



TEACHER BEHAVIOUR AND ITS EFFECTS ON PUPILS' ATTENDANCE IN BASIC SCHOOLS IN THE NORTHERN REGION OF GHANA

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ABSTRACT

"There is no exaggeration that a spacious building, costly equipment and very sound syllabus will serve some useful purpose only when there is a teacher in the classroom who is alive to the nobility of the profession" Agarwal 2005.

This paper empirically examines the importance of a teacher and how his behaviour in school negatively affects attendance in basic schools in Northern Region of Ghana. The study employed both qualitative and quantitative methods and also used primary and secondary data. In addition to the processes and procedures of sampling, data collection and handling, multi-stage cluster technique was used as well as interview guides and questionnaire for data collection. The qualitative data in the analysis was used to support the quantitative data in many cases. It was found that absenteeism on the part of many teachers' in the region has been a topic for discussion over the past decade, thus most teachers in the region attend school only thrice in a week (Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays). The female teachers absent themselves from school more than the male teachers. It was also revealed that the female pupils at the JHS are always being verbally and sexually harassed by most of the male teachers. Absenteeism in many instances discouraged many pupils from attending school especially the female pupils in the region and this widens the disparity in attendance in favour of the male children. The paper calls for effective monitoring by Ghana Education Service and the institutions for effective measures (for example dismissal) to deal with teachers who constantly absent themselves from school. The paper also suggests the involvement of the traditional rulers in the monitoring of the teachers in the various communities else, the achievement of gender parity in attendance in the region will always be an illusion.

Keywords: Absenteeism, Attendance, Behaviour, Gender, Disparity, Basic Education, Teacher

INTRODUCTION

Teachers in every society play a vital role in the lives of children in the classroom. They are best known for the role of educating the children who are placed under their care. They set the tone of their classrooms, build warm environment, mentor and nurture children, become role models, listen and look for sign of troubles in the classroom. The responsibility of a teacher in the classroom often goes beyond teaching facts and figures and basic skills. From primary school through adolescence, children undergo constant changes and progress through many stages of development, each stage of development puts different demand on the teacher and changes the dynamics of the classroom. Children also progress at different rates both socially and academically so a teacher must take pain to meet the variety of different needs each day. Teaching children to be good citizens as well as good learners is an important part of the classroom activity that a teacher directs. The teacher plays an important role in molding and shaping the attitudes, habits, manners and above all the character and personality of pupils therefore, his absence in

the classroom is a hindrance to the development and progress of children in the society. The following quotations were the views of some great philosophers, thinkers and statesmen in relation to the importance of a teacher in the classroom cited in Argawal (2006).

John Adams (1735-1826) the second president of the United States of America said “*A teacher affects eternity, he can never tell where his influence stops*”

Henry Brooks Adams (1838-1918) also said “*I am indebted to my father for a living but to my teacher for living well*”

Alexandra (356-323B.C) said “*Teachers who educate children deserve more than their parents*”

John Dewey (1859-1952) said “*woe to the teacher who teaches one thing with the lips and carries another in the heart*”.

Richard Hooker (1554-1600) said “*the teacher is indeed the architect. Our future society can neglect him at its own peril*”

Sri Aurobin (1872-1950) an Indian philosopher said “*The teacher is the prophet of the true God and the usher of the true kingdom of God*”

Robert Smith (1634-1716) said “*the teacher is like a lamp lighting other lamps. But a lamp cannot put light into laps if it does not burn and shed light*”

From the above views of these great philosophers, it is clear that teachers are so important that their absence in the classroom seriously and negatively affect the pupils or the students they teach. A growing number of studies have shown that teacher absence is an important obstacle in the provision of education in many low- and middle income countries. A study of six countries in Africa (Ghana, Botswana, Gambia, Mali, Nigeria and Sierra Leone) by Bell et al. (1994) in which primary schools were randomly visited two or three times between 2008 and 2010. It was found that 11 to 27 percent of primary school teachers were absent on the day of the visit.

Bell et al (1994) study of four states in India by Bruno (2002), found that one third of headteachers were absent at the time of the school visit and any teaching-related activity was found in only half of all schools visited. The presence of a teacher in the classroom is a central aspect of education and a necessary condition for pupils learning. The gender gap in school attendance is largely a rural and urban phenomenon in Ghana, attributed to a historically low level of government investment in human development. According to Mate et al (2005), in coeducational settings, absence by teachers is unlikely to have different implications for the share of enrolled boys or girls who miss out on education. In Ghana, however, teacher absence is markedly higher in government schools which are staffed exclusively by men more than women than in private schools staffed exclusively by both men and women.

Evidence suggests that constraints in access to government schools as measured by distance to or the presence of a school in a community are key factors in the decision of parents to enroll their children, particularly girls (Lloyd, Mete, and Sathar 2005). The number of government schools in Ghana has risen since the early 1990s, although by 2010 about one third of communities in rural Ghana still had no government primary school (World Bank report 2011). Indeed, factors such as being male or a headteacher, which reflect higher salary and seniority were consistently related to higher absence probably because they confer power and protection from any monitoring systems in place. Low teacher accountability is a major problem in government schools. The assignment of teaching posts is often based on political connections (Hasnain 2005) and once hired, firing teachers is difficult. There is no comprehensive system to monitor teacher absence in Ghana (World Bank Report, 2011).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Absenteeism, according to Epstein and Sheldon (2002), is any failure of an employee to report for or to remain at work as scheduled, regardless of reasons. Teasley (2004) writes that absenteeism is a period of not attending school. Truancy according to Bell et al (1994) , is an “unexcused and unlawful absence from school without parental knowledge and consent.

The most cited absenteeism model that is used in a multitude of studies on teacher absenteeism was the Steers and Rhodes’ (1978) model. They used a multi- variable approach that encompasses psychological as well as personal characteristics of teachers. Based on the ideas of Steer and Rhodes (1978),

demographic variables such as personal and family-related characteristics are slated as well as psychological variables such as job satisfaction, motivation to be absent and the ability to attend work. The model emphasizes that attendance is highly influenced by the practices of the organization. McKay (1999) purported that the teacher attendance rate has an effect on pupils' achievement. The authors discovered that in classes where teachers had the greatest number of absence, individual pupils standardized test scores were low, attendances were low and over all school scores were down as a result of frequent absence of teachers.

Bell et al (1994) writes that truancy on the part of teachers is associated with sexual promiscuity, alcoholism, drug abuse and dropping out of school. Teasley (2004) believes that truancy from school may be one of the first sign in a series of anti-social behaviors that lead to negative personal and developmental outcomes. Moreover it is influenced by a lack of community support, an unsupportive school environment, disorderly family life, harsh weather, transportation problems, personal deficits and poor health. Pupils in urban settings are confronted with many challenges. According to the study, as childhood poverty increases nationally, truancy rates have skyrocketed to new levels. Pupils, who go to urban schools where the majority of pupils have low socioeconomic statuses, experience a larger teacher absent rate than their peers in rural or suburban settings. Since many of students in urban schools operate in the affective domain instead of the cognitive domain, these students tend to believe that school and teachers do not care or believe in them and are more apt to skip or be truant to class. As a result, more staff development must be established to better aid teachers and administrators in discovering ways to build relationships with these pupils.

Absenteeism on the part of teachers is a complete lost to the educational system. Based on the research by Unicomb et al (1992), gender and life stage plays an important part in determining the profiles of teachers who are absent from the instructional environment. It was discovered that female teachers tend to be absent more as they increased with age. Male teachers were out more days in their thirties than at any other time in their teaching career. In another study by Scott and McClellan (1990), it was reported that male teachers tend to miss fewer days than women by a ratio of 3.39 days to 5.29 days per academic year. Additionally basic school teachers missed far more days of work than secondary school teachers by a ratio of 6.63 days to 3.32 days (McClellan 1990).

Unicomb et al (1992) further found that Wednesdays were missed more than any day per week and that Mondays had the fewest number of days missed from work. A common misconception is that employees will miss work on Friday. The research indicates that teachers tend to stay at school in anticipation for the weekend. The authors discovered that teachers are more likely to be absent during the months of November, January, and April. This usually resides around holidays or in times of long periods between holidays.

Porwoll (1980) believes that novice teachers with two to four years of experience and veteran teachers who have worked within the educational arena between twenty- three to twenty- five years miss the fewest number of days of school. Novice teachers are still in the infant developmental phase of their career and tend to have fewer personal responsibilities, such as child rearing. However, Jacobson (1990) found that teachers who were nearing retirement were absent on a more frequent basis. In a study by Pitkoff (1993), teachers who received low performance markings tend to miss a larger number of days than those who did not. Teachers with low marks do not feel a connection to the workplace and believe that they are ineffective in the classroom. This gives an impetus for school administrators to develop teacher growth plans early in the academic year for low performing teachers than later in the year.

Scott and McClellan (1990) write that the school level taught and the levels of the teaching license were two primary predictors of teacher absences. Through their investigation, it was discovered that the higher the degree obtained by the teacher, the higher the number of days they were absent from the classroom. Basic school teachers missed the most days. Bruno (2002) stresses that students in a classroom eventually lose the desire to learn when the regular teacher is frequently absent and the delivery of the instruction is by an array of substitute teachers. As a result of this key finding, substitutes are hard to find to replace absent teachers in urban schools. Regular education teachers who are off during their

conference period do not particularly volunteer to substitute (Mckay 1999). Pupils' academic achievement falls and pupils' do not feel connected to the classroom.

Bruno (2002) purports that when there is a high teacher absence; it tends to lower the morale of remaining teachers resulting in high teacher turnover. Other teachers tend to feel more burdened because they may have to plan for the teacher who is absent. Addition to teacher morale, urban teachers tend to become frustrated with poor resource allocations in their schools and tend to desire to disconnect from the inner city campus with high rates of minority children whose families are labeled as low- income. Because of this, Bruno (2002) emphasizes that teaching at low- income area schools increases the propensity of teachers to be absent. Jacobson (1988) believes that a pay incentive plan helps to decrease teacher absenteeism. Teachers will remain at work to obtain a pay incentive. Scott, Markham, and Robers (1985) believe that recognition motivates employees to stay at work and that pay incentives can be used if they are designed properly.

Scott, Markham and Taylor (1987) believe that "a good attendance policy also includes a progressive discipline clause" p. 100. Employees under this guidance must receive increasing levels of punishment for more severe or repeated violations of the organization's policy. The goal is to shape the employee's behavior and to give the information they need to understand the consequences of their actions. The policy needs to be procedural and must be ingrained throughout the academic year to staff members.

RESEARCH METHODS

The study was done in 10 districts of the Northern Region of Ghana and within each district three communities were selected therefore thirty communities were selected. Within each community a primary school was selected and in some cases both primary and Junior High School (JHS) were selected.

The study employed both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection and data analysis. Multi-stage cluster sampling was used (simple random, purposive and accidental sampling). Household questionnaire and interview guide were used for the data collection, especially the primary data while the secondary data were sourced via internet, published thesis, journal and relevant textbooks. In all 30 headteachers were interviewed, 150 household heads and 96 children from both primary and JHS schools. The qualitative data in the analysis were used to support the quantitative data and in some instances charts and tables were used to describe the findings with the help of the Statistical Package for Social Scientists.

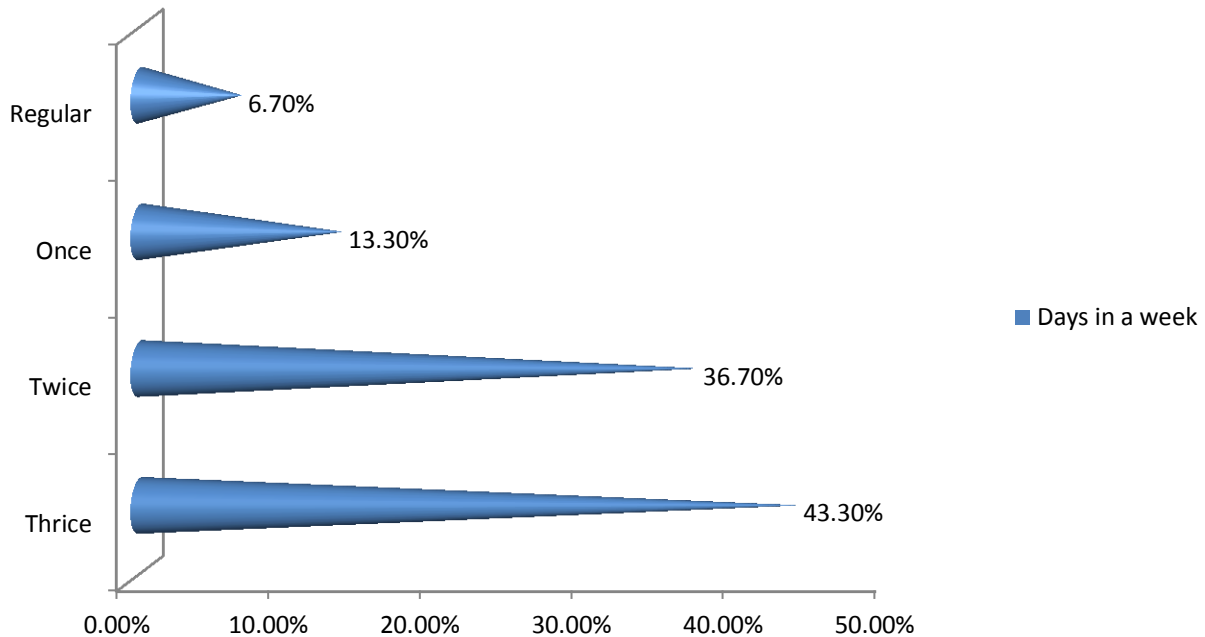
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study found that absenteeism among teachers in the Northern Region was high when the attendance books for teachers in the various schools were cross-checked. It was observed that many teachers did not sign the attendance books on Thursdays and Fridays in each week, meaning they did not attend school on those days. Out of five teaching days in a week, many teachers attended school only three days. It was further found from the attendance books that out of a total number of 70 days, many teachers were absent for 28 days. The effects of this absenteeism on the part of some teachers cannot be over emphasized. Out of a total of 744 days for both girls and boys, the girls attended 221 days while the boys attend 523 days. This was for the 2 days that teachers absented themselves from school. The figures were calculated using the total number of pupils in the classes of the schools visited. It can be interpreted that absenteeism on the part of some teachers negatively affect girls more than boys and this further widens gender disparity in attendance in favour of the boys. Absenteeism was high in the rural areas as compared with the urban areas and this was due to the lack of proper supervision in the rural areas.

In a question relating to teacher absenteeism, the headteachers were not realistic in their responses they contradicted themselves. Eighty seven percent (87 percent) of the headteachers said that their teachers do attend school regularly but the records from the attendance register in the school did not support their claim. They explained that though not all the teachers live in the communities in which they teach, they do attend school. Some live in the big towns and commute daily to school therefore, there is no assurance that every teacher will be in school at all times. Thirteen percent (13 percent) of the headteachers who said that their teachers do absent themselves from school showed the researcher the teachers' attendance register as evidence and it was found that not all the teachers attend school regularly. The headteachers

further explained the reason why most of the teachers do not attend school regularly due to the lack of supervision in the rural areas. In a response to a question by the headteachers as to how many times the teachers absent themselves from school in a week the headteachers were not again realistic because their responses did not actually tally with what was found in the teachers' attendance register. The following Figure 1 below shows the responses:

Figure 1: Weekly Absence of Teachers from School



Source: Field survey (2012)

It can be observed from Figure 1 that only 6.7 percent of the teachers attend school regularly, 13.3 percent attend once in a week, 36.7 percent attend twice and 43.3 percent attend thrice in a week. The figure shows that majority of the teachers in the Northern Region absent themselves from school thrice in a week while only a few teachers attend school regularly. These were the opinions of the headteachers but the fact in the school registers remains the same, many teachers absent themselves on Thursdays and Fridays and this does not augur well for effective teaching and learning if other variables are held constant.

Confirming the absenteeism on the part of some teachers, Tonah (2011) noted that trained teachers are unwilling to reside in the rural communities therefore the few who are trained and found themselves in the rural communities are unwilling to stay thus absenting themselves on certain days in a week as already explained above. Some commute daily from the urban areas to the rural areas and this does not promote effective learning and teaching.

The attitude of teachers in the region has negative effect on pupils' attendance. When a question was asked why some of the teachers do not come to school regularly the headteachers explained that some of the teachers are businessmen and women and that they devote their time selling their wares in a number of areas. Another explanation they gave was that majority of them do not stay in the community. The effects of teacher absenteeism in most of the basic schools in the Northern Region on the pupils' attendance to school regularly are so serious that the headteachers of Tinga Primary school in Bole District said

“On a day that a particular teacher does not come to school, the pupils of that class run home immediately after break and the pupils do not learn anything till the school closes.”

It can be observed that teachers absent themselves more in the government public rural schools in the Northern Region of Ghana and this is as a result of lack of proper supervision in the rural areas. Girls in particular do not attend school as compared to boys and this creates more disparity in favour of the boys in basic schools in the Northern Region of Ghana.

This study again found that there were no punitive measures stipulated by schools to ensure that the teachers who absent themselves from school are dealt with. The headteachers explained that when they report the absentee teachers to the District Directors of Education, the only punishment they give is to transfer the teacher to a different school and sometimes those of them in the rural areas find it difficult to report teachers who consistently absent themselves from school for the fear that they might not post any teacher to their schools. They cited many instances where they reported teachers and after they transferred them up till now they have not yet got a replacement.

Khalid (1996) reported that the assignment of teachers post in Pakistan is often based on political connections. The situation in Pakistan is not different from what happens in the rural areas of the Northern Region regarding posting of teachers to these places. One of the rural headteachers confirmed this when he remarked that:

“These days, as a head teacher in the rural area, if you do not have connections in the District Education Office, it is likely that no teacher will be posted to your school throughout the academic year.”

In an interview with the District Directors of Education, they alluded to the fact that the headteachers have got it wrong. They added that postings of teachers are based on the urgent need and not who you know at the District Office. Female teachers absent themselves more than the male teachers. These teachers serve as role models for the girls therefore; their absence sometimes further widens the disparity in attendance and performance of girls in the school. Many girls are unable to confide in the male teachers what their problems are and the difficulties they face regarding their school attendance and participation in class. The female teachers who were at post at the time of the study confirmed that their absence sometimes affects the girls more than the boys because the girls find it difficult to express what they feel regarding their education to the male teachers. They explained that they serve as mentors to these girls as well as social mothers. Their absence sometimes means that the girls have nobody to look up to in the school and nobody to always encourage them at the school.

Furthermore, female teachers dominated in the number of schools visited, especially in the urban school. The preponderance of these teachers in the urban schools in the Northern Region was attributed to the fact that most of them had their husbands working in the urban areas. Also, the young females want to select their spouses from the urban areas at the expense of teaching in the rural areas. The absenteeism on the part of these teachers, especially in the rural areas discourages many parents from allowing their children to attend school especially their girls. It was observed that when the Directors of Education in the selected districts were asked as to whether there was a guideline relevant to posting of teachers. The answer was in the affirmative but it was observed that the guidelines did not specify which category of teachers should be sent to an urban area or a rural area. It was again revealed in the study that teachers, upon completion of the Teacher Training College want to teach in the urban area in the region. The study revealed that supervision of teachers in the region has gone beyond the powers of the headteachers in the various districts as the headteachers explained. According to the headteachers some teachers in their schools more often bribe some of the Circuit Supervisors just to get favours from them when they absent themselves from school and this does not augur well for effective teaching and learning in the school.

The study further found that girls in the basic schools in the Northern Region of Ghana have few females as role models to emulate. For example, out of the 30 headteachers visited only 13 percent of the headteachers were female headteachers and out of a total of 78 teachers in the selected districts, only 22 percent were female teachers, most of them in the urban centers. It was observed that female teachers were scarce in the rural areas and Tonah (2011) confirmed the observation made by the author when he explained the scarcity of female teachers in the rural communities in the some parts of West Mamprusi

District in the Northern Region of Ghana. The female teachers in the schools visited were handling subjects like Social Studies, Citizenship Education, Religious and Moral Education and English while the so called 'hard' subjects such as Mathematics and Science were handled by the male teachers.

The girls explained that when they do not see female teachers handle the so called "hard" subjects like Science and Mathematics, they consider them to be subjects that are only being taught by males. This does not boost their morale to perform well in these subjects. The parents also explained that when they do not see many female teachers in the school, they feel that education is not compulsory for girls and therefore there is no need to enrol the girls. The effects of the absence of female teachers as role models on gender disparity in basic schools in the Northern Region are limited. A systematic study is therefore needed. This study should control key factors such as class size, type of school, teacher and headteacher characteristics. It can be explained that many girls would have wished that they have more female teachers as role models because their absence discourage many of the girls from attending school which creates disparity in attendance in favour of the boys. In relation to the teachers' absenteeism, it is important to find out how the teachers relate to the female pupils in the school and how their relationship affects girls' attendance.

It was found that teachers in the basic schools in the Northern Region of Ghana relate well with the girls at the primary level and do not relate well with the girls at the JHS level. There were instances the author observed at the JHS that some teachers do not relate well with their girls at the JHS just because the girls do not accept sexual advances that some teachers have made to them. Such instances prevented the girls from attending school regularly. In a response to a question relating to whether the teachers relate well with the girls they teach, 80 percent of the headteachers said the teachers relate well with their female pupils at both the primary and the JHS levels which the author did not observe in both cases.

Twenty (20) percent of the headteachers said the teachers do not relate well with the girls, especially at the JHS level. These opinions supported the earlier observations made by the author. When a similar question was posed to the female pupils, they supported the author's observation, 84.6 percent of the girls said they relate well with their teachers and these were females from the primary levels while 15.4 percent said they do not relate well with their teachers and these also were pupils from the JHS. Supporting the findings further, one of the girls at the JHS said

"Once in a while, I experience sexual advances by some of our male teachers and that negatively affect my school attendance and performance because of the psychological discomfort I always experience."

The girls further explained that those teachers who normally harass them sexually and do not succeed hate them and sometimes disgrace them either in class or at the assembly. As to how it retards their progress, 46 percent said that after the harassment they feel timid in class so they cannot learn. Forty-four (44) percent explained that they are not comfortable in school, therefore do not attend school sometimes and 10 percent said that after the harassment, they find it difficult to attend school.

It can be explained that not all the girls in the district are being harassed; only a few are harassed at the JHS level and this prevent these girls from attending school regularly. One of the headteachers narrated a case of sexual harassment where one of his teachers impregnated a Form Two girl and when he reported the case to the District Director of Education, the teacher was only transferred to another school. As to how the girls relate to their male counterparts, 93 percent of the girls said their relationship with their boy counterparts is friendly while 7.0 percent said is not friendly and these were mostly Junior High School pupils where the girls explained that they are being verbally harassed by some of their male counterparts. In the course of the interview with the headteachers, the headteachers denied categorically that both male teachers and male pupils have never harassed the female pupils; they added that no female pupil has ever complained to them concerning sexual harassment by their male counterparts or any male teacher.

In response to a question relating to whether there are mechanisms put in place to deter the teachers from harassing the female pupils in the school, the headteachers responded in the affirmative and explained that the mechanisms are to report the teacher involved to the District Director of Education for the teacher to be sanctioned. The mechanisms also involved the refusal of the school to support the teacher concerned when the victim's parents decide to take punitive measures. It was noted that reporting the teacher to the District Director of Education is a mechanism that was in place for years. According to the headteachers,

there were instances in some schools where the victim's parents had to beat up the accused teacher and even attempted sending the matter to court. One of the girls at the JHS further remarked that;

“sexual harassment sometimes occurs both within and outside classroom and that teachers sometimes collude with their male counterparts in the verbal harassment in the classroom either directly or indirectly”.

When the headteachers were asked to confirm or deny these allegations, all the thirty (30) headteachers found it difficult to answer but stated categorically that no incidence of sexual harassment has ever been reported. They were quick to say that they hear about it in some schools.

Nyamzi (2002) supported the finding when he noted that girls are more often being harassed in schools in Zimbabwe and added that it is hard for male pupils to refrain from sexual activity in school if their male role models are engaged in the same practices. In Zimbabwe, according to Nyanzi (2002), in 1988 and 1989, 520 and 468 teachers respectively were dismissed for misconduct including sexual harassment of girls in their schools. The measure in Zimbabwe is not applicable in the Northern Region of Ghana as teachers who misconduct themselves sexually are not dismissed but transferred when their misconduct is reported to the appropriate authorities. It was observed in the urban areas that in instances where sexual harassment resulted in pregnancy, the cost to girls is not only loss of education potentials but also the health risk which is connected with the pregnancy which may put a permanent end to girls' school attendance.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Northern Region has become a focus of Ghana's educational interest in recent years. Much progress remains to be made in ensuring that children, particularly in rural areas of Northern Region are enrolled and allowed to attend school. Teacher behavior especially absenteeism on the part of teachers in government schools is rampant and negatively affects pupils school attendance. The gender differences in absence rates among teachers in government basic schools in the region may have implications for the feasibility of girls' access to education.

To prevent and correct serious attendance problems, schools need to change the way they are structured, improve the quality of the courses, and intensify interpersonal relationships between pupils' and teachers. There should be general strategies that will aide in reducing pupils' absenteeism taking a comprehensive approach to attendance with activities that involve pupils' families and the community using more positive involvement activities than negative or punishing activities and sustaining a focus on improving attendance over time. It will be useful to design and test creative solutions that can be tailored to local conditions and rigorously evaluated in terms of their impact on teacher attendance, pupils' attendance and learning. Teachers need to be motivated by provision of transportation or other monetary incentives to secure regular attendance. For teachers in both the rural and urban areas, proper supervision is necessary. The supervision and monitoring of teachers in the region should be community-based. The community will be fast in reporting teachers who constantly absent themselves from school and who will sexually harass their females to the District Directors of Education for appropriate sanctions. This approach will be more effective as compared to the occasional rounds by the Circuit Supervisors. Teachers will find it difficult to absent themselves from school if they know that the communities are monitoring their attendance and behaviour. This approach should be backed by a policy.

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