Absenteism in Schools: A Chronic Problem in the Present Time

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Abstract
Student absenteeism is a major concern for elementary and secondary school educators today. It has become a complex, educational, political and social problem that is generating increase in interest among educators, researchers and policy makers. The problem of absenteeism is becoming the concern of every member of society since it has negative consequences at both individual and social level. The problem is precipitated by the interplay of factors which are both internal and external to the student and/or the school. The paper highlighted the common causes of student absenteeism like family health or financial concerns, poor school climate, drug and alcohol use, transportation problems, and differing community attitude towards education are among the conditions that are often associated with a child’s frequent absence from school. This paper throws the light on the effects of classroom absence e.g. Disconnected to school, Compromised Learning, Lack of Positive Social Support, Strained School Budgets and Removal from school. Teacher should try to respond to the problem of student absenteeism by exploring creative techniques to increase class attendance. Obviously, one way of operationalising this ideal is through the use of innovative teaching methods, the use of better equipped classrooms and change in attitude. Some possible solutions to reduce the student absenteeism have also been discussed in the paper.

Key words: Absenteeism, School, Student, Teacher

Introduction
Student absenteeism has been consistently identified by educators as a major concern (Marvilde 1981). Classroom absence is a major factor responsible for falling standard in school education system today. Future of the nation always takes place in schools. School is such an organization which deals with the betterment of society (Khatri, 2013). School absenteeism has a far-reaching impact on a child’s academic progress and future. Absenteeism creates a dead, tiresome and unpleasant classroom environment that makes students who come to class uncomfortable and the teacher irritable (Marburger, 2001). It disturbs the dynamic teaching-learning environment and adversely affects the overall well being of classes (Segel, 2008). In quality terms, absenteeism is a waste of educational resources, time and human potential. Students who have absenteeism problem generally suffer academically and socially (William, 2000).

Absenteism can be defined as persistent, habitual and unexplained absence from school (Brooks, 1997, as cited in Bond, 2004). They noted that chronic absenteeism occurs when a student is absent without reason. The Auditor General Victoria (Australia, 2004) identified four
major dimensions of absenteeism truancy, school refusal, school withdrawal and early leaving. It is important to identify the different dimensions of absenteeism in tackling the problem because they require different interventions. Truancy as the persistent, habitual and unexplained absence from school of a child of compulsory school age, although it can occur with parental knowledge and sometimes consent. Bond (2004) included fractional truancy, which occurs when student arrive late or leave early or spend entire days away from school. School refusal differs from truancy in that children refuse to attend schools even in the face persuasion and punitive measures from parents and school. These students stay at home with the knowledge of their parents and school administrators (McShane, Walter & Ray, 2001). School withdrawal means children are absent from school because their parents keep them away from school on a frequent basis. Their parents do not enroll them at school. Early leaving refers to children fewer than 15 who drop out of school before completing their schooling.

Absenteeism in one angle viewpoint is one of the most common causes of degrading performances of the students. Especially to those who are included in the advance intelligence curriculum, absenteeism causes a great lose and may result to giving up an aimed position. It can also cause social repletion especially when a class is composed of a great number of students. This habit can cause a dilemma to the school administration when big figures are involved and may decrease the school’s performance. The student body is the greatest contributor to the success or the ground falling of the school. An individual who have habitually made absences in class may have lost the chance of learning. He or she might have less chances of getting an aimed position. The school who plays an important role to a child’s motivation has known the impact of absenteeism to a student and to the school performance itself. The chronic spread of absenteeism may have roots that affect the attendance of an individual. “A constant doing may lead to a constant result, just like Domino” (Asia Child Data Trend, 2008). Coping up is never easy, especially when there is a lot of work to be done. Some teacher’s are also considerate that slows down the run of class discussion.

Absenteeism alone when a large part of the school population is involved may not only cause a problem to the school but also to the local administration (Williams, 2001). Attendance is an important factor in school success among children and youth. Studies show that better attendance is related to higher academic achievement for students of all backgrounds, but particularly for children with lower socio-economic status. (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Ready, 2010). Beginning in kindergarten, students who attend school regularly score higher on tests than their peers who are frequently absent. Chronic truancy (frequent unexcused absence) is a strong predictor of undesirable outcomes in adolescence, including academic failure, dropping out of school, substance abuse, gang involvement, and criminal activity (Mc Cluskey, Bynum & Patchin 2004; Baker, Sigmon, & Nugent, 2001). Students who are absent have lower achievement and may be penalized on test scores (Barker and jansen, 2000).

Lotz & Lee (1997) indicated that sustained absences may affect retention as it may degenerate into truancy. The study also revealed that the act of delinquency are more frequent among students who exhibit low grade, have spotty attendance and later on drop out of school. Many factors can contribute to student absenteeism. Family health or financial concerns, poor school climate, drug and alcohol use, transportation problems, and differing community attitudes towards education are among the conditions that are often associated with a child’s frequent absence from school (Teasley, 2004).
Common Causes of Absenteeism

When a student misses a day of school he/she must have lost the chance to hear others, interpret and analyzing the lessons or joins the interaction within the class. This lost is being routed to varying factors that contribute to a child’s regular truancy. These may be family situation or an individual problem, finance concerns, disability, psychotic imbalance, poor school climate, family health, transportation problems, drug and alcohol use, and differing community attitude towards education (Savers et al. 2005). Some possible causes of school absenteeism are listed here.

• Lack of Subject Interest and Personal Interest in studies.
• Available opportunities for entertainment like malls, movie halls etc.
• The mental capacity of a student does not matches with the course opted.
• Too much pamperness from family.
• The poor teaching skills of a teacher also keep away student from the school.
• Unfavorable learning environment, unconducive interpersonal relations between students & teachers in schools.
• Lack of confidence and Ragging also cause absenteeism.
• Lack of allied activities also causes absenteeism like no sports program, no fresher or farewell parties, no annual day celebration etc.
• Poor food of canteen and poor infrastructure facility in school such as no place in a library to sit may also be considered as reasons for absenteeism.
• Teacher absentees or lacking of efficient teachers in schools is a major cause to shift towards private tuitions which further lead to student absenteeism.
• Most of the students are doing private coaching’s for their entrance examinations such as medical engineering or are preparing for their board exams through private tuition causes absenteeism in school & college.
• Preparation for examination, excess of homework and sometimes fear from examination keep away students from school/college.
• Preparation for the participation in TV shows in dance musical or acting, G.K. contest programs also increase the percentage of absenteeism.
• If school or college is far off the percentage of absenteeism may increase.
• Over expectation of parents also deteriorate the attendance of a student when s/he is unable to cope with parent nature of making comparison among their own children of with the friends of their child.
• Poor socio-economic background of the student and too much socialization causes absenteeism. It mostly happens during teen age and college when the students form a group to freak out.
• Use of drug and alcohol by the student and peer group influence.
• When more than desired facilities are provided by parents such as CAR, Mobiles, High amount of money as Pocket Money the student start enjoying those facilities and become absent.
• Social phobia (don’t have friends), Health (always sick) and inferiority complex within student causes absenteeism.
• School culture shock (have a hard time coping up, might be that the school is too advance or too slow.)
• Influences from outside the school gates (sees people who cuts classes, Internet and Computer games.)
• Financial support (the family can’t afford education or education is not a primary necessity).
• Differing Community Attitude towards Education (The people that surrounds your home and within it education is not given importance)
• Transportation (The family might lived in a very rural community where in transportation cannot easily reach.

Effects of Classroom Absence

Students who skip school a lot miss out on the opportunity to gain a quality education, while teachers who are often absence may hurt the students' chances by weakening the school's ability to function. Students without adequate parental supervision may skip school to escape the boredom or cope with depression. Others stay away from class because of feelings of disconnectedness and inadequacy. Some effects of classroom absence as shown in Figure I are being explained here.

![Diagram showing effects of classroom absence](image)

- **Disconnected to School:** Students who are frequently absent from school have more difficulty forming relationships and participating in school activities. Students with excessive absences may feel disconnected from academics and believe that the lessons are not relevant to their lives. They may spend less time in extracurricular activities, which reduces their chances to discover their passion, gain recognition for their talent and develop their skills outside the classroom. Disconnected student lack accountability which can lead to behavioral issues and poor academic achievement. Teachers who are frequently absent may not be able to bond with students. As a result students are more likely to disregard lessons and take school less seriously.
Compromised Learning: Excessive absences create gaps in the student's education. Lesson plans are designed to prepare students for the next lesson. However, if the student is not present in the classroom for the teacher to help them, the student has a higher chance of being left behind. Due to frequent absences, students may forget the previous lessons which results in academic insecurity. Students may be doubt their ability to excel academically and stop putting in the effort to achieve high grades. If teachers have excessive absences, the learning process of the students becomes disrupted. Instead of challenging lessons, students are given busy work from less qualified substitute teachers.

Lack of Positive Social Support: Constructive support from teachers and peers can boost a student's confidence in academics and encourage her to work towards academic success. Many students with excessive absences are dealing with difficult financial, health or family situations. However, without the chance to gain support from teachers, the student may not receive the extra attention she needs. Students who are exposed to negative attitudes about school will not have to chance to befriend students that excel academically. Teachers who are frequently absent are less able to join a strong network of teachers and gain the support of administration. This can lead to further clashes, organizational issues, conflicts and divisions within the school.

Strained School Budgets: Student and teacher absences put a heavy burden on the school budget. Money that could be invested in field trips, technology and extracurricular activities are instead wasted on the cost of absences. It has been found that Oakland, Unified School District suffered a loss of $4 million from student absences. Raegan Miller, researcher for American Progress, revealed that teacher absences cost the nation $4 billion.

Removal from School: Chronic absenteeism can often result in the student getting expelled, especially if the student has behavioral issues and extremely low grades. Students who are disconnected from school are less likely to be aware of the attendance policy. This increases the chances of them being expelled from school. To reduce the budget strain and improve the quality of education, teachers with excessive absenteeism are targeted for removal. Many schools are feeling pressure from officials to reduce budget costs by enforcing attendance. As a result frequently absent teachers are vulnerable to layoffs and dismissals.

Possible Solutions to Reduce Students Absenteeism

It is recommended that:

- Schools should identify training needs and organize symposium, workshops, conferences and staff development programs for teachers to enhance their skills and performance level.
- The school administration with the parents of the concerned students must conduct and effective conference dialogue.
- Solutions to the different areas of difficulty due to absenteeism can be taken action by the responsible organizations and individuals in their respective fields.
- Orientation and briefing on students who are absent might be conducted to at least they would commit to absenteeism.
- Schools seeking to alleviate their attendance problems should study the particular circumstances present in the school before adopting any plan. The successful programs should be adopted which fit the needs of the schools.
- The school enlists the help of parents and community agencies in the effort to reduce student absenteeism. It is clear that the schools cannot solve the problem alone.
• Teachers and other members of the school staff become more involved in the programs for reducing absenteeism. Although absenteeism can be viewed as an administrative problem, many of the causes of absenteeism begin in the individual classroom.
• Alternative programs should be developed for students who have trouble adjusting to the traditional structure of most schools. Educators must begin to realize that traditional schools do not meet the needs of all students.

Conclusion
The problem of student absenteeism is gaining much attention from educators, researchers and policy makers as it is not just an educational problem but also a social and political issue with huge social costs. Regular attendance in school is crucial to a child’s ability to learn, grow and thrive. It forms the foundation for further academic and social development. This is why chronic absenteeism in school needs to be addressed from the very beginning. Studies released by the National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP) highlight the adverse affect of chronic early school absence, most notably in the child’s diminished educational progress in the primary grades. In a September 2008 report from NCCP finds a link between chronic absence in students’ early years and a number of negative outcomes later in life – including truancy, delinquency, substance abuse and dropping out of high school. School absenteeism has a far-reaching impact on a child’s academic progress and future. In order to address the problem in meaningful way, efforts should be directed not only at the student or school but at the broader socio-economic and political environment in which schools are located.

References