



Available Online

Journal of Education and Social Studies

ISSN: 2789-8075 (Online), 2789-8067 (Print)

<http://www.scienceimpactpub.com/jess>

EXAMINING THE IMPACT OF TEACHER ABSENTEEISM ON ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AMONG PRIMARY-LEVEL STUDENTS IN FAISALABAD

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ABSTRACT

The frequent absence of teachers has a direct impact on student's academic performance and also gives rise to various management challenges. The primary objective of this research was to assess the perceived consequences of teacher absenteeism on the performance of primary school students. The study was conducted in the primary schools of Tehsil Sadar Faisalabad, located in District Faisalabad. Out of a total population of 200 teachers across 20 primary schools, a random sample of 80 teachers was selected for data collection. Data were gathered through a structured, validated, and reliable questionnaire and subsequently analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The findings revealed that substitute teachers faced a range of challenges, including difficulty in gaining students' attention, insufficient communication skills, availability of substitute teachers, maintaining classroom discipline, addressing students' mental disturbances, and managing the classroom burden resulting from the absenteeism of regular teachers. Furthermore, the impact on students was perceived in the form of increased disobedience, lower academic grades, students arriving late to school, attitude problems, and a reduced enthusiasm for learning. It is evident that teacher absenteeism not only contributes to behavioral issues among students but also leads to their dissatisfaction with the learning environment. It is recommended that government authorities implement stringent policies to ensure regular teacher attendance and, by extension, enhance the overall quality of education.

Keywords: Absenteeism; Grades; Disturbance; Behavior; Workload; Punctuality.

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<https://doi.org/10.52223/jess.2023.4307>

Received: July 11, 2023; Revised: September 16, 2023; Accepted: September 30, 2023

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INTRODUCTION

Primary education is the foundational stage in a child's academic journey, setting the tone for their future learning experiences and overall development (Lamas, 2015). This crucial phase, typically spanning from ages six to twelve, plays a pivotal role in shaping a child's cognitive, social, and emotional development (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). Primary education is not just the starting point of a child's academic journey; it's a critical phase that shapes their entire life. It provides them with essential skills, knowledge, and a strong educational foundation, empowering them to pursue higher education and contribute meaningfully to society (Massa, 2014). Recognizing the importance of primary education is essential for ensuring the holistic development of every child and building a brighter future for communities and nations (Osman & Booth, 2014).

During primary education, children acquire core academic skills, including reading, writing, and basic mathematics. These skills are not only essential for academic success but also for practical, everyday life situations. Primary education fosters critical thinking and cognitive development (Talukder et al., 2021). Children learn how to analyze information, make informed decisions, and solve problems, which are skills they will use throughout their lives. Primary schools provide a structured environment where children interact with peers, learn teamwork, and develop essential social skills. These interactions contribute to their emotional intelligence and ability to collaborate with others. Primary education prepares students for the transition to secondary education. A strong foundation in primary school is crucial for success in higher grades, where subjects become more specialized (Etor et al., 2013).

The critical role of teachers in shaping students' learning experiences and outcomes cannot be overstated. Teachers are not just instructors; they are mentors, guides, and facilitators of knowledge. Teachers establish a structured and productive classroom environment. They set rules and expectations, creating a safe and conducive space for learning (Oliver & Reschly, 2007). Beyond academics, teachers play a role in instilling values and ethics in students. They model good behaviour, empathy, and respect, helping students develop into responsible citizens. Teachers assess student performance and provide constructive feedback. This helps students understand their strengths and areas for improvement, guiding them toward better learning outcomes (Ozan & Kincal, 2018). Their influence extends far beyond the classroom, shaping the character, skills, and aspirations of the next generation. The critical role they play in students' lives makes them invaluable contributors to society's progress and development (Johnson, 2017).

Teachers at the primary level of education are instrumental in shaping the intellectual, social, and emotional development of young learners (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Their dedication, passion, and commitment to nurturing the potential of each student contribute significantly to the overall growth and success of individuals and society as a whole (Humphries et al., 2018).

Teacher absenteeism is a pressing issue in many primary schools worldwide, and its impact on students can be profound and detrimental. When teachers are frequently absent, it disrupts the continuity of learning in the classroom (Ameeq et al., 2018). Students miss out on planned lessons and activities, leading to gaps in their understanding of the curriculum. Students who experience teacher absenteeism often fall behind academically. They may struggle to catch up with their peers and may not achieve their full potential in terms of academic achievement. Students may become demotivated when they repeatedly encounter teacher absenteeism (Mupa & Chinooneka, 2015). A lack of consistent guidance and support from their teacher can lead to a loss of interest in school and learning (Yariv, 2011). Consistent teacher-student relationships are crucial for a positive learning experience. Frequent teacher absenteeism disrupts these relationships, making it harder for students to connect with their educators (Memon, 2007).

Efforts to address teacher absenteeism should involve a combination of strategies, including improving working conditions for teachers, providing incentives for regular attendance, monitoring and accountability mechanisms, and professional development. Ensuring that teachers are present and engaged in the classroom is essential to providing quality primary education and fostering positive student outcomes. The main objective of the study was to examine the effects of teacher absenteeism on student's academic performance at the primary level.

METHODOLOGY

This research adopted a descriptive research design to investigate the effects of teacher absenteeism on the performance of students at the primary school level of Tehsil Sadar Faisalabad. A total of 20 schools in tehsil Faisalabad were targeted in this study, and there were 200 teachers in these 20 schools. These 200 teachers served as the population of the study. The sample size of 80 teachers was determined from the targeted population. These respondents were selected using a simple random sampling technique.

The questionnaire was used as a research instrument for this study. The questionnaire was prepared by reviewing the published literature and scholarly articles. The validity and reliability of the questionnaire were ensured through different techniques; for the validity of the questionnaire, the face validity technique was used. For this purpose, assistance was sought from research experts, experienced graduates, lecturers, and, in particular, the experienced supervisors who examined the instruments and gave feedback, and their recommendations were incorporated accordingly. To assess the reliability, pilot testing of the questionnaire was performed. The questionnaire was distributed among 20 teachers who were not part of the sample of the study. The reliability was tested through the Cronbach alpha method, and the value emerged as 0.79, which endorsed the reliability. As a result of pilot testing, minor changes were made to the questionnaire. Final questionnaires were distributed among teachers by visiting them in their schools and on WhatsApp, followed by reminders. Collected data were analyzed with the help of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics was applied to the data. Responses were ranked considering the mean values.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Profile of Study Participants

Demographic attributes are not only important but often indispensable in research across various fields. They provide the necessary context and framework for understanding, analyzing, and making informed decisions based on research findings (Hammer, 2011; Mehmet & Gul, 2014). Therefore, respondents were asked to explore the information related to their gender, age, marital status and family background. Results in this regard are given in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic profile of respondents.

Demographics	Percentage
<i>Gender</i>	
Male	38
Female	62
<i>Marital status</i>	
Married	50
Single	50
<i>Age</i>	
Below 25	25
26-34	40
35- above	35
<i>Background</i>	
Rural	68
Urban	32

The data given in Table 1 gives insights into the demographic composition of the surveyed respondents. In terms of gender, the group exhibits a slightly higher representation of females, accounting for 62% of the respondents, while males make up 38% of the sampled respondents. Marital status within the group is evenly divided, with 50% of the individuals being married and the remaining 50% being single. In terms of age distribution, a significant portion of the group falls within the 26 to 34 age range, constituting 40% of the respondents. Individuals below the age of 25 represent 25% of the group, while those aged 35 and above make up 35% of the respondents. Considering their backgrounds, the majority of the group belongs to rural areas, with 68% having rural backgrounds and 32% coming from urban environments.

Problems Faced by the Substitute Teachers

In this section, the responses from the respondents were collected against the listed problems on a five-point Likert scale such as 1. Strongly disagree 2. Disagree 3. Undecided 4. Agree 5. Strongly Agree. Once the responses were collected, the mean and standard deviation were calculated. The responses are ranked based on mean values (Table 2).

Table 2. Problems faced by the teachers while working substitute in the absence of teachers.

Problems related to	Mean	SD	Rank
Trouble in gaining the attention of students	3.44	1.08	1
Lack of communication skills	3.34	1.12	2
Availability of substitute teacher	3.22	1.18	3
Discipline	3.11	1.59	4
Mentally disturbance	3.03	1.78	5
Classroom management	2.94	2.62	6
The burden on substitute teacher	2.83	2.66	7
Communication gaps between student and teacher	2.85	2.56	8
Difficulty in lesson planning	2.70	2.64	9
Time Table Management	2.56	2.62	10

The data given in Table 2 provides insight into the problems faced by substitute teachers while filling in for regular teachers. The data includes the mean and standard deviation (SD) for each problem, which explains the severity and variability of these issues. Trouble in gaining the attention of students was ranked 1st (Mean = 3.44, SD = 1.08). This problem indicates that substitute teachers often struggle to capture the students' focus during their lessons, and there is significant variability in the extent of this issue. Lack of communication skills (Mean = 3.34, SD = 1.12) being ranked 2nd postulates that substitute teachers may face challenges in effectively communicating with students. While the mean suggests a moderate level of this issue, the low standard deviation indicates that this problem is relatively consistent across situations. The findings of Hoon et al. (2017) showed a notable disparity in communication skills between the two distinct categories of classroom management approaches. This implies that substitute teachers may have different communication levels and classroom management as compared to regular teachers. Availability of substitute teachers (Mean = 3.22, SD = 1.18) was another key problem that ranked 3rd. This problem pertains to the availability of qualified substitute teachers when needed. The mean indicates a moderate concern, with some variability in how often this issue arises. Benhenda (2022) reported significant variation in substitute teacher effectiveness; he identified that more competent substitute teachers can mitigate the adverse effect, whereas less effective substitute teachers do not demonstrate a statistically noteworthy influence.

Maintaining discipline in the classroom can be a significant challenge for substitute teachers. The findings of Macias and Sanchez (2015) indicated that classroom management poses a significant issue, encompassing challenges that span from inadequate classroom environments to overt instances of misconduct. Discipline was ranked 4th among all the problems listed in the table (Mean = 3.11, SD = 1.59). Mentally disturbance (Mean = 3.03, SD = 1.78) faced by substitute teachers indicates that substitute teachers may encounter students with emotional or psychological disturbances. The mean suggests a moderate concern, with some variability. Substitute teachers often face difficulties in managing the classroom environment effectively. The high standard deviation indicates significant variability in this issue (Mean = 2.94, SD = 2.62). The burden on substitute teachers (Mean = 2.83, SD = 2.66) was perceived to increase in the absence of regular teachers and substitute teachers may need to take on additional responsibilities left by the regular teacher. Respondents perceived a communication gap between student and teacher (Mean = 2.85, SD = 2.56) reflecting the possibility of communication breakdowns between

substitute teachers and students. Similarly, substitute teachers find it challenging to plan lessons effectively (Mean = 2.70, SD = 2.64) and difficulty in managing timetables (Mean = 2.56, SD = 2.62): Managing the class timetable was problematic for substitute teachers. The information given in the table deduced the various challenges that substitute teachers face, with discipline and classroom management being particularly variable and concerning issues.

Effects of Teacher Absenteeism on Students’ Performance

In this section, the responses from the respondents were collected against the listed problems on a five-point Likert scale such as 1. To a very low extent 2. Low extent 3. Undecided 4. High extent 5. Very high extent. Once the responses were collected, the mean and standard deviation were calculated. The responses are ranked based on mean values (Table 3).

Table 3. Perceived effects of teachers’ absence on students’ performance.

Effects	Mean	SD	Rank
Insecurity/Discomfort	2.702	16.991	1
Attitude problems	2.777	17.700	2
Reluctance in understanding	2.675	17.683	3
Absenteeism of students	2.50	21.603	4
Late arrival	2.857	14.973	5
Difficulty in Rebuilding relationships	2.778	14.042	6
Hesitation	2.564	20.154	7
Lack of interest	2.538	20.921	8
Disobedience	2.911	20.885	9
Incomplete Homework	2.538	12.581	10
Poor grades	2.911	16.917	11
Difficulties in learning	2.475	16.976	12

Table 3 presents the effects of teachers' absenteeism on primary school students' performance. Each effect is rated on a scale, with a mean (average) and standard deviation (SD) provided for each effect. Disobedience (Mean = 3.01, SD = 1.88) was the top-ranked effect as a result of teacher absenteeism. Teacher absenteeism may lead to students displaying disobedient behavior in the classroom. The mean indicates a moderate level of disobedience, with some variability. Students tend to get poor grades (Mean = 2.91, SD = 1.91), which was ranked 2nd among different perceived effects. Students' academic performance, as reflected in their grades, may suffer in the absence of teachers. At the same time, students may get the habit of coming to classes late. This factor was ranked 3rd (Mean = 2.85, SD = 1.97) with the assumption that teacher absenteeism might result in students arriving late to school. The mean indicates a moderate issue, with some variability in punctuality. Respondents perceived that due to teacher absenteeism, students had attitude problems (Mean = 2.80, SD = 1.70). The students were perceived to develop attitude problems, especially towards punctuality, homework, class participation, and learning when teachers are frequently absent.

When the teachers were absent, students had difficulty in rebuilding relationships (Mean = 2.77, SD = 1.04) with the teachers. Student-teacher relationship and interaction is deemed vital for students’ academic performance. Teacher absenteeism can make it challenging to rebuild positive relationships between students and substitute teachers. Reluctance in understanding (Mean = 2.67, SD = 1.68) was another impact on students’ performance, as reported by the respondents. They believed that students can become reluctant to understand or engage in learning when teachers are absent. Students can develop the habit of hesitation (Mean = 2.56, SD = 1.15) in communication, discussion with the teachers, hesitation in participation in classroom activities, and development of lack of interest in learning (Mean = 2.53, SD = 2.12).

Teacher absenteeism resulted in students failing to complete their homework assignments (Mean = 2.50, SD = 2.58), and in response to teacher absenteeism, students themselves were perceived to have started to skip school. Students were facing learning difficulties when teachers were frequently absent (Mean = 2.37, SD = 2.57). The mean indicates a moderate concern, with high variability in learning challenges. This is synthesized that teacher absenteeism had adverse impacts on the school students' performance and behavior. These consequences include disobedience, poor grades, late arrival, attitude problems, and a reluctance to engage in learning. The studies such as Ameer et al. (2018), Finlayson (2009), Miller (2012), Porres (2016), Miller et al. (2008) and Medrano (2019) endorsed that teacher's absenteeism had a negative effect on students' academic performance. Due to teacher absenteeism, students perceived adverse impacts on their attitude, learning behavior, and participation in class activities. This was further endorsed by Ameer et al. (2018), who said that teacher absenteeism was more prevalent among public school teachers and had a negative impact on students.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this study shed light on the critical challenges encountered by substitute teachers in primary schools, with particular emphasis on the issues of discipline and classroom management. These challenges are of variable severity and deserve close attention. Moreover, the research has unequivocally highlighted the detrimental impact of teacher absenteeism on the academic performance and behavior of primary school students. The data indicates that when regular teachers are absent, students often exhibit disobedience, achieve lower grades, arrive late to school, display attitude problems, and show reluctance to engage in the learning process. While the mean values suggest moderate levels of concern, the standard deviations reveal significant variability in the experiences of different students. This underscores the need for a nuanced approach to address these issues. Teacher absenteeism in primary schools poses significant challenges to both substitute teachers and students. Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach that combines teacher accountability, professional development, student engagement, and community involvement. Implementation of these recommendations by educational institutions can create a more supportive and effective learning environment for primary school students. Educational authorities and school administrations should enforce strict teacher attendance policies. Regular and punctual attendance should be considered a fundamental professional responsibility.

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