14% in Ecuador and 11% in Peru. They further found that in developing countries among primary school teachers, absenteeism average rate was 19%. [7] found teacher absenteeism rate of 17% in Zambia. [10] cited in [5] found that age was a factor responsible for teacher absenteeism, as majority of teachers who were absent were above fifty five years. [33] cited in [22] indicated that through making multiple unannounced visits to 3700 government primary schools across States in India, 25.2% of teachers were found absent from schools in rural areas.

Despite the importance of teachers in the education system, teacher absenteeism has continued to be a disturbing issue to school administrators and the government in Nigeria. Several unannounced visits made by State governors to some secondary schools in the 21st century, they were reported cases of teacher absenteeism from school without permission from the school authority. For example the Delta State governor [29] stopped the salaries of forty-four public secondary school teachers in the state for absenteeism. In Edo State, [24] fired dozens of teachers for absenteeism when he embarked on

unannounced visits to schools. Estimates indicates that about 20% of teaching work force in Nigeria are absent from public primary school on a particular day [9, 31]. This study examines teacher absenteeism dilemma in public secondary schools in two local government areas of Delta State, Nigeria.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Teacher absenteeism has been one of the major problems facing school principals in the daily administration of schools in Nigeria in the 21st century. The issue of continued teacher absenteeism has been of great concern and worry to principals, government and the general Nigerian public. Teacher absenteeism have been a growing dilemma in Nigerian secondary education system especially government owned schools. Newspaper reports indicates that several secondary school teachers have had their salaries stopped while some have been dismissed from work as a result of their being regularly absent from school without due permission. This study explores the factors that could be responsible for the continued teacher absenteeism in public secondary schools in two local government areas of Delta State.

1.3 Need of Study

This study had three specific objectives. They are;

1. To identify the demographic variables that can cause teacher absenteeism in secondary schools.
2. To find out the teacher related factors that can cause teacher absenteeism in secondary schools.
3. To find out the school related factors that can cause teacher absenteeism in secondary schools.

2.1 Research Questions

Three questions were asked and answered in this study. They are:

1. What are the demographic variables that can cause teacher absenteeism in secondary schools?
2. What are the teacher related factors that can cause teacher absenteeism in secondary schools?
3. What are the school related factors that can cause teacher absenteeism in secondary schools?

2.2 Hypothesis

Two null hypotheses were formulated and tested as follows:

Asiyai, RI

1. There is no significant difference between principals and teachers regarding their perceptions on teacher related variables that are responsible for absenteeism.
2. There is no significant difference between males and female teachers with respect to their perceptions on teacher related variables that can cause absenteeism.

2.3 Limitations of the Study

The study has finance as the major limitation. Ideally, a study of this nature would have covered all the schools in the two local government areas where the study was conducted so that it could be generalized. But some of the schools are located in far rural areas that are not easily accessible. This study is further limited by the uncooperative attitudes of two principals who rudely refused to assist the researcher saying “teachers are not the problem of Nigeria but politicians that research should focus on them” In addition, the researcher wanted to take snaps of attendance documents but was not allowed even after assuring the participants that it was just for the purpose of research. This would have made the research more robust.

2.3 Review of Related Literature

Studies on teacher absenteeism abound especially in other countries of the world. Absenteeism is the habit of one not being regularly present at class or school. From the perspective of [30] absenteeism is a situation whereby workers who have been scheduled to work fail to report to duty when they are actually on the payroll”. [1] noted that teacher absenteeism is abysmal in Nigeria, stressing that the school environment was repellent, amidst inadequate teaching–learning facilities. These situations they noted, forced many teachers to engage in truancy and adopt negative attitude to work, while some left the sector in search of better jobs’. Absenteeism is categorized into four types as “authorized absenteeism, unauthorized absenteeism, willful absenteeism and authorized absenteeism beyond our control” [20, P.152, 10, p.78] asserted that “higher teacher absenteeism rates may reduce student’s motivation to attend school and also lead to higher student’s absentee rates”. The effectiveness of a teacher depend on his/her stability as a regular classroom instructor [25] The board maintained that the more the teacher was present to deliver instructional information and monitor skills, the greater the result of academic growth. Hence teacher’s regular presence in the classroom to teach and supervise students’ classroom activities can contribute immensely to their academic growth and development. When teachers are regularly absent

from school or classroom, it can have destabilizing effect on the students' emotions and attitude towards schooling and thus disrupt their learning. It has been well established that regular teacher absence negatively affects academic performance of students [32; 4; 21; 8]. Similarly, [2; p.11] noted that "teacher absenteeism had a negative impact on the financial resources of a school system and a detrimental and teacher disruptive effect on students' achievement". According to [2; p.138], "teachers' salaries represent at least 70% of the total current costs of education in many developing countries and more than 90% of the current cost of primary education". Therefore teachers must regularly attend school and actively participate in activities to justify the huge amount spent in paying their salaries'. "Teachers' salaries must be carefully weighed against educational efficiency" [2; p.138]. When teachers whom the school system is heavily dependent upon for the execution of its programmes develop and integrate negative attitudes to their duties by being regularly absent from school, students who are on the receiving ends suffer in many ways. Absenteeism causes additional damage beyond economic and strongly affects the school's general existence [20;11;16]. Absenteeism negates the goals of productivity improvement as it translates to lost productivity [9]. It has been noted [19] that in education, employees' absenteeism is a special problem in terms of its cost to the school as well as wasted education time that is liable to impair the sense of confidence the general public has for the school.

3.1 Methodology

The design of this research is purely descriptive survey. The study population comprised of all public secondary schools in Ethiope East and Ethiope West local government areas of Delta Central senatorial district of Delta State during the 2015/2016 academic year. Statistics of secondary school population from Post Primary Education Board, gives the number of secondary in the two local government areas as 71. A sample of sixty teachers and twenty principals was selected through simple random technique from the entire population of public secondary schools in Ethiope East and Ethiope West local government areas of Delta Central senatorial districts of the state.

The instrument used for the study consists of questionnaire. Section A of the instrument, the researcher supplied demographic variables which focused on gender, age, marital status, and qualification and teaching experience to the school authority. This list was used in categorizing teachers. Schools opened for 108 days, 112 days and 114 days for first, second and third terms respectively. The number of times a teacher was absent from school was supplied by the school personal assigned to the researcher by the school head. In this way the statistics on teacher's school attendance was obtained. The section B consists

of questionnaire structured by the researcher. The questionnaire comprised of two main parts. The first part is sub-divided into two sections. The first section contains ten items meant for principals and teachers to identify likely teacher related factors responsible for teacher absenteeism. It was tagged “Respondents’ Perceptions on Teacher Related Causes of Absenteeism Questionnaire” (RPTRCAQ). The second section contains ten items meant for male and female teachers to identify likely school related factors responsible for teacher absenteeism. It was titled “Respondents’ Perceptions on School Related Causes of Absenteeism Questionnaire” (RPSRCAQ). The items were structured following a four point Likert type rating scale of strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree.

The face and content validity of the instrument was conducted through expert judgments of two educational administrators. They read through the items, scrutinized it and provided suggestions which were used to bear on the final draft. The reliability of the instrument was conducted using ten principals and twenty teachers in public secondary schools not used in the original study. Test re-test reliability determination technique was employed in establishing the item stability over time. Pearson Product Moment formular was used in calculating the reliability coefficients to obtain indexes of 0.84 and 0.79. This high reliability indexes suggest that the instrument have high internal stability and hence their use for the study. The instrument was administered to the teachers and principals through the assistance of three teachers recruited by the researcher. Eighty copies of the instrument were administered but seventy six copies (fifty eight for teachers and eighteen for principals) were returned correctly filled and used for data analysis. Data collected through qualitative methods were grouped and indexed. Then descriptive statistical tools of frequency distribution and percentages were used to analyze the data in answer to the research questions. The quantitative data were also subjected to similar methods of data analysis. The t-test of significant difference was employed in analysis of data to test the hypotheses. The level of significance was 0.05.

3.2 Results of the Study

From Table 1, in terms of gender, for male teachers, an average of 15 days per year was lost while for female teachers an average of 22 days was lost per year due to absenteeism. In terms of age, teachers of age below 30 years, an average of 4 days were lost per year to absenteeism. Teachers of age between 31-40 years, an average of 9 days were lost per year due to absenteeism. Teachers between 41-50 years, an average of 12 days were lost while those between 51-60 years, lost an average of 15 days to absenteeism per year. For marital status, married teachers lost an average of 16 days per year while single teachers lost

Table 1: Demographic Variables on Teachers Based on Absenteeism.

Variables		Frequency N=60	Average number of days lost per year
Gender	Male	22	15
	Female	38	22
Age	Below 30 years	15	4
	31-40 years	30	9
	41-50 years	11	12
	51-60 years	4	15
Marital Status	Single	12	6
	Married	48	16
Qualification	B. Ed	46	8
	M. Ed	6	18
	Non Professionals	8	25
Experience	Below 5 years	10	7
	6–10 years	20	9
	11–15years	12	11
	16–20years	14	16
	21–30years	4	13

an average of 6 days per year. In terms of qualification, teachers having B.Ed degree lost an average of 8 days per year, teachers having M.Ed degree lost an average of 18 days per year but non professional teachers lost an average of 25 days per year.

The results in Table 2 indicates that the mean scores for principals and teachers for the teacher related variables exceed the cut off mean score of 2.50. This implies that all the factors above are the teacher related factors that can cause absenteeism. These factors are illness of the teacher, teachers work load, marital status, gender, teaching experience, age, qualification and family emergencies.

The results in Table 3 shows that all the school related variables identified are likely factors that can cause teacher absenteeism in secondary is because the mean scores for all the factors for both male and female teachers exceed the cut off mean score of 2.50. These factors are classroom population; teacher's working condition, principal's leadership style, supervision, infrastructural facilities and school attendance policy.

Table 2: Mean Scores of Principals and Teachers on Teacher Related Causes of Absenteeism.

Teacher Related Variables	Principals Mean	SD	Teachers Mean	SD
Teachers age	2.73	.912	2.68	.564
Gender	2.76	.682	2.82	.840
Teaching experience	2.84	.774	2.70	.652
Educational qualification	2.65	.632	2.68	.811
Marital status	2.82	.486	2.80	.500
Illness of the teacher	3.00	.920	2.88	.733
Family emergencies	2.62	.730	2.65	.740
Teachers work load	2.96	.720	2.86	.642

Table 3: Mean Scores of Male and Female Teachers on School Related Factors Responsible for Absenteeism.

School Related Variables	Male Teachers Mean	SD	Female Teachers Mean	SD
Supervision	2.76	.511	2.54	.880
Classroom population	3.00	.673	3.56	.820
Principals leadership style	2.77	.480	3.40	.732
Infrastructural facilities	2.72	.652	2.90	.664
Attendance policy	2.74	.622	2.83	.792
Working condition	3.16	.720	2.94	.922

Hypothesis One There is no significant difference between principals and teachers regarding their perceptions on teacher related variables that are responsible for absenteeism.

The calculated t-value of 1.157 is less than the critical t-value of 1.960 at degree of freedom 74. The mean score for principals which is 22.32 is slightly higher than the mean score for teachers 22.07. The Mean Difference (MD) score 0.25, 0.05 alpha level which lies between the upper limits bounds and lower limits bounds is found not statistically significant at the 95% Confidence Interval (CI). Therefore, the null hypothesis is retained.

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant difference between males and female teachers with respect to their perceptions on teacher related variables that can cause absenteeism.

Table 4: t-test Analysis of Principals and Teachers on School Related Factors Responsible for Absenteeism.

Variables	N	Mean	SD	DF	t-cal	t-crit	MD	95%CI	
								Upper Bound	Lower Bound
Principals	18	22.32	5.33	74	1.157	1.960	0.25	1.18	1.11
Teachers	58	22.07	5.48						

Table 5: t-test Analysis of Male and Female Teachers on School Related Factors Responsible for Absenteeism

Variables	N	Mean	SD	DF	t-cal	t-crit	MD	95%CI	
								Upper Bound	Lower Bound
Male Teachers	28	17.25	3.66	74	1.336	1.960	0.72		
Female Teachers	30	17.97	4.50						

The calculated t-value of 1.336 is less than the critical t-value of 1.960 at degree of freedom 74 and 0.05 level. Though female teachers with mean score of 17.97 is slightly higher than male teachers with a mean score of 17.25, the Mean Difference (MD) score 0.72, 0.05 alpha level which lies between the upper limits bounds and lower limits bounds is not statistically significant at the 95% Confidence Interval (CI). Therefore, the null hypothesis is retained.

4.1 Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study indicate that the demographic variables that can cause absenteeism among secondary school teachers are gender, age, marital status, qualification and experience. In terms of gender, female teachers were found to be more likely to be absent from school than their male counterparts. This finding lends credence with [11] that female teachers were more frequently absent than male teachers. The reason for this could be because of additional family responsibilities placed on female teachers when their family members are faced with critical health challenges. Additionally, female teachers are prone to maternity leaves. However, this finding is at variance with [27] that male teachers were more absent from school than female teachers.

The finding of this study also revealed that teachers' age was a factor responsible for absenteeism as older teachers were more likely to be absents from school than younger teachers. Older teachers appears to get easily

stressed up with the demands of effective teaching and learning and as such, they resort to being regularly absent from school than younger teachers who are full of energy to withstand the demands of teaching. Marital status of teacher is another factor responsible for absenteeism. The finding showed that married teachers were more regularly absent from school than single or unmarried teachers. In terms of qualification, the findings showed that more qualified teachers were more likely to be absent from school than their less qualified counterparts. The results also indicates that non professional teachers were more likely to be absent from school than professionally qualified teachers. Non professional teachers lack professional competence in lesson planning and presentation, classroom management and control and evaluation of students' learning outcomes. The daily routine of writing lesson notes, lesson planning, checking and marking students' notes appears to make non professional teachers bored with teaching and absent from school more than their professional counterparts. Non professional teachers are never satisfied with teaching job. Majority of them take the teaching job just to while away the time till they get a better job. According to [28], the rate of teacher absenteeism increases with lack of job satisfaction.

For research question two, the teacher related factors that can cause teacher absenteeism are illness of the teacher (96.1%), teachers work load (94.7%), marital status (85.5%), qualification (78.9%), teaching experience (77.6%), age (72.4%), gender (65.8%) and family emergencies (63.2). The findings of this study on teacher illness and family emergencies as factors responsible for absenteeism corroborates that of [13] that HIV/AIDs infection was a major illness responsible for teacher absenteeism in Uganda and Zanzibar. The findings on teachers work load is in congruence with [17] that burn out as a result of handling students disciplinary problems accounted for teacher absenteeism for schools in Cyprus. Non professional teachers because of their lack of training in pedagogy, tend to get easily de-motivated with teaching routines and hence are more likely to be absent from school than professional teachers. The finding of this study with respect to teaching experience, indicates that more experienced teachers were more absent from school than less experienced teachers. This finding agrees with [6] that high ranking teachers were more absent from school than low ranking teachers. This could be due to the extra engagement of more experienced teachers in administrative duties. The hypothesis tested revealed that there is no significant difference between principals and teachers regarding their perceptions on teacher related variables that are responsible for absenteeism.

With respect to research question three, the findings revealed likely school related factors that can cause teacher absenteeism in secondary school

are classroom population (94.7%), teacher's working condition (86.8%), principal's leadership style (84.2%), internal and external supervision (84.2%), infrastructural facilities (76.3%) and school attendance policy (75.0%). When the classroom size becomes too large, the teacher finds it difficult coping with students' behavior problems. This situation could make teachers to become bored, stressed up and deliberately avoid going to school or being present in the classroom. This finding is supported by [3]. The principal's leadership is a major determinant of teacher's characteristics such as their devotion to duty, motivation and commitment to quality teaching and learning. Supporting this finding, [12] noted that the principal's supervision of teaching including their frequency has a significant effect on teacher absence. Teachers are likely to be absent from school when they notice that the principal is regularly absent. Similarly, students are bound to avoid school when they observe that their teachers are always absent from school. Other school related factors that this study has identified as possible causes of absenteeism among secondary school teachers are school attendance policy and infrastructural facilities. Good school attendance policy can help to check mate teachers activities and discipline them but when a schools' attendance policy becomes too loose, teachers take undue advantage of it and behave as they like. This finding is supported by [23]. They contended that generous school leave policy can cause higher rates of absence from school in developing countries. In terms of school infrastructural facilities, the finding is consistent with [15] that the quality of school infrastructure, quality of learning environment, lack of training programmes and job dissatisfaction among teachers were some of the causes of absenteeism in many African countries. The hypothesis tested showed that there is no significant difference between male and female teachers with respect to their perceptions on school related factors that are responsible for absenteeism

4.2 Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examined teacher absenteeism in public secondary schools in Delta state. The findings revealed that demographic variables such as age, gender, marital status, qualification and experience were responsible for teacher absenteeism. Teacher related factors that are likely to induce absenteeism among teachers are illness of the teacher, teachers work load, marital status, qualification, teaching experience, age, gender and family emergencies. The school related variables identified as possible causes of teacher absenteeism are classroom population, teacher's working condition, principal's leadership style, internal and external supervision, infrastructural facilities and school attendance policy. Based on the findings and conclusion of the study, the recommendations are:

Asiyai, RI

1. Principals should as much as possible put in place good school attendance policy to help keep the tide of absenteeism down.
2. Principals should improve in their supervisory roles to help monitor teachers closely.
3. Female principals should be closely monitored and permission to be absent from school must be properly sought and approved.

4.3 Acknowledgements

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Exploring Teacher
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Nigeria

Asiyai, RI

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