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## Research Article

# *The Effects of Teacher Absenteeism on the Academic Performance of Students in Selected Junior High Schools in the Ejisu Municipality, Ghana*

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## ABSTRACT

This quantitative cross-sectional study with follow-up qualitative interviews was undertaken to evaluate the effects of teachers' absenteeism on Junior High School students' academic performance in English Language and Mathematics. A purposive sampling method was used to select forty Mathematics and English teachers and 683 learners from ten public Junior High Schools in the Ejisu municipality of Ghana. Data on absenteeism among teachers were garnered using log books which were analyzed with archival secondary data on students' academic performance in English Language and Mathematics. The quantitative data suggested a correlation between the average student score and the logarithm of teacher absenteeism. As teacher absenteeism in logarithmic terms increases, student average scores decline, while they rise when teacher absenteeism is lower. On the other hand, qualitative interviews revealed that the majority of teachers were absent owing to their involvement in distance learning, weekend, or sandwich programs at a university or college, a lack of passion on the job, and economic difficulties. The study recommends that the Ministry of Education should introduce incentives such as performance-based pay, recognition, granting of allowances, and improving working conditions, to motivate teachers to be more committed to their work to reduce the incidence of absenteeism.

## KEYWORDS

*academic performance; junior high school education; teaching and learning; teacher absenteeism*

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## INTRODUCTION

In recent times, developing countries, notably African countries, have made a concerted effort to enroll their children in school. Among Ghanaians for instance, the Ghanaian government has demonstrated a strong commitment to achieving "Education for All" (EFA) as a measure of its poverty reduction strategy (Obeng-Denteh et al., 2011). Importantly, Ghana started deriving a significant achievement in her education system within the first eighteen (18) months after the implementation of the Education Strategic Plan (ESP); enrolment rates have risen particularly in the primary, Junior High School (JHS), and post-primary sub-sectors (Asiyai, 2017). Regardless of the significant progress, educational attainment in Ghana just like most African countries is lagging in terms of global standards due to several factors. Primarily, the literature suggests that the abysmal educational attainment in Ghana can be attributed in part, if not entirely, to absenteeism and truancy on the part of both students and teachers (Karppinen et al., 2021). Aside from the above, it is important to note that in Ghana, absenteeism and truancy form a central part of acts perpetrated by school administrators. Of all these, the absenteeism of teachers has been noted to be a detrimental consequence on Ghana's educational sector (Lee et al., 2015). According to a World Bank report on Ghana's educational system, on average, Ghanaian teachers miss 43 days of school each year (Asiyai, 2017). Among the main underlying reasons for the high absentee rate are lack of supervision, sickness or medical care, collection of salary at a bank located at a distance, frequent funeral attendance, long distances to school, and religious practices, for instance, Friday prayers among Muslim teachers (Karppinen et al., 2021). Aside from this, Obeng-Denteh et al. (2011:9-10) suggest that absenteeism on the part of teachers are as a result of the following: "stress, lack of job satisfaction, boredom on the job, serious accidents and illness, low morale, poor working conditions, excessive workload, transportation problems, inadequate leadership, and poor supervision as well as poor physical fitness among others".

The absenteeism of teachers and its impacts on education has been well discussed among scholars in the literature. The consequences range from impeding student achievement and attendance to depleting school resources and increasing administrative time spent on replacing classroom instructors and managing attendance (Porres, 2016). In line with this, Obeng-Denteh et al. analyze the same from three major perspectives and costs: administrative costs, financial costs, and a decrease in productivity. Concerning the latter, they argue that the absenteeism of teachers usually leads to employees carrying out extra workload to support absent staff; and a decrease in staff morale and employee service (Obeng-Denteh et al., 2011).

As a result of its negative impacts on education and students in particular, the literature has provided major recommendations that are geared toward addressing the absenteeism of teachers within schools. Primarily, it has been reported that wage payment and the creation of incentive systems appear as the major factors that influence the motivation and productivity of workers. From a similar perspective, these factors can be important in shaping teacher's absenteeism (CITE). In addition, factors such as coherent leadership in schools, paying attention to the problems of staff quickly and appropriately, boosting employee morale, and training teachers and students concerning the consequences of absenteeism are some of the factors that have proven effective in addressing teacher absenteeism across the globe (Hausknecht et al., 2008). Essentially, the literature on Ghana has reported that despite the existence of efforts such as ensuring strict supervision and incentive provisions to teachers have been made to reduce it, teacher absenteeism remains a serious problem in Ghanaian schools (CITE Ghana). The negative impact of teacher absenteeism on students, schools, and teachers suggests that there is a need to understand the causes of low teacher attendance and to identify systemic solutions for mitigating it. The goal of this study is to investigate and

answer the above question on how teacher absenteeism affects student performance and systemic and policy-oriented solutions can be generated to address same.

## Literature Review

Teacher absenteeism has been identified as a major challenge affecting student learning outcomes in many developing countries (Britto, 2017; Castillo et al., 2022). According to Grinza and Rycx (2020), when an organization's absenteeism rate exceeds 3 percent, the employer is forced to bear significant costs. This helps to explain why businesses make every effort to find solutions to the absence issue. Teacher absenteeism is a significant issue that can have far-reaching consequences for students. When teachers are absent from school, students face a range of challenges, including disruptions in learning, missed opportunities for feedback and guidance, delays in the curriculum, and a lack of continuity in instruction. One of the primary concerns of teacher absenteeism is its impact on students' academic performance. Several studies have found that teacher absenteeism can lead to lower levels of academic achievement, particularly in math and reading (Al-Zoabi, et al., 2015; Spaul, 2015; Aucejo et al., 2016; Banerjee, 2016). When teachers are absent, students become disengaged and lose motivation, leading to misbehavior and disruptions in learning (Ibrahim & Zaatari, 2020). This can be particularly challenging for substitute teachers, who may not be as familiar with the students or the curriculum. Additionally, teacher absenteeism leads to overcrowded classrooms, which can make it difficult for students to receive individual attention and support (Mashaba & Maile, 2018). Moreover, teacher absenteeism also hurts school culture and morale (Ahghar, 2016). When teachers are absent, students may miss out on 20 opportunities to build relationships with their teachers, which can be important for academic and social-emotional development. Furthermore, teacher absenteeism leads to a lack of continuity in instruction, which can make it difficult for students to build on previous knowledge and skills (Kelchtermans, 2017). This can contribute to a decline in academic performance and student engagement. Many school systems in poor nations lack replacement teachers. When one teacher is missing, it might be conceivable to merge classes; but, in many circumstances, class sizes are already so huge that the combined class would be so big that it would visibly hinder learning (Ananga & Tamanja, 2017).

Although the evidence suggests that teacher incentive structures are equally crucial, these non-financial incentives are nevertheless significant. On the part of teacher incentives, have an impact on who decides to enter and stay in the teaching profession as well as how well instructors perform their duties in the classroom (Fryer, 2011). The United States of America is one of the better examples, where there is growing worry over the falling standard of teachers. For instance, data indicate that the number of eligible candidates for teaching posts declined as women's employment opportunities increased in the US labor market. Because teacher wage scales in the 21 United States are so constricted, studies by Fryer (2011) as well as Collins and Liang (2015) suggest that both experienced instructors and newcomers are likely to leave the teaching profession in search of higher-paying positions in other professions. However, the incentives might make them stay (Liang, 2015). However, developing a tracking system to monitor teacher absenteeism allows each school to identify patterns of absenteeism, establish accountability, and take measures accordingly (Castillo et al., 2022).

However, relying solely on one authority to track attendance is not effective, as research has found that headteachers may report absent teachers as present (Rogers & Vegas, 2009). To ensure accurate tracking, it is important to appoint multiple authorities and various mechanisms to track attendance. For example, the Sierra Leone Education Attendance Monitoring System (SLEAMS) uses mobile devices, self-



reporting by school administrators, teacher fingerprint data, and monthly visits from district deputy directors to track attendance ([Castillo et al., 2022](#)). Local education offices should also support the monitoring of teacher attendance in schools, with regular supervision performed by local authorities and stakeholders. This support and monitoring is particularly relevant in remote, rural schools ([UNCEN et al., 2012](#)). Empowering students, parents, and community members to monitor and report teacher absence is an effective strategy ([Karamperidou et al., 2020](#); [UNCEN, UNIPA, SMERU, BPS & UNICEF, 2012](#)). Research has shown that community and parent participation in monitoring teacher attendance, as well as effective school-based management reforms, have increased teacher attendance ([Karamperidou et al., 2020](#); [UNCEN, UNIPA, SMERU, BPS & UNICEF, 2012](#)). To institutionalize parents' and community members' monitoring roles, community-based monitoring systems can be created ([UNCEN, UNIPA, SMERU, BPS & UNICEF, 2012](#)).

Effective monitoring depends on the degree of community involvement as well as the capacity and power that they have to take action against excessive absenteeism. Therefore, it is essential to raise awareness of the issue and build community members' capacity to ensure effective monitoring ([UNCEN, UNIPA, SMERU, BPS & UNICEF, 2012](#)). However, implementing community monitoring in practice can present logistical challenges. For instance, the META program in Peru was discontinued due to logistical challenges despite it being found effective in increasing teacher attendance through parents' voluntary monitoring ([Cueto & Chinen, 2008](#)).

It is important to remember that teacher absenteeism equates to a loss of interaction time between teachers and their students or pupils. In Ghana, the practice has been observed to be on the rise despite numerous efforts by succeeding governments to eradicate the problem. A 20 percent loss in contact hours occurred in public basic schools in 1993, according to the [Ministry of Education \(2010\)](#), with 14 percent of teachers and 16 percent of head teachers absent. Eleven years later, [Karikari-Ababio \(2003\)](#) reported findings from a related study that in 2003, the southern region of Ghana, which includes the Greater Accra, Eastern, Central, and Volta regions, lost 27% of its contact hours due to teacher absence (28%) and head teacher absences (15%), respectively. According to the same survey, teachers and head teachers were missing at rates of 16 and 22 percent in the central belt of the nation, which includes the Brong-Ahafo and Ashanti regions ([Karikari-Ababio, 2003](#)). Additionally, [Norton and Lester \(1998\)](#) studied school administrators across the state and discovered that 71 percent of them listed teacher absenteeism as one of their worst issues. The survey identified teacher absenteeism as the top-ranked "general problem" faced by school personnel directors, and substitute teaching as the third-highest ranked 23 "severe" problem. Along with the rising financial consequences of teacher absenteeism, a significant issue for many school districts is the challenge of obtaining qualified substitute teachers ([Basiru, 2013](#)). A study by [CDD- Ghana \(2008\)](#) found that absenteeism among teachers is high in Ghana and that it is higher among male teachers (35 percent absent at least once) than female teachers (46 percent) and is slightly higher in urban schools (50 percent absent at least once) than in rural schools (46 percent) (23 percent). According to their survey, head instructors miss class more frequently than normal teachers (26 percent miss class at least twice). Additionally, it was noted that supervision is inadequate, with only 57 percent of the teachers surveyed receiving monthly visits from circuit supervisors. Additionally, sanctions against teachers are uncommon ([CDD-Ghana, 2008](#)).

## METHODOLOGY

This research was conducted using a quantitative cross-sectional study with follow-up qualitative interviews. A total of 40 teachers and 683 learners from 10 public schools within Ejisu were used for the study. The ten selected schools were schools that fall under the Ghana Accountability for Learning Outcomes Project (GALOP). The GALOP seeks to improve learning outcomes in schools with a key focus on minimizing factors that negatively influence learning gains among learners. The purposive sampling method was used to select Mathematics and English teachers from the selected schools. To measure absenteeism among teachers, log books for each school were used to identify how frequently subject teachers were around during instructional periods within a term.

Archival secondary data on learner's academic performance in English, and Mathematics within a term for an academic year was ascertained from 10 public Junior High Schools in Ejisu. To arrive at a fair mean score, the arithmetic mean was computed for each school. This was achieved by summing up individual scores of students across the two subject areas and dividing by the number of students with those scores mean.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This aspect of the study presents the findings of the study. The findings are presented in line with the objectives outlined for the study.

*Table 1: Summary of data on Students' scores and Teacher Absenteeism rate*

School	Mean Scores	Teacher Rate	Absenteeism	Number of Students Per School
1	232	3.56		25
2	220	3.41		34
3	206	2.85		84
4	56	9.56		45
5	216	3.21		30
6	310	1.8		56
7	309	1.78		48
8	275	3.88		72
9	378	1.2		34
10	369	1.3		52

Table 1 shows the summary data for students' mean scores across the ten selected schools, teachers' absenteeism rate, and the number of students per school. From the table, the rate of teacher absenteeism was high for school "4" which had a sharp decline in the overall mean for students scores. However, schools 10 and 9 with a relatively small teacher absenteeism rate had high student mean scores respectively.

In furtherance, a simple linear regression was used to assess how teachers' absenteeism rate predicts or explains students' mean scores. Preliminary analysis was conducted to ensure no violation of the assumption of linearity.

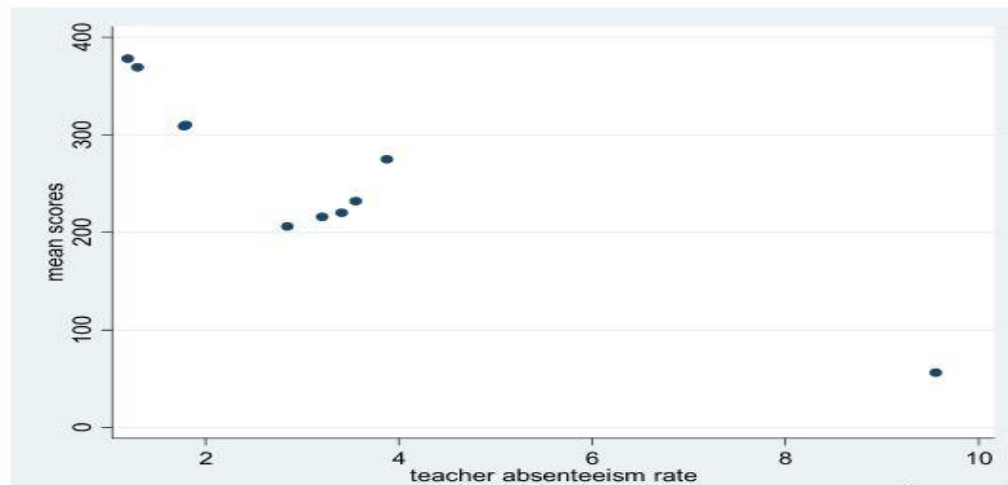


Figure 1: Scatter Plot for mean scores and teacher absenteeism rate

Observing the scatter plot (Figure 1), it becomes evident how distinct the correlation is between the "average student score" and "logarithm of teacher absenteeism." As teacher absenteeism in logarithmic terms increases, student average scores decline, while they rise when teacher absenteeism is lower. This suggests the possibility of employing a model to forecast a student's overall score based on the teacher's absenteeism rate.

The result of the simple linear regression indicated that one predictor (teachers' absenteeism) explains 83% of the variations in students' mean scores ( $F(1, 9) = 39.08, p = 0.00$ ) as shown in Tables 2 and 3. This suggests that the model's predictor (teacher absenteeism) is useful in explaining differences in mean among students' scores. Even though there may be other factors or predictors that could influence or account for the remaining 17% of the variation in students' mean scores.

Table 2: Variability of predictor explained

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.911	0.8301	0.8088	41.144

Table 3: Significance of the Model

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	66156.5211	1	66156.53	39.08	0.00
	Residual	13542.3689	8	1692.79		
	Total	79698.9	9	8855.43		

The finding from this study revealed that a high rate of teacher absenteeism impact on student's academic achievement. This supports the findings of a study conducted by the [World Bank \(2004\)](#). The World Bank study concluded that for every 10% increase in teacher absenteeism, student test scores dropped by approximately 5-6%. This indicates a clear and direct relationship between teacher presence in the classroom and student academic success. Teacher absenteeism could disrupt the continuity of



instruction which could influence students' achievement of learning outcomes. When teachers are absent, it often leads to a loss of instructional time, as substitute teachers may not be as effective in delivering the curriculum. This interrupted learning process can hinder students' ability to grasp and retain essential concepts.

[Chaudhury et al. \(2006\)](#) concluded that teacher absenteeism was associated with a significant decline in learning outcomes for students. Hence, students in schools with higher teacher absenteeism rates are likely to consistently score lower on standardized achievement tests or high-stakes tests. Prolonged teacher absenteeism can lead to increased dropout rates among students. [Muralidharan and Sundararaman \(2011\)](#) found that students in schools with high teacher absenteeism were more likely to drop out, further affecting their long-term academic prospects.

The impact of teacher absenteeism can have long-term consequences for students' academic and career prospects. Lower academic achievement during the formative years can limit future educational and economic opportunities.

### **Reasons teachers absent themselves in the Ejisu Municipality**

Findings from the study revealed that 87.5% of the teachers indicated that their absence from school is basically due to their involvement in a distance learning, weekend, or sandwich programme at a university or college. However, 76.8% of the teachers interviewed agreed that a lack of motivation in the job sometimes compelled them to be absent. Current research conducted by [Saviour et al. \(2022\)](#) in Sagnarigu Municipality in the Northern Region of Ghana revealed a similar trend: teachers pursuing advanced degrees absent themselves from school, thereby negatively impacting the academic success of the students in the BECE. Furthermore, 87.4% of teachers interviewed agreed that economic hardship was a major contributor to absenteeism. The findings from the teachers were supported by the SMC and PTA responses, as they noted that most teachers take on additional work such as tax driving and provisioning stores to complement their teaching. Although previous studies such as [Chaudhury et al. \(2006\)](#), as well as [Rogers and Vegas \(2009\)](#), found contrary results to this study, what distinguished them was that their study areas were all in rural areas, as opposed to this study, which was conducted in an urban environment.

### **Effects of teacher absenteeism on the performance of JHS students in the Ejisu municipality**

The findings of the study revealed a strong correlation between teachers' absenteeism and the student's performance in the BECE for the past three years. The average pass 56 rate for the core subjects including English Language and Mathematics in the past three years in the sample schools is 48.7%. Compared to other municipalities such as Obuasi, which has a cumulative pass rate of 76.2%, The findings of the study support earlier works such as [Raychaudhuri et al. \(2010\)](#), [Tingle et al. \(2012\)](#), [Gottfried \(2014\)](#), and [Utami and Vioeza \(2021\)](#), as they discovered that high absenteeism among teachers impacts negatively on students' academic performance in their final exams since most syllabus cannot be completed.

### **Existing structures that monitor teachers' absenteeism in the Ejusi Municipality**

The findings of the study discovered that stiffer measures such as salary embargo, salary deduction, sacking from the services, and suspension were available to control teachers' absenteeism, but all the headteachers used the weaker measures such as caution notices, a bond of good behavior, and verbal rebukes. This was affirmed, as all the teachers agreed they had not been subjected to the above-mentioned sanctions. Researchers such as [Ejere \(2010\)](#), [Duflo \(2012\)](#), and [Cook \(2017\)](#) have all observed that good

systems for preventing teachers' absenteeism exist in schools, but authorities hardly implement those that have tougher sanctions on teachers.

### **Possible strategies to reduce teacher absenteeism in the Ejisu Municipality**

The findings of the study revealed that teachers (87.3%) in the profession proposed giving incentives to teachers posted to rural areas, granting allowances to offset economic challenges (97.3%), as well as postings to areas near teachers (93.6%), strengthening (79.1%) the deduction of the number of days absent from salaries, especially without proper permission, and granting of study leave for advance learning. The SMC/PTA noted that an improvement in the economic life of teachers will go a long way toward reducing their absenteeism.

### **CONCLUSION**

There is a strong correlation between teachers' absenteeism and students' academic performance in English Language and Mathematics in the Ejisu municipality. Considering that the average pass percentage of 56 for the core subjects including English Language and Mathematics for the past three years, the past rate in the Ejisu municipalities schools was significantly lower (48.7%) while in other municipalities like Obuasi, the pass rate has been as high as 76.2% throughout the years. The findings note several reasons participants cited for absenteeism, including their involvement in distance learning, weekend classes, and sandwich courses at a university or college, as well as poor motivation in the teachers' careers. Economic hardship was a major contributor to absenteeism. Stringent measures such as salary embargo, salary deduction, sacking from the services, and suspension were available to control teachers' absenteeism, but all the headteachers used weaker measures such as caution notice, a bond of good behavior, and verbal rebuke.

Therefore, the study recommends the implementation of incentives such as performance-based pay, recognition, granting of allowances or increasing salaries, and improving working conditions, to motivate teachers to be more committed to their work and to offset economic challenges to reduce the incidence of absenteeism. Additionally, it recommends school authorities use stringent measures such as salary deductions, sacking from the services, and suspension to deter teachers from being absent from their classrooms. Finally, the government and Ghana Education Service should consider granting study leave for teachers to study for second degrees.

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