

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS TOWARDS TEACHERS AND STUDENTS ABSENTEEISM IN THE HILLAREAS

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Paper Received On: 25 APR 2022

Peer Reviewed On: 30 APR 2022

Published On: 1 MAY 2022

Abstract

School absenteeism is identified as one of the problems where the administrators, teachers, parents, community members, society in general and school in particular are facing in various States across the country. For this, schools, administrators, and every stakeholder are working to solve the various problems which led to absenteeism of students as well as teachers. It is in this context that this study was carried out to identify the factors contributing to teachers and student's absenteeism at elementary school level in Hill concentrated areas of Manipur. The sample for the study was students and teachers who were frequently absent from schools, head of the schools, teachers, parents of absentees students. The tools for data collection were questionnaire/ SES Scale, Interview scheduled (un- structured) for family respondents (parents) and students who are regularly absent, questionnaire for teachers and a focus group discussion was carried out with students. This study was primarily qualitative in nature. Some of the findings from the study were lack of basic facilities such as safe drinking water, separate toilet for boys, girls and teachers, no proper classroom settings, job satisfaction are some of the reason which contributes towards students as well as teachers absenteeism.



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Introduction

Elementary Education is important for the overall improvement and development of the nation. It is the foundation on which the development of every citizen and the nation as a whole is built on. However, even with the various initiatives, schemes and programmes

introduced by the Government of India the goal of 100 percent universalization of elementary education in India still remained unreached and unachieved as the primary schools are still facing many problems. Research has shown that attendance is also an important factor in school success among students. Studies has reveals that better attendance is also related to higher academic achievement and better performance for students of all backgrounds, particularly for children coming from lower socio-economic status.

Absenteeism can be defined as persistent, habitual, and unexplained absence from school (Brooks, 1997, as cited in Bond, 2004). According to Merriam-Webster dictionary, absenteeism is "chronic absence." In the context of school, it is the habitual or intentional failure to attend school. While every student may miss some school activities now and then, absence becomes a problem when the student is away from school for many days. Bond noted that chronic absenteeism occurs when a student is absent without reason 20% or more of school time; —this nominal figure is consistently identified regardless of the specific circumstances of the absenteeism. The Auditor General Victoria (Australia, 2004) describes truancy as: the persistent, habitual and unexplained absence from school of a child of compulsory school age, although it can occur with parental knowledge and sometimes consent. Truancy can take the form of fractional truancy, where students arrive late, leave early or skip individual classes.

On the other hand culpable absenteeism refers to lateness or absence problems for which the employee should be held responsible because the problems are within the employee's power to address and correct (Anonymous, 2004). For instance, an employee who is on sick leave even though he/she is not sick, and can be proven that the employee was not sick is guilty of culpable absenteeism. Examples of culpable absenteeism are lateness / leave early, failure to notify or inform or absences without leave and abuse of leave and non-culpable or innocent absenteeism in other words refers to the absence of employees due to illness or injury for reasons beyond the employees' control. Innocent absenteeism is not culpable which means that it is blameless and is not subject to disciplinary action but is approached based on identifying and understanding the medical needs of the employee and any restrictions as identified by the employees' health care practitioner.

However, chronic absence is increasingly identified as an important "early warning sign" that a student is at risk for school failure and early dropout. Chronic absenteeism is usually defined as missing ten percent or more of school days. Unfortunately, few school

districts currently have the capacity to analyze attendance data to identify those students who are chronically absent.

There are many factors which contributed to student absenteeism. Family health or financial concerns, poor school climate, drug and alcohol use, transportation problems, and differing community attitudes towards education are among the conditions that are often associated with a child's frequent absence from school.

It is unfortunate that the number of students in the government schools have been decreasing year by year due to mismanagement of the concerned authority. The numbers of failed students' percentage in government school and colleges have been higher than the private school. The question is how far the education department and the Manipur Boards have taken an initiative to check the government schools running in the state.

The attendance of the teachers in Government schools and colleges including the hill areas is very poor that lead to hamper the day-to-day lesson for the particular subject. This poor attendance of the teacher has highly affected the interest of students who dreams for good careers in life. Students who came from poor economic background are worse affect, for they could not afford for private tuition. They are mostly depending on schools to learn and equip all the knowledge teaches by their teachers.

The causes of absenteeism on the part of teachers are many and includes 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 and poor physical fitness.

It is important to review the existing conditions and staffing norms for teachers in the government schools. These would ensure optimum utilization of teachers and would help to do away the problems of shortage of trained teachers in the school. It is also important to study the present position in respect of accessibility of school's children, infrastructure deficiencies, and non-availability of qualified teachers in the village schools, attendance of teachers and students, and dropout rates.

Govinda and Bandyopadhyay, (2008) The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) programme, universalising elementary education in India, provides special grants to each school for preparing/acquiring teaching-learning material. It also recommends a no-detention policy and continuous and comprehensive evaluation (CCE) to promote effective learning and participation of children in schools. A 'mid-day-meal' scheme is being implemented to protect

children from hunger and malnutrition, but also to increase school enrolment and attendance. These initiatives have improved access and retention but problems of irregular attendance, extended absenteeism and repetition affect many across the country. Particular groups of children belonging to disadvantaged communities and living in remote areas are vulnerable to these problems.

Though education is the talk of the day, it remains a challenge for the state of Manipur until the government run schools are rectified. Once the Government schools can provide the quality of education, then the poor and rich students will avail the benefits of the quality education equally. Hence the need of the hour is to improve the quality of the government schools substantially and do away with the gap between government and private schools.

Need and Significance of the Study

School absenteeism whether it's the teachers or students is considered as a hindrance to progress and development of the individual as well as the society. It is a menace that needs to be solved as shown by many research findings. It is the aim of every school to lessen, if not eradicate, absenteeism among its students and teachers and one way of addressing this problem is to identify the causes that led to absenteeism. Once they are singled out, understood, and analysed, these issues may be addressed with specific actions and measures. This will eventually result in the better performance of the students, teachers, and the school in general.

Hence, it is in this context that this research study was taken up, to identify the factors contributing to teachers and student's absenteeism at elementary school level in Hill concentrated areas of Manipur. All this was carried out keeping in mind the quality elementary education as well as Universalization of Elementary Education (UEE).

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are as follows.

1. To study the factors contributing to teachers and students absenteeism at the elementary level in the Hill areas of Manipur.
2. To find out the parents' views on how the principals and teachers do when the child is regularly absent from the school.
3. To find out the parent's suggestions on the steps schools should take up to help the child go to school regularly.
4. To find out the principal's view on absence of teachers and students in the school.

5. To study the problems faced by the teachers in school which lead to absenteeism
6. To suggest remedial measures to tackle the problem of teacher's and student's absenteeism.

Sample of the Study

The sample of the study consisted of (i) Sample of frequently absent teachers and students (ii) Parents of absentees' students (iii) Teachers and (iv) Head of school/ principals.

Multi- stage sampling technique was adopted in the selection of sample as follows:

Stage 1: Two Districts of Manipur was selected viz., Tengenoupal and Churachanpur Districts. Out of which two Blocks were selected namely Machi and Tengenoupal block from Tengenoupal District and three Blocks namely Samulamlan, Singngat and Henglep from Churachandpur District.

Stage 2: In this stage the school under each of the two Blocks selected at stage 1 was covered; and 6 schools from Machi block and 7 schools from Tengenoupal block were selected following simple random sampling technique. For Churachanpur district, 10 schools from Samulamlan block, 10 from Singngat block and 9 from Henglep block were selected following simple random sampling technique. Thus, the total number of schools was 42.

Stage 3: In this stage 70 absentee's teacher and 472 students from each of the 42 schools selected in stage 2 was selected following simple random sampling technique. Thus, the sample of absentees' teachers and students were 542. Similarly, 130 parents (one from each school was selected following simple random sampling technique). The head of school/principal of all the 42 schools have been included in the sample.

Tools

The tools for collection of data were as follows:

1. A Questionnaire/ SES Scale, with items aiming at collecting information on the respondents socio-cultural, economic, language, geographical background such as- caste, religion, rural/ tribal habitation, types of family, family income, parental and sibling's education and occupation, number of siblings and others for school head teachers/ principals and teachers.
2. Interview scheduled (un- structured) for head-teachers, family respondents (parents).
3. Interview scheduled (un- structured) for students who were regularly absent and community members.
4. Questionnaire for Teachers.

5. Focus Group Discussion with students

For the study, both primary and secondary sources were used.

Methodology

This study was primarily qualitative in nature. Qualitative information was collected through unstructured interviews, discussions, interactions and consultations with respondents such as head-teachers, parents, students in selected schools. Qualitative data was generated through a structured questionnaire administered to teachers, and focus group discussion with students. These primary data were supplemented by secondary data obtained from other relevant documents such as school attendance registers of teachers and students.

Discussions of the Findings

According to the findings of the study, the main factors that leads to teachers- students' absenteeism was lack of basic facilities and infrastructure of schools starting from lack of playground to no proper classroom, shortage of desk and benches, chairs, tables, location of the school, no safe boundary wall etc. It was also found that schools in both the districts lacks some of the much needed facilities such as safe drinking water, separate toilets for teachers, students, girls and boys. There are no hostel facilities for students, neither residential schools nor quarters for teachers since most of the teachers as well as students have to travel from distant villages to schools and it creates more problems during monsoon season. Teachers' job satisfaction, high number of proxy teachers, ghost schools, lack of cooperation from parents when called for parent- teacher meetings are also some of the pertinent factors which has an impact on both teachers and students' absenteeism. Apart from performing their official school duty, many a times teachers were engaged in the various duty outside the schools such as election, census duty etc which further led to high rates of teacher- student absenteeism. The above data also reveals that the schools have no teaching learning materials, no access to technology such as ICT/ computer lab for educational purpose, which is now considered as an integral part of school education and needs to be introduced in order to meet the needs and requirements of the ever changing society.

The other pertinent reasons include shortage of textbooks, uniforms, stationeries, no counselling cell to address the problems of student's absenteeism, lack of other curricular activities such as cultural activities and sports equipment's are also some of the factors. Other factors contributing particularly towards students' absenteeism are the economic and the social factors, which include poverty, occupation of parents, unemployment, lack of financial

help, poor economic background and low family income, students engaging in domestic work, helping parents in the field, illiterate parents, and lack of motivation from parents, unsupportive and un-favourable family as well as school environment.

The responses of the students through focus group discussions shows that the major reasons for being regularly absent were teacher's irregularities, lack of libraries and TLM's, no proper distribution of textbooks and uniforms, financial problems, death of parents, lack of interest in the studies, poor grades, fear of test, poor health condition, teaching not understandable, lack of encouragement from schools. Based on the discussion there was another pertinent factor, which contributed to student and teacher absenteeism and that was bandh and strike. The frequent bandhs and strikes were the main hindrances in maintaining academic calendars. Another disheartening situation was that if some sections or group of people threatened to call a bandh on a particular day only few students and teachers come to the schools.

Parents view on what principals or teachers does when the child is regularly absent from the school

The most common practice taken up by the principals and teachers considering students absenteeism was that they arrange for parent- teacher meetings, which was conducted twice annually and not on monthly basis. Sometimes personal visit to the student's home to know the reason for being absent was done. The principal at times sits with students for counselling session, teachers mark as absent in the students' school diary whenever the students were absent. It was observed that apart from the common parent- teacher meetings not much effort was made to curb or find the problems of absenteeism among the students from the school side.

Parent's Suggestions on What School Should do to help the Child Go to School Regularly

Following were some of the suggestions from the parents.

1. Friendly and supportive environment should be created in the school by the principal and teachers.
2. Classes should be more interactive by introducing activities and TLM's thereby making the teaching learning more fun, participatory and more active for students.
3. Most importantly, the parents also stress on providing regular mid-day meal, separate toilet should be constructed for both boys and girls, need proper classrooms, enough desk, benches and need to maintain discipline in the school.

4. School inspection by the concerned education inspector should be done regularly.
5. Should not appoint proxy teachers (who give their jobs to another person and give half of their salary to that person and they themselves were busy in some other jobs).
6. Introduce other curricular activities like sports, literary activities, Art such as music, dance, cultural programme etc., in the school.
7. Proper playground should be there in all the schools.
8. Government incentives such as free uniforms, textbooks, stationeries etc. should be well distributed as some of them do not receive. Textbooks also should be distributed on time.
9. Teachers should come to school regularly in order to reduce students' absenteeism. This will set as a good example to the students.
10. Schools should organize group activities and follow up meetings with teachers, parents and students should be conducted from time to time.

Principal's View on Absence of Teachers in the School

As per the data collected, the principals of various schools agreed that when the teachers were regularly absent, they were not able to complete the syllabus by the end of the year. Most importantly, this hinders the learning process of the students. This may lead to poor performance in the studies, negligence in performing their regular task such as reading, writing, etc. given by the teachers. Further, all the principals have also mentioned that regular absenteeism of teachers will lead to a complete lack of quality education in the whole educational system.

Principal's View on Student's Absenteeism

As per the findings absenteeism among the students definitely hamper the child's learning process as S/he could not cope up with their studies and most importantly find difficulties in understanding the text therefore leading to poor reading skills, learning, writing and solving sums. Being absent regularly in the school would also lead to lower rates of present percentage of the students as it is one of the important factors for allowing a student to sit for promotion exams. It was also mentioned that students would lose on the classroom teaching and notes given by teachers for their studies and hence lead to lower grades and less learning efficiency.

Problems Faced by the Teachers in School which Lead to Absenteeism

As per the findings the followings were some of the problems, which were faced by the teachers in the school.

1. Lack of proper infrastructure, no proper flow of funds for teaching learning materials or Educational Kits, which is an important factor for effective teaching- learning process.
2. Low salary for teachers leads to lack of job satisfaction therefore seeking for additional income as well as job opportunities.
3. It has been mentioned that there is a need for accommodation for the teachers, as most of them have to travel from distant villages to come to school, as there are no proper transportation, which is needed to reach the school on time.
4. Another problem faced by the teachers was lack of toilets and although there is staffroom, it was not well-constructed and insufficient furniture's for the teachers.
5. One common problem faced by them was that the parents do not cooperate when called for parent- teacher meeting with regard to their child performance in studies.
6. Apart from teaching in the schools, they were also asked to perform various duties such as polling duty during elections etc. They reported that this hampers and creates problem in delivering their classroom duty as a teacher and therefore distracting in the teaching-process.

Suggestions to Tackle the Problem of Student's Absenteeism

1. Financial support from the government in the form of scholarships should be provided for some students, who are not financially sound.
2. Conducting parent- teacher meeting for students every month.
3. The parents should also support their child morally, mentally and imbibe in them the power and benefits of education.
4. It has also been mentioned that proper guidance and counselling cell should be set up in the school.
5. Strict discipline and more vigilance towards student's absenteeism are needed.
6. Proper working of the School Management Committee (SMC) member should be observed in order that the school meets its basic facilities such as playground, library, drinking water facilities, toilets, sports equipment's, TLM's, electricity, cultural/ sports/ literary activities etc.
7. The SMC members should works on tracking every child's progress and monitoring the school development plan.
8. SMC meeting should be held on a regular basis.

Suggestions to Tackle the Problem of Teacher's Absenteeism

Following are the suggestions.

1. Quarters should be provided to teachers as this will help in curbing the absenteeism among the teachers.
2. Transportation facilities should be provided for teachers travelling from distant villages.
3. Regular meetings and discussions should be taken up with teachers who were regularly absent.
4. Proper or basic facilities (staff room, toilets, drinking water, TLMs etc.) should be provided to motivate teachers.
5. There should be regular teachers- principal discussions on the importance of education, how to create effective teaching- learning process and how to deal with teachers and students absenteeism.
6. Government should not send teachers to other related work such as election duty, census etc.
7. Disciplinary action may be taken for teachers who are regularly absent.
8. Good salary for teachers and separate incentives to teachers working at the remote or rural areas.

Educational Implications

Based on the findings this study will definitely benefit the administrators, policy makers, SMC members, teachers, parents and students. In a nutshell, all the stakeholders will realize the importance of teachers and students being regular to the school and most importantly its impact on quality education.

Conclusion

In order to curb with the problem of absenteeism, timely actions from district educational inspectors, SMDC's, principals of the schools, teachers, parents, and community members/ elders is required and necessary action need to be taken. There is an urgent need to organize various community awareness and sensitization programs. This will address the problem to curb the issue of both teachers as well as students' absenteeism. Despite all the above problems faced by educational institute of Manipur there is another crucial matter, which is hampering the education system that is frequent bandh and strike. A peaceful social environment is extremely crucial for having a conducive academic environment. Learning and teaching as a process are possible only within a healthy and peaceful academic atmosphere.

Therefore, to ensure progress and development of individual, society as well as the nation there is an urgent need to improve the regularity of teachers and students in the school.

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