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*Full Length Research Paper*

# The Menace of Teacher Absenteeism on Pupils' Performance at Basic Schools in East Gonja District of Northern Ghana

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Given the abysmal performance of pupils in schools of the East Gonja district which is said to be the outcome of teacher absenteeism and related factors, the study examined the effects of teacher absenteeism on the academic performance of pupils in the district. A total of 98 respondents comprising of head teachers, assistant head teachers and classroom or subject teachers in the basic schools of the district were interviewed using a structured questionnaire. The data was analysed using SPSS data analyses software. The study revealed that teacher absenteeism was really prevalent in the school district. Beside, the results of the study showed that teacher absenteeism led to a cut in instructional hours which resulted into the inability to cover stipulated syllabus that eventually led to poor performance of pupils in examinations. The recommendations made to minimise the phenomenon include: the improvement in working conditions such as provision of health facilities in school communities; provision of means of transport and accommodation for teachers, especially those in rural areas; intensification of supervision by circuit supervisors, with the active involvement of PTA and SMC in monitoring and supervision of teachers; putting a stop to salary delay of newly recruited teachers; and encouraging teachers to take online programs for staff development. The study will serve as a wake-up call to all stakeholders of education such as parents, teachers, school administrators, governments and NGOs.

**Keywords:** Teacher absenteeism, pupils' performance, rural school, urban school, school district

## INTRODUCTION

### Background to the Study

There is a dwindling trend in educational standards these days have painted a negative picture of the performance of teachers. This perception has been confirmed by the education sector review (MoE, 2010). This phenomenon is attributed to the attitudes of some teachers in the educational sector. They include irregular attendance to work, absenteeism, inadequate use of contact hours and poor supervision of teachers' work. These are just a few issues that affect quality education and performances

and therefore need to be dealt with.

If teachers are not present at all working days and no teaching takes place because of the absence of teachers, either the prescribed course of any given class will not be completed or will not be completed in a satisfactory manner. Thus, teachers' absence affects the quality of education. The major problem towards achieving quality education is chronic absenteeism among teachers which affect the performance rate of pupils in external examination such as the basic education certificate examination (BECE). Academic performance or (academic achievement) is the outcome of education- the

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extent to which a student, teacher or institution achieve their educational goals.

### **Study Area**

East Gonja District is located at the South-eastern section of the Northern Region of Ghana, with Salaga as the district capital. The district lies within Lat.  $8^{\circ}\text{N}$  &  $9.29^{\circ}\text{N}$  and, Longitude  $0.29\text{E}$  and  $1.26^{\circ}\text{W}$ . It shares boundaries with Yendi and Tamale districts to the North, Central Gonja District to the West, Nanumba-North, Nanumba-South and Kpandai Districts to the East, and the Volta and BrongAhafo Regions to the South. The total land area of the district is 10,787 sq kilometres, occupying about 15.3% of the landmass of the Northern Region. The district comes first in terms of land area (size) among the districts of the Northern Region (Republic of Ghana, 2013).

The 2010 Population and Housing Census put the population of the East Gonja District at 135,450, of which 69,721 are males and 65,729 are females. The district's share of the total population of the Northern Region is 5.46%. The total population of the Northern Region stood at 2,479,461 (as at 2010). The district's population growth rate is 2.1% (1984-2000), lower than both the regional and national averages of 2.9% and 2.5% respectively (GSS, 2012). This relatively low population growth rate could be explained by increased outmigration from the district combined with modest success of population control and education measures of the Ministry of Health and other Development Partners. This lower population growth rate in East Gonja district is an asset to be maintained and reinforced through conscious policy, promotional and educational measures.

The district has 167 Primary, 40 Junior Secondary, 1 Health Assistants Training School, and 2 Senior High Schools both located in Salaga. Amongst the many problems affecting the educational sector of the East Gonja district are poor enrolments particularly that of the girl-child, poor educational infrastructure, long average distance from school due to the sparse nature of Communities, inadequate Teachers, declining performance levels at both BECE and WASSCE exams and high teacher attrition, absenteeism and lateness (Republic of Ghana, 2013).

### **Statement of the Problem**

There is a decline in the performance of pupils at the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE). For example the BECE performance of pupils in the district from 2012 to 2014 showed poor results. The percentages passed within the period under review were 22.5%, 8.7% and 23.48% respectively (Republic of Ghana, 2013).

While on the average teachers in Ghana are absent 43 school days within an academic year, teachers in the East Gonja district, are averagely absent 79 school days in an academic year (District Statistician, 2015). It is therefore important to determine teacher absenteeism and the effects on academic performance of pupil in the district.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The general objective of the study was to examine the effects of teacher absenteeism on academic performance of pupils in the basic schools of the East Gonja district.

Specifically, the objectives of the study include:

1. To identify the factors accounting for teacher absenteeism in schools of the district.
2. To assess the effects of teacher absenteeism on pupils performance in schools of the district.
3. To determine measures to control teacher absenteeism in the district.

### **Research Questions of the Study**

In view of the issues raised above, the study sought to address the following research questions:

1. Which factors account for teacher absenteeism in schools of the district?
2. How does teacher absenteeism affect performance of pupils in schools of the district?
3. What measures should be put in place to control teacher absenteeism in the district?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Descriptions of Absenteeism**

There are many variations to the definition of absenteeism. According to the South African Labour Guide, absenteeism is not just about not being at work but it also includes arriving late for work, leaving the workplace early, having extended tea or lunch breaks, attending to private business during working hours, not attending to assigned roles in respect of employment contract terms even though one is at the workplace, feigned illness, and other unexplained absences from the work station or from the premises. The implications and repercussions of absenteeism therefore, become more pronounced if engagement in the act which takes the worker away from his duty or obligation becomes habitual but not accidental (Gyansu et al. 2014).

Furthermore, Iannuzzi (2013) indicated that absenteeism has to do with indulging in acts that take the worker away from his duty, that are not authorized by the

organizations or employers. In his view, any acts that make employees to take time off from work for valid reasons like vacation and sickness, are expected and authorized by employers, which do not therefore constitute absenteeism. However if employees habitually stay away from work for invalid reasons, then they are indulging in absenteeism.

Vanderweerd (2013) identified two forms of absenteeism which include: Innocent Absenteeism - which refers to employees who were absent from work for reasons beyond their control, such as injury, sickness among others. Such cases cannot be remedied by disciplinary measures. Culpable Absenteeism – refers to employees who absent themselves without authorization for reasons which are within their control. In a more formal manner, Johnny (2007) also suggests two forms of absenteeism including: Planned Absenteeism – consisting of annual leaves, study leaves, paternity and maternity leaves, etc. Unplanned Absenteeism – consisting of sick leaves, family responsibilities, absence without leave, among others.

### Teacher absenteeism

According to Gyansu et al. (2014) teacher absenteeism can be considered as the percentage of contractual days that permanent teachers were absent from the classroom due to their personal issues. A teacher's contractual days refer to those days when he/she is bound by law to be with his/her students either for teaching and learning or for co-curricular activities. It is for the sake of these contractual days that teachers are even paid salaries whenever schools are on holidays. On the average, Basic School Teachers in Ghana are bound to spend between 195-205 days yearly for their contractual responsibilities. Compared with their counterparts in other civil services who spend between 125-135 days as a rest day, teachers in Ghana have the advantage of about 30 days more for the rest (Gyansu et al. 2014). It is however strange to note that some teachers still attempt to spend part of the contractual days for their personal needs.

### Level of teacher absenteeism in Ghana

It is worth noting that teacher absenteeism is synonymous to loss of contact hours by teachers with their pupils or students. The phenomenon has been noted to be on the upsurge in Ghana, despite several attempts by successive governments to eradicate the menace. According to MoE (2010), there was a 20% lost in contact hours in public basic schools in 1993, with 14% of teachers being absent and 16% of head teachers being absent. Eleven years later, a similar study conducted by Karikari-Ababio (2004) indicated that in

2003, the southern sector of Ghana including the Greater Accra, Eastern, Central and Volta regions recorded a loss of 27% in contact hours, with 28% of teachers being absent and 15% of head teachers being absent. In the same study, the middle belt of the country including the Brong-Ahafo and the Ashanti regions lost 14% of contact hours with 16% and 22% teacher and head teacher absenteeism respectively.

### Some Reasons for teacher absenteeism

*Illness, funeral attendance, and care of family members:* In Malawi illness was cited as a reason for frequent absences (Kadzamira, 2006). This finding was supported by previous research by Kadzamira in an HIV/AIDS study, which found that teachers most often cited "personal sickness, funeral attendance and attending to sick family members" as reasons for absence (cited in Kadzamira, 2006).

*Proximity to school:* A teacher's commuting distance to school may have positive or negative effects on absenteeism rates. In Bangladesh, Ecuador, India, Indonesia, Peru, and Uganda teachers local to the school community tended to be absent less often than those who commuted from outside the community (Alcázar et al., 2006; Chaudhury et al., 2006). Similarly, teachers in Papua and West Papua, Indonesia, who lived in the same district as their schools had an average absence rate of 19 percent, compared with 25 percent for teachers who lived farther out in a sub-district (UNICEF, 2012). A reason mostly given by teachers for being absent is the distance from school and transportation challenges. Many teachers, who live far from their schools, may have transportation problems. Also, World Bank (2004) indicated that Ghanaian teachers often reported distance and the need to collect salaries from town as a reason for missing classes.

*Salary and compensation:* Research on teacher absenteeism has identified a relationship between days away from school and salary or compensation. In Tanzania teachers identified low salary as the greatest barrier to meeting their priorities: the ability to care and provide for their children, to be able to live in a satisfactory home that offers security and emotional stability, and the money necessary to attain these goals (Tao, 2013). As a result, teachers in emergent nations commonly take on secondary employment to supplement their income. Stakeholders in Malawi reported that teacher absenteeism is a major problem for the region because teachers cannot afford to live on their teaching salary alone (Kadzamira, 2006).

As stated by one Malawi Ministry of Education official, "Teacher absenteeism is high. Teachers go vending or get secondary employment. For example, few teachers go for marking exam papers nowadays. They say it's

better to do other jobs” (Kadzamira, 2006, p. 12). Teachers in Tanzania acknowledged that they had even left school during the teaching day to look for other work (Tao, 2013). Nelson and Quick (2008) indicate that people who are dissatisfied with their jobs are more frequently absent from their work. The dissatisfaction based on low salaries and inadequate motivation.

*Inadequate supervision:* In some emergent nations private schools have lower teacher absenteeism rates than public schools. In Lagos State, Nigeria, private schools had higher rates of teaching activity and lower teacher absenteeism than public schools (Tooley, Dixon, & Olaniyan, 2005). In addition, in Lao People’s Democratic Republic teachers at private schools were much less likely to be absent than teachers at public schools (Benveniste et al., 2007). They indicated further that based on a series of surprise visits across a sample of 155 public and private schools (with the number of teachers visited per school, up to 20, dependent on school size), 4.4 percent of private school teachers were absent, while 7.4 percent of public school teachers were absent. In India teachers were less likely to be absent at schools that were inspected regularly (Kremer et al., 2005). Teachers in rural areas most at times do not go to school because they are aware that no circuit supervisor will be able to easily get to the school since the place is far and the road is also not good. Based on this, the teachers choose not to go to school.

*School facilities and infrastructure:* In six countries including Bangladesh, Ecuador, India, Indonesia, Peru, and Uganda—primary schools and health facilities with poorer infrastructure (based on an index that included “the availability of a toilet..., covered classrooms, non-dirt floors, electricity and a school library”) had higher absenteeism rates (Chaudhury et al., 2006). This was also the case in Indonesia, where teachers at schools with inadequate facilities (such as lack of electricity or working toilets) were more likely than teachers at schools with adequate conditions to be absent (Usman & Suryadarma, 2007).

*School location (urban or rural):* In Papua and West Papua, Indonesia, school location is a significant factor in absence rates among administrators and teachers. Geographically, principals from urban schools had the highest attendance rates (67 %), followed by principals from the easy-to-access low land district schools (59%); principals from the highland district schools had the lowest of 33% (UNICEF, 2012). In Nigeria teachers in urban schools had slightly lower absentee rates than teachers in rural schools, which were attributed to more regular school supervision and higher visibility of inspectors in urban locations (Adelabu, 2005). In India teacher absenteeism was higher in the rural, less developed regions than in the most developed areas. Schools were sometimes staffed by a single teacher, and they closed completely when that teacher did not come to

work, which may have discouraged students and families and thereby increased student absenteeism (Chaudhury et al., 2006; Rogers & Vegas, 2009).

Across multiple countries small schools (especially those in rural settings in emergent nations) are mostly at risk for high teacher absence. Reasons for this phenomenon include that small schools in remote communities struggle to attract qualified and dedicated teachers; that rural schools tend to have poorer infrastructure, which deters attendance; and that traveling away from remote areas (for example, to visit a doctor or attend in-service training) requires long journeys and more missed days of school (UNICEF, 2012; Harris van Keuren, 2009; Mulkeen, 2005). Socioeconomic, health, and environmental conditions have all been cited as overall reasons for high teacher absence rates. The location of schools and communities in relation to health care facilities and other basic necessities, such as clean water, affect a teacher’s ability to show up and teach (Tao, 2013; Kadzamira, 2006). These issues are especially apparent in rural areas (Kadzamira, 2006).

### **Effects of Teacher Absenteeism on Academic Performance**

Teacher absenteeism is a problem with great concern the world all over because it affects the development of the learner and the state. A teacher in the classroom is regarded as a very important resource for improving learning achievement. However, absenteeism significantly prejudices the learning outcomes of the children in the classroom, demoralizes school organizational culture and represents a significant waste of financial resources.

Miller et al. (2008) also state that the effect of teacher absenteeism on teaching processes is one of the important variables that may explain the difference between the success levels of students. These show the enormity of damage that teacher absenteeism has on the school system. According EARC (2003), teacher absenteeism is particularly costly to the poor, since they cannot afford private tutors to cover the curriculum and pass high-stakes examinations. Thus, it has been related to lower student test scores in primary schools. One study showed that a 5% increase in the absenteeism rate of teachers who stayed with the same class for two years reduced student gains by 4-8% during the year; the size and precision of these estimates was the same for both math and English (Das et al. 2005). In an Indonesian study, higher teacher absenteeism was related to lower fourth-grade student achievement on math (but not dictation) after controlling for household characteristics, teacher quality, and school conditions (Lewis & Lockheed 2006). Absenteeism among teachers also encourages similar behaviour among students, notably in countries

such as Mali and Somalia (EARC, 2003).

Also, Bruno (2002) indicates that students in a classroom eventually lose the desire to learn when the regular teacher is frequently absent. This is consistent with the finding by Jacobson (1989) that teacher absenteeism and poor attitude might impede students' academic growth. The hypothesis that the relationship developed between students and teachers indeed influenced students' performance. Thus, when linked to the quality of instructional time, the frequent absence of a classroom teacher would weaken the student-teacher bond and cause student absences. Students who were frequently absent from school, when asked why they chose not to go to school, responded in the following manner: "If my teacher does not come to school, why should I?" (Jacobson, 1989). Similarly, Ehrenberg et al. (1991) stated that students' motivation to attend school may be reduced by higher teacher absentee rates which further leads to higher student absentee rates.

Moreover, Mary et al. (2015) reported that international studies point to the relationship of teacher absenteeism to student learning. For instance, they indicated that 25% of teachers at rural primary schools in India were absent on any given school day. The loss of instructional time resulting from these absences corresponded to low school-wide student proficiency levels, which ranged from 40% to 50% in grade-level literacy and numeracy (Narayan & Mooij, 2010). In Indonesia an increase of 10 percentage points in the average teacher absence rate was associated with a .09 standard deviation decrease in grade 4 mathematics scores (Suryadarma et al., 2006; Rogers & Vegas, 2009). An analysis of the relationship between student mean test scores and teacher absence rates in Ghana's Ashanti region district schools showed that teacher absenteeism is inversely related to student performance. When teacher absence rates increased, student mean scores declined (Obeng- Denteh et al., 2011). The economic costs associated with managing the loss of instructional time in cases such as these are high and produce additional burdens on already strained school systems (Mary et al. 2015).

In primary schools in Zambia, student learning gains were correlated with teacher absence, and absences resulted in a surprisingly large effect: each additional 5% increase in teacher absence reduced learning for the typical student by 4–8% by the end of the school year (Rogers & Vegas, 2009). In rural Rajasthan, India, students' learning increased significantly when they were taught by teachers with higher attendance (Rogers and Vegas, 2009).

However, national data from the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (1996) demonstrated that urban teachers did not regard teacher absenteeism as a major problem. The data from this study revealed that only 1.6% of all teachers believed that their absences from the classroom presented a serious barrier to student

achievement. In a Nation at Risk (1983), the achievement scores of American students were compared with the scores of students from other industrialized nations. The result was that the achievement scores of American students were related to the quality and quantity of instructional time. Time lost by students because of the absence of the regular classroom teacher was a significant problem that slowed or halted academic and emotional growth (Darling-Hammond, 1995).

NCTQ (2014) also reported that there is a significant negative impact on student achievement in classrooms where the teacher is absent for ten days. Yet in the average classroom in their study, teachers exceeded this level of absence, often for perfectly legitimate reasons and even in pursuit of becoming a more effective instructor. They also indicated that given the time and attention spent on school programs, new curriculum and strategies to strengthen teacher quality, the most basic, solvable and cost effective reasons why schools may fail to make educational progress may be overlooked. Thus, parents and guardians owe it to their children to have the most effective policies and practices to make sure that teachers are present when the roll is called.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

Given that the aim and objectives of the study are both qualitative and quantitative in nature primary data under a cross-sectional survey were collected. As a complement however, secondary data from books, reports and journals related to the topic were also used.

### Population and Sample Size

The survey targeted all basic school teachers of the East Gonja district, including head teachers, assistant head teacher, subject teachers as well as classroom teachers. For issues of convenience and feasibility however, 98 respondents from 20 basic schools in the district were drawn. The probability sampling technique was used to ensure, as much as possible, that the sample represents the population with all sample units having equal chances of being chosen. Basically, the 20 schools were selected from a pool of 207 basic schools in the district using the simple random sampling technique, where a sampling frame of all basic schools was designed and the respondent schools selected randomly. The 98 respondents were also selected using the simple random technique. The number of respondent selected from a school was subject to the number of teachers in the school. On the average, 5 respondents were selected from each of the 20 schools. Table 1.0 below presents

**Table 1.0** Distribution of respondents in terms of schools

| <b>Name of School</b>       | <b>Number of respondents</b> |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------|
| Ansariya JHS                | 6                            |
| Ansariya Primary            | 5                            |
| Bau D/A JHS                 | 5                            |
| Bau D/A Primary             | 3                            |
| BinjaiPresby JHS            | 4                            |
| Good Shepherd R/C Primary   | 3                            |
| GrunshieZongo D/A Primary   | 5                            |
| Islamic JHS                 | 7                            |
| Islamic Primary             | 5                            |
| Kakoshi D/A Primary         | 4                            |
| Kalande JHS                 | 5                            |
| Kpembe D/A JHS              | 5                            |
| Kpembe D/A Prim.            | 7                            |
| Litinkpa JHS                | 5                            |
| Mepeasem Primary School     | 4                            |
| Sakafatu Primary            | 5                            |
| Salaga Islamic JHS          | 4                            |
| Salaga Presbyterian J.H.S   | 7                            |
| Salaga Presbyterian Primary | 4                            |
| YagbowuraTimu Girls         | 5                            |
| <b>Total</b>                | <b>98</b>                    |

Source Author's construct, 2015

the distribution of respondents based on the selected schools:

### Data Collection Instruments

A structured questionnaire was used as the major instrument to solicit information directly from the respondents. The structured questionnaire consisted of both open-ended and closed-ended questions. The open-ended questions gave the respondents the chance to express themselves, whereas the closed-ended questions gave the respondents pre-coded responses of which a respondent selected the option he or she agreed to and/or to specify if otherwise.

The questionnaire was designed by giving attention to the conventional format of a standard questionnaire. The questionnaire was chosen because it offered an efficient means of collecting statistically quantifiable data. Besides, it gave attention to the ethics of research and made data collection process as bias-free as possible (Sarantakos, 1997).

### Data Analysis

To a large extent, the study employed qualitative method of research given the nature of the aim and objectives. As a result, descriptive statistics were used largely in the analysis and presentation of the data, from which inferences were made about the variables under consideration. However, the chi-square statistic was

generated and interpreted when necessary to indicate whether or not some significant differences existed between some responses and/or characteristics of the respondents. Basically, percentages, charts and cross tabulations were used to present the data for clear understanding and correct interpretation of the results. These analyses were done using the SPSS version 20.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

There were some empirical findings of the study on the effects of teacher absenteeism on the academic performance of pupils, and suggested solutions to curb teacher absenteeism in the study area and the entire country.

### Experience of respondents in teaching

Table 1.1 shows the distribution of respondents' experience in the teaching profession. From the table, 46.9% of all the respondents had experience of 0 to 5 years in teaching; 17.3% had 6 to 10 years of experience and 35.7% had more than 10 years of experience in teaching. This indicates that on the average, a teacher had 8.9 years of experience in teaching. Table 1.1 also indicates that the respondents in the rural schools had mean years of experience being 8.93 whilst those of the urban schools had 8.83 mean years of experience in teaching. The difference in the mean years between those two categories was found not to be statistically

**Table 1.1** Distribution of respondents' years of experience in teaching

| Number of years | Rural     |              | Urban     |              | Over all  |              |
|-----------------|-----------|--------------|-----------|--------------|-----------|--------------|
|                 | Frequency | Percentage   | Frequency | Percentage   | Frequency | Percentage   |
| 0 - 5           | 33        | 47.8         | 13        | 44.8         | 46        | 46.9         |
| 6 - 10          | 8         | 11.6         | 9         | 31.0         | 17        | 17.3         |
| Above 10        | 28        | 40.6         | 7         | 24.1         | 35        | 35.7         |
| <b>Total</b>    | <b>69</b> | <b>100.0</b> | <b>29</b> | <b>100.0</b> | <b>98</b> | <b>100.0</b> |
| Mean            | 8.93      |              | 8.83      |              | 8.88      |              |
| Minimum         | 2         |              | 1         |              | 1         |              |
| Maximum         | 30        |              | 22        |              | 30        |              |
| T statistic     | 0.07      |              |           |              |           |              |

Source Field data, 2015

**Table 1.2** Frequent teacher absenteeism in the rural and urban schools

| School's community status | Do teacher frequently absent themselves in your school? |      |       |      |       | $\chi^2$<br>$\chi^2 = 0.971$<br>Df = 1<br>Sig. (p = 0.32) |
|---------------------------|---|------|-------|------|-------|---|
|                           | Yes   |      | No    |      | Total |   |
|                           | Freq.   | %    | Freq. | %    |       |   |
| Rural                     | 21  | 30.4 | 48    | 69.6 | 69    |   |
| Urban                     | 6   | 20.7 | 23    | 79.3 | 29    |   |
| Total                     | 27  |      | 71    |      | 98    |   |

Source Field data, 2015

**Table 1.3** Distribution of average level of teacher absenteeism in sampled schools

| School's community status | Average period of absenteeism |      |                         |      |       | $\chi^2$<br>$\chi^2 = 2.57$<br>Df = 1<br>Sig. (p = 0.0) |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------|------|-------------------------|------|-------|---|
|                           | 1 to 3 days in week           |      | 1 to 2 weeks in a month |      | Total |   |
|                           | Freq.                         | %    | Freq.                   | %    |       |   |
| Rural                     | 33                            | 47.8 | 36                      | 52.2 | 69    |   |
| Urban                     | 19                            | 65.5 | 10                      | 34.5 | 29    |   |
| Total                     | 52                            |      | 46                      |      | 98    |   |

Source Field data, 2015

significant.

### Frequency of teacher absenteeism in respondents' school

It has been argued in literature that teachers of rural schools do absent themselves more than those of the urban schools. Table 1.2 presents the distribution of respondents' responses on whether or not teacher absenteeism is frequent in their respective schools. From the table, 30.4% of the teachers in the rural schools indicated that there is frequent teacher absenteeism in their schools, whilst 20.7% of the respondents in the urban schools indicated that teacher absenteeism is not frequent in their schools. This confirms the arguments made in literature. Specifically, it conforms to the findings by Adelabu, (2005) that in Nigeria teachers in urban

schools had slightly lower absentee rates than teachers in rural schools, which he attributed to more regular school supervision and higher visibility of inspectors in urban locations. From table 1.2 however, the chi-square statistic of 0.971 indicates that there is no significance difference between the community status of a respondent's school and his or her response to the question of whether or not teacher absenteeism is frequent in his or her school.

### Average level of teacher absenteeism in schools

Table 1.3 shows the distribution of average levels of teacher absenteeism in the sampled schools across the rural and urban communities. The table indicates that 47.8% of the respondents in the rural schools indicated that their schools experience teacher absenteeism of 1 to

**Table 1.3** distribution of responses on whether or not teacher absenteeism affects pupils' performance

| School's community status | Does absenteeism affect pupils' performance |       |       |      | Total | $\chi^2 = 7.36$<br>Df = 1<br>Sig. (p = 0.007) |
|---------------------------|---|-------|-------|------|-------|---|
|                           | Yes   |       | No    |      |       |   |
|                           | Freq.                                       | %     | Freq. | %    |       |   |
| Rural                     | 69  | 100.0 | 0     | 0.0  | 69    |   |
| Urban                     | 26  | 89.7  | 3     | 10.3 | 29    |   |
| Total                     | 95  |       | 3     |      | 98    |   |

Source Field data, 2015

**Table 1.5** Some effects of teacher absenteeism on pupils' performance

| Effect   | School's community status |            |           |            |
|--|---------------------------|------------|-----------|------------|
|  | Rural                     |            | Urban     |            |
|  | Frequency                 | Percentage | Frequency | Percentage |
| Fewer exercises  | 8                         | 11.6       | 0         | 0          |
| Higher burden on other teachers                                      | 8                         | 11.6       | 0         | 0          |
| Instructional hours are cut, Syllabus are not covered,               | 33                        | 47.8       | 11        | 37.9       |
| No response  | 16                        | 23.2       | 15        | 51.7       |
| The pupils do not take the subject of the absentee teacher seriously | 4                         | 5.8        |           |            |
| Pupils are unable to proceed to the next level of education          |                           |            | 3         | 10.3       |
| Total  | 69                        | 100        | 29        | 100        |

Source Field data, 2015

**Table 1.4** Rating of pupils' performance in some key subjects in the selected schools

| Subject          | Performance rating |     |       |      |         |      |       |      |          |      | Mean |
|------------------|--------------------|-----|-------|------|---------|------|-------|------|----------|------|------|
|                  | Very high          |     | High  |      | Average |      | Low   |      | Very low |      |      |
|                  | Freq.              | %   | Freq. | %    | Freq.   | %    | Freq. | %    | Freq.    | %    |      |
| English language | 4                  | 4.1 | 11    | 11.2 | 42      | 42.9 | 17    | 17.3 | 24       | 24.5 | 3.47 |
| Mathematics      | 4                  | 4.1 | 19    | 19.4 | 38      | 38.8 | 24    | 24.5 | 13       | 13.3 | 3.23 |
| Social Studies   | 7                  | 7.1 | 29    | 29.6 | 31      | 31.6 | 28    | 28.6 | 3        | 3.1  | 2.91 |
| Int. Science     | 4                  | 4.1 | 11    | 11.2 | 46      | 46.9 | 28    | 28.6 | 9        | 9.2  | 3.28 |
| ICT              | 4                  | 4.1 | 18    | 18.4 | 25      | 25.5 | 40    | 40.8 | 11       | 11.2 | 3.38 |
| all subjects     | 0                  | 0.0 | 11    | 11.2 | 56      | 57.1 | 28    | 28.6 | 3        | 3.1  | 3.23 |

Source Field data, 2015

3 days in a week against 65.5% of the urban school teachers indicating that their schools experience teacher absenteeism of 1 to 3 days in a week. Besides, for every month the average absentee teacher was likely to be absent for 2 weeks indicated by 52.2% of the respondents in the rural schools and 34.5% in the urban schools. Again the findings justify the fact in literature that rural school teachers absent themselves more than their urban counterparts. Moreover, the probability associated with the chi-square statistic is less than 0.1 which implies that there is a significant difference between the rate of absenteeism and community status (rural or urban) of a particular school.

### Responses on whether or not absenteeism affects pupils' performance

Table 1.3 presents the responses given by respondents on whether or not teacher absenteeism negatively influences pupils' performance. It is indicated in the table that majority of the respondents indicated that indeed teacher absenteeism negatively influences pupils' performance, with all (100%) the rural schools' teachers against 89.7% of the urban teachers agreeing to the statement. the chi-square statistic of 7.36 indicates that there is a significant difference between a school's community status the likelihood of the teachers



perceiving absenteeism to have negative influence on pupils' performance. Specifically, the rural teachers are more probable to perceive teacher absenteeism to have negative influence on pupils' performance.

### **Effects of absenteeism on pupils' performance**

Table 1.5 contains the specific effects that respondents felt that teacher absenteeism has on pupils' performance. Key among the effects as far as this study is concerned is that instructional hours are cut which results in inability to cover stipulated syllabus, eventually leading to under performance of students in examination. Other effects given are fewer exercises; pupils not taking subjects of absentee teachers seriously; among others all of which result in under performance of pupils as well as not being able to proceed on the educational ladder. The respondents also indicated that higher rates and frequency of teacher absenteeism put higher burdens on other teachers, which conforms to the findings of Obeng-Denteh et al. (2011) who reported that at one Ghana school district, absenteeism affected the motivation of fellow teachers, who were left to take on additional planning and instructional duties.

### **Pupils' performance in some key subjects for the past 2014/2015 academic year**

Table 1.4 indicates that 42.9% and 24.5% of the respondents rated the performance of their schools' pupils in English language as average and very low respectively; 38.8% and 24.5% rated pupils' performance in Mathematics as average and low respectively; 31.6% and 28.6% rated their pupils' performance in Social studies as average and low respectively; 46.9% and 28.6% rated their pupils' performance in Integrated science as average and low respectively; 25.5% and 40.8% rated pupils' performance in ICT as average and low respectively; with 57.1% and 28.6% rating pupils' performance in all subjects as average and low respectively. However, the mean performance ratings in the listed subject areas indicate that pupils' performance in social studies was ranked highest, followed by mathematics, integrated science, ICT, with performance in English language being ranked lowest.

### **SUMMARY OF RESEARCH FINDINGS**

The study was set to investigate the effects of teacher absenteeism on pupils' academic performance in northern Ghana in general and East Gonja District in particular. A summary of the findings are stated below:

### **Frequency of teacher absenteeism in respondents' schools**

It has been argued in literature that teachers of rural schools do absent themselves more than those of the urban schools. According to the study 30.4% of the teachers in the rural schools indicated that there was frequent teacher absenteeism in their schools, whilst 20.7% of the respondents in the urban schools indicated that teacher absenteeism was not frequent in their schools. This confirmed the arguments made in literature and the statement by Adelabu, (2005) that in Nigeria teachers in urban schools had slightly lower absentee rates than teachers in rural schools, which he attributed to more regular school supervision and higher visibility of inspectors in urban locations.

### **Average level of teacher absenteeism in schools**

The distribution of average levels of teacher absenteeism in the sampled schools across the rural and urban communities of the study indicated that for every month the average absentee teacher was likely to be absent for 2 weeks as indicated by 52.2% of the respondents in the rural schools and 34.5% in the urban schools. Again the findings confirmed literature that rural school teachers absent themselves more than their urban counterparts.

### **Responses on whether or not absenteeism affects pupils' performance**

The respondents' perception on whether or not teacher absenteeism negatively influenced pupils' performance, yielded the following result: Hundred percent (100%) of the rural school teachers said teacher absenteeism negatively influenced pupils' performance, while 89.7% of the urban teachers agreed to the statement.

### **Effects of absenteeism on pupils' performance**

Key among the effects identified in the study include: a cut in instructional hours which results in the inability to cover stipulated syllabus, eventually leading to under performance of students in examinations. Furthermore, fewer exercises were given to pupils and pupils did take subjects of absentee teachers seriously. Pupils were not able to proceed on the educational ladder due to failure in their examinations. The study also revealed that higher rates of frequency of teacher absenteeism put more burdens on other teachers. This confirmed the findings of Obeng-Denteh et al. (2011) who reported that at a school district in Ghana, absenteeism affected the motivation of

fellow teachers, who were left to take on additional planning and instructional duties.

### **Pupils' performance in some key subjects for the past 2014/2015 academic year**

The study indicated that 42.9% and 24.5% of the respondents rated the performance of their schools' pupils in English Language as average and very low respectively; 38.8% and 24.5% rated pupils' performance in Mathematics as average and low respectively; 31.6% and 28.6% rated their pupils' performance in Social Studies as average and low respectively; 46.9% and 28.6% rated their pupils' performance in Integrated Science as average and low respectively; 25.5% and 40.8% rated pupils' performance in ICT as average and low respectively; with 57.1% and 28.6% rating pupils' performance in all subjects as average and low respectively. However, the mean performance ratings in the listed subject areas indicated that pupils' performance in Social Studies was ranked highest, followed by Mathematics, Integrated Science, ICT, with performance in English Language being ranked lowest.

### **CONCLUSION**

The study concluded that teacher absenteeism was prevalent in the basic schools in the East Gonja district of the Northern Region. Teacher absenteeism was more prevalent in the rural schools than the urban schools. This accounted for the poor performance of pupils in examinations, particularly the BECE. The study also concluded that health challenges, teachers' attendance to social functions, lack or inadequate accommodation facilities in communities, long distances, poor conditions of service, teachers going for further studies, inadequate water supply and delay in the mechanization of the salaries of newly trained teachers were the factors that accounted for teacher absenteeism in the East Gonja district.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The study identified some key factors that accounted for teacher absenteeism and their effects on the academic performance of pupils in the East Gonja district. This social menace could be tackled by teachers, community leaders, school authorities, NGOs and the government. They need to work together as a team to reduce teacher absenteeism in the basic schools of the district under study and all other school districts in Ghana.

On the issue of health challenges of teachers it is recommended that health facilities should be established

in the rural areas to promote quality health care for all inhabitants, including teachers. Stakeholders such as NGOs and philanthropists could assist in the provision of safe drinking water, toilet facilities and other sanitary measures to improve the health of the people.

Where long distances contribute in no small way to teacher absenteeism in the district, government should provide means of transport such as bicycles and motor bikes for teachers in the rural areas. Public means of transport such as buses could also be made available at designated points to convey teachers to and from schools. These logistics could also serve as incentives to motivate teachers to give off their best in teaching and learning.

In order to curtail teachers' attendance to social gatherings such as funerals and Friday prayers (worships) by Muslims, there should be the intensification of supervision by circuit supervisors in schools within the district, especially on Fridays when a good number of teachers within the district use Friday worship or attendance to funerals as an excuse to stay away from school.

The practice of delaying newly recruited teachers' salaries should be abolished to prevent teachers from shuffling between their schools and the district offices to fill out forms. Salaries of teachers upon completion of college should be mechanized early enough at most three months after completion of their courses. Scheduled officers who sometimes delay the submission of inputs to the headquarters should be sanctioned. District Directors of Education should see to it that things take the right course.

The government should take immediate steps to improve upon the current conditions of service of all personnel in GES. They should match them with those of their counterparts in other services such as the Ghana Health Service. If this is done, it would improve upon teachers' income and would in turn, prevent them from engaging in secondary jobs that are likely to conflict with their responsibilities.

With respect to the lack of accommodation for teachers, especially in the rural areas the government, NGOs who are into education, Parent-Teacher Associations, School Management Committees among others should as a matter of urgency provide accommodation for teachers within the districts. This will address the problem of the accommodation shortage and therefore improve upon teachers' attendance to school.

In order to reduce the problem of teacher absenteeism as a result of teachers leaving the school for further studies, the government is encouraged to provide facilities that will make online programmes easily accessible to teachers. If these arrangements are put in place, the time that would have been spent by teachers writing semester examinations or attending lectures elsewhere would be drastically reduced. Time saved by

teachers would be used to improve upon teaching and learning in their schools.

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