

Perceptions of Teachers and Learners towards the Effects of Absenteeism on Learner Academic Performance in Selected Rural Secondary Schools in Eastern Cape, South Africa

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KEYWORDS Academic Performance. Learner Absenteeism. Negative Effect. Teacher Absenteeism

ABSTRACT This paper investigates the views of teachers and learners on how teacher and learner absenteeism affects the academic performance of learners in rural secondary schools in the Eastern Cape. The researchers were prompted by observation that it is not uncommon for teachers and learners to be absent from school. Authors argue that teacher and learner absenteeism can have a negative effect on the academic performance of learners. A qualitative research approach with a case study research design was used. Face-to-face, semi-structured interviews were used to collect data. Interviews were guided through an interview schedule. 16 participants from four schools were conveniently selected. The following participants were purposefully selected and interviewed per school, that is, principal, a head of department, a post level 1 teacher and a learner per school. The main findings revealed that there are no effective strategies to curb teacher and learner absenteeism. To regulate learner absenteeism, the South African Schools Act should be clearer on the responsibilities of learners regarding their absence from school.

INTRODUCTION

In South Africa there are laws that regulate absenteeism for both teachers and learners. Such laws are the South African Schools Act (SASA) (84) of 1996 that regulates learner absenteeism and the Employment of Educators Act (EEA) Act (76) of 1998, which stipulates that a permanently employed teacher, who is absent from work for more than 14 days without permission of the employer, shall be regarded as having been discharged unless the employer directs otherwise. It may be argued that teachers who are frequently absent from school for no valid reason may be in violation of the stipulations of the above-mentioned laws and regulations. The South African education system is faced with the challenge of teacher and learner absenteeism that affects the provision of quality education in schools. Teacher and learner absenteeism

leads to loss of teaching time and insufficient syllabus coverage.

Over a number of years, there has been poor academic performance of learners, especially in some schools in the Eastern Cape Province. The province has failed to produce the desired quality of education (Ziduli et al. 2019). For the quality of education to improve, both teachers and learners must attend school regularly to acquire quality education (Nedungadi et al. 2017). They further argue that the reduction of teacher and learner absenteeism is important in improving quality teaching and learning. They also claim that motivated and committed teachers are the major role players in improving the quality of education for sustainable development. The researchers agree with Ziduli et al. (2019) and Nedungadi et al. (2017) that to improve the quality of results in the Eastern Cape, both teachers and learners must attend school regularly and that teachers must be kept motivated so that they stay committed to their work.

Teachers play an important role in nurturing learners, providing them with the much-needed skills and their knowledge base and thus moti-

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vating them to contribute positively to society (Msosa 2020). There are cases where one finds that a teacher has been absent for a long time, but there is no one substituting for them in the meantime. The challenge is that, during this time, learners are not taught. It may be argued that learners may suffer during this whole period because they do not have a teacher to teach them in that particular subject since the other teachers may be overloaded to take over the work of the absent teacher. According to Birioukov (2016), learner absenteeism has received a lot of international academic attention. It is the cause of decreased academic outcomes and a high level of dropouts in learners. In South Africa, compulsory school attendance is regulated by the South Africa Schools Act (SASA) 84 of 1996. It is unfortunate that the Act puts the responsibility upon parents to ensure that their children attend school and does not put it upon the learners to make sure that they attend school and not be absent for no valid reason.

Research Problem

Although teacher absenteeism is a global phenomenon, it is more prevalent in developing countries than in developed countries (Bold et al. 2017). South Africa, as a developing country, is not immune to this problem. Teacher absenteeism negatively affects learners' academic performance, behaviour, targets and goals that they set for themselves. Teacher absenteeism also affects the role that learners want to play at school (Ameeq et al. 2018). It is clear that teacher absenteeism does not only affect learner academic performance but also disrupts the school.

Learners also absent themselves from school. Their reasons for being absent vary, some are of questionable validity while others may be sick and not be able to come to school. Mafa (2018), argues that learners who, on a regular basis, are absent from school are at risk of not attaining their educational, social and psychological abilities. They may also be exposed to danger during the time when they are absent from school. If left unsolved, teacher and learner absenteeism may have negative effects on learners' academic performance. This may not only affect the learners but the society at large.

Research Question

The primary research question this study aims to answer is, what are the teachers' and learners' views on how learner academic performance is negatively affected by teacher and learner absenteeism?

In order to answer this main question, the following are the subsidiary research questions:

- ♦ How does teacher absenteeism affect the academic performance of learners?
- ♦ How does learner absenteeism affect their academic performance?
- ♦ What strategies may be employed to curb teacher and learner absenteeism?

Objectives of the Study

The study aimed to establish teachers' and learners' views on how learner academic performance is negatively affected by teacher and learner absenteeism. The study, therefore, came up with strategies that might be employed to curb both teacher and learner absenteeism. The study also helped to develop a framework that might assist in serving as an 'intervention' to learner and teacher absenteeism.

Theoretical Framework

Adom et al. (2018) state that a theoretical framework is a blueprint that is often borrowed by the researchers to build their own research inquiry. The study looked at two components, that of teacher absenteeism and that of learner absenteeism. The study employed two frameworks, Steers and Rhodes' process model of employee attendance (1978) and Bandura's social learning theory (SLT) (1977). Steers and Rhodes process' model of employee attendance outlines the socio-psychological variables that impact teacher attendance. It explains the cause and effect dynamics between class attendance and performance, and performance and class attendance. More specifically, the SLT holds a better promise of explaining the various dynamics that are at play for both teachers and learners. How learners acquire knowledge is of utmost importance in this study, hence the consideration of this theory. Through the lens of this theory, one can argue that learners have to

attend class and be taught in order for them to achieve academically. The theory implies the importance of attending school so that learning can take place effectively through observing, retaining the information provided, reproducing it and imitating it. According to McLeod (2016), children copy various behaviours displayed by people around them. Learners also learn better from their peers. Peer learning classrooms encourage peers to teach each other. In such an environment, learner engagement increases and this leads to improved performance in learners.

Literature Review

Literature on the effects of teacher and learner absenteeism on academic performance is discussed under the following topics:

The Effects of Teacher Absenteeism on the Academic Performance of Learners

Maphosa et al. (2015) opine that teacher absenteeism does not only interrupt teaching and learning but also negatively affects learner attainment and achievement of learning outcomes. Nedungadi et al. (2017) add that the major concern for education is teacher and learner attendance. They say that the level of accountability of the teachers, which is linked to teacher attendance, has a major impact on learner performance. Mbiti (2016) argues that in developing countries, documented measures of quality teaching are quite low in many countries. He also states that teacher absenteeism is a passive issue in many developing countries. Badubi (2015) agrees with other researchers that teacher absenteeism does not only affect the performance of learners but also adversely affects those teachers who are present. These teachers have to assume the duties of the absent teacher and that demoralise these teachers. He further states that the intervention strategies of the teachers who are present actually exacerbate the condition for those who decide to stay away from work for more days to avoid the pressure of the increased workload. The gap exists in the information regarding the correlation between teacher absenteeism and learner academic performance, particularly in developing countries.

The Effects of Learner Absenteeism on Learner Academic Performance

Many researchers (Kumar and Saqib 2017; Mafa 2018; Otto 2016), agree that there is a challenge of learner absenteeism in many countries. Kumar and Saqib (2017) suggest that there is a strong correlation between learner absenteeism and high rates of school dropout, grade repetition and low academic achievement, and health and physical disorders. Learner absenteeism is believed to be linked to underachievement. When learners are absent from school, it means that they are not exposed to teaching and learning. The statement is corroborated by Mafa (2018) that learner achievement is affected negatively by absenteeism. Absenteeism does not only affect the learner, but also the classroom and the school as a whole and also the community (Otto 2016). This means that learner absenteeism may affect the smooth running of the school and the daily operations of the class.

When teachers plan to do specific activities on a particular day, they do that without considering learners who will be absent. Sullivan (2018) affirms that classroom instruction nowadays is fast paced and time-sensitive. Class attendance does not only allow learners to obtain information that is contained in the textbook, it also increases retention of information and also increases overlearning, which is known for improving class grades. Overlearning is important when considering that learners with poor class attendance engage in the massed practice. Massed practice simply means cramming for examinations. Distributed learning practice is known to be good. Class attendance is therefore, good for distributed learning practice. In class, learners are able to do extra work such as revision and homework as well as learn from their peer through cooperative learning. Sullivan (2018) argues that when learners are absent from school, they face a variety of consequences. For example, they miss out on assignments, and when they miss out on assignments, they are likely to perform poorly on their academic work. Learners may also suffer long-term and short-term consequences. On a short-term basis, they find themselves having to repeat the grades and being labelled as stupid or under-achievers. In the long term, they find themselves facing the risk of being unemployed because there is al-

ways a possibility that they may drop out of school. It is also stated that even when they ultimately attend they fail to do their homework because their absences prevent them from effective learning. Balkis et al. (2016) reveal that learners who regularly attend school have higher academic achievement than learners who have high absences. Those learners who attend regularly get all the benefits of being taught. Komakech and Osuu (2014) argue that learners who miss classes lose the benefit of having instructions explained and demonstrated to them by the teacher.

Komakech and Osuu (2014) assert that for effective teaching and learning to take place effectively, there must be proper interaction between the teachers and the learners. He also argues that learners lose auditory and visual supplementation of the textbook, the opportunity to learn from questions asked by other learners during lesson delivery and the explanation provided by the teacher thereof. Otto (2016), in her research that was conducted in South Africa on the management of learner absenteeism in urban schools, revealed that absenteeism might have serious consequences on learners, such as the use of drugs and alcohol, which may lead to poor academic performance and poor health. Absentees may also be exposed to violence, as they are not supervised most of the time. Violence results in poor school attendance and an eventually increased failure rate. Amongst other things, learners miss the opportunity of becoming part of small class discussion groups that may assist them in understanding lessons better (Khalid and Mehmood 2017). Since they do not get guidelines for assignments, they do not do well in assignment writing. This results in their performance dropping and they eventually drop out of school.

Strategies That May be Employed to Curb Teacher and Learner Absenteeism

Having procedures in place to reduce teacher absenteeism does not guarantee that it will be effectively managed (Naidoo, 2017). This means that measures to reduce teacher absenteeism in schools must be regularly evaluated if they are to be effective. According to Msosa (2020), education policies can contribute to teacher ab-

senteeism in specific circumstances. Teachers in South Africa's Gauteng province, for example, are only disciplined if they are absent for more than 20 days. This implies that education measures should be reinforced to lower the rate of teacher absenteeism.

Parental participation, according to Kim and Barret (2019), can be defined as parents' behaviours that help their children develop academically and intellectually. According to Ntekane (2018), parental involvement in a child's education is important. This means that if a parent does not participate in their child's education, the youngster may struggle academically, and the parent will be unaware when the child is absent from school.

METHODOLOGY

Research Paradigm

The study is interpretivist in nature because the researchers interpreted what the participants were telling her. The interpretivist paradigm is linked to the phenomenological approach, whose epistemology is based on a creativist foundation of knowledge. The emphasis was on the viewpoints of participants as insiders, in understanding the social realities of absenteeism. Thanh and Thanh (2015) argue that interpretivism empowers researchers to view the world through the perceptions and experiences of the participants. The study used the experiences of the participants to construct and interpret an understanding of the phenomenon from the data gathered. To be in line with interpretive paradigm, a group of teachers and learners from different schools were used to solicit more diverse information. A qualitative research method which is supported by interpretive paradigm, was adopted. The study aimed at getting insight and in-depth information from the participants. Broad questions were aimed at exploring, interpreting and understanding the problem, which is, the effects of teacher and learner absenteeism on the academic performance of learners.

Research Approach

The study used a qualitative research approach. Lune and Berg (2017) describe qualita-

tive research as referring to meaning, concepts, definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbols and descriptions of things. Qualitative research designs posit a phenomenological epistemology and they are mainly constructivist and subjective in their ontology (Creswell 2009; Newman et al. 1998; Bryman 2012). Qualitative research approach was used because of the belief that meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting (Creswell 2009).

Research Design

The study used a case study research design. According to Maree (2007), a case study describes a unit of analysis, for example, a case study of a particular organisation. The case study research design makes it possible for the investigator to interact with participants and become immersed in the processing of data gathering. The researchers' familiarity with subjects and research sites in the study assisted in understanding the lives of people and their culture (Maree 2007; Leedy and Ormrod 2010; Lichtman 2011). Through a case study, the researchers got the views of the participants from different sites that were visited for data collection.

Data Collection Instrument

Data collection is a detailed description of the data collection procedures for the planned investigation (De Vos 1998). The study used standardised face-to-face, semi-structured interviews. In-depth interviews were used for collecting data on a naturally occurring behaviour in the usual context of the participants. Qualitative research approach was used because of the belief that meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting" (Creswell 2009).

Population

Alvi (2016) states that population refers to all the members who meet the particular criterion specified for a research investigation. The population of the study was the rural secondary schools in Lusikisiki in O.R.Tambo Coastal District.

Sample

Sampling refers to the process used to select a portion of the population for study (Maree 2007). McMillan and Schumacher (2006) posit that choosing a research site is a negotiable process to obtain the freedom of access to a site that is suitable for the research problems and feasible for the researcher's resources of time, mobility and skill.

Convenience sampling refers to situations when elements are selected based on the fact that they are easily and conveniently available (Maree 2015). The four schools were conveniently selected because it was quick and easy to reach them.

Purposive sampling: Leedy and Ormrod (2010) suggest that researchers choose participants who are accessible and convenient for the study. It is used in situations where the sampling is done with a specific purpose in mind (Maree 2015). The non-probability purposive sampling strategy was used in choosing the participants on the basis of their knowledge of the phenomenon.

Participants

Participants were purposefully selected from 4 schools. They consisted of one (1) post level 1 teacher (PL1), 1 Head of Department (HOD), and the Principal or Deputy Principal (DP), where the principal was not available for the interview, so as to enrich the data collected. That made a total of 12 teacher participants. The teachers assisted in the selection of learner participants and one learner was selected from each school. The total number of participants was 16.

Data Analysis

Lune and Berg (2017) suggest that qualitative data need to be reduced and transformed, in other words, coded in order to make them more readily accessible and understandable to arrive at different themes and patterns. Labels or codes for chunks of data that summarised the responses of the participants were created and the examples of participants' words were recorded as they were and established properties of each code. Similar codes were gathered together into

categories. Data was recorded using in vivo coding and then identified the categories and themes. Data were reduced through coding and identifying categories and themes. The information was analysed through open coding by reading through the data several times so as to be familiar with it.

Ethical Considerations

Before commencing with the research, permission was requested from the Eastern Cape Department of Education (ECDoE), the circuit manager, the principals of the schools and the teachers who were going to participate in the interviews, to conduct research in the schools in Malangen, Central and Palmtop Circuits in Lusikisiki. The teachers and learners who had agreed to participate signed consent forms.

Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest four criteria for judging the soundness of qualitative research. These are dependability, credibility, transferability and confirmability. They argue that these are an alternative to traditional quantitatively oriented criteria, and they better reflect assumptions involved in qualitative research. The researchers tried to maintain trustworthiness by strengthening dependability, credibility, transferability and confirmability.

Limitations

The limitation of the study was time. Since the research was conducted in four secondary schools of Lusikisiki, the researcher had to manage time very well, as the case study is time consuming. Data collection took a longer time than expected. It was initially planned that all the participants in one research site would be interviewed in one day to avoid travelling back and forth to the same school so that data collection from all the sites would be finished in four days. This proved impossible for two of the three schools that are in the rural area because in these two schools, teachers were not available for the interviews, as they were busy conducting examinations. There was also a limitation of the chosen research design. The case study, as it was

used to collect data, is known for its lack of generalisability. This means that, the results of the study could not be generalised.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The main research question was stated as follows: What are the teachers' and learners' views on how learner academic performance is negatively affected by teacher and learner absenteeism? To solicit information from the participants, in response to the question, interview schedules were used. The results revealed that teacher and learner absenteeism has a negative effect on the academic performance of learners.

How Teacher Absenteeism Affects Learner Academic Performance

Participants in all sites agreed that teacher absenteeism affects syllabus coverage. They claimed that if the syllabus is not covered, that results in learners not achieving to the best of their abilities, and thus underperforming. When a teacher is absent on a particular day, it means that their subject is not taught on that particular day. Teacher absenteeism also affects planning because the syllabus is not finished at the time it is supposed to be finished. The annual teaching plan (ATP) stipulates what should be taught on a day-to-day basis. According to School 4 (S4) HOD, *"One minute lost is a great loss because teachers have to teach according to the annual teaching plan. The ATP stipulates what a teacher should do on a day-to-day basis."* This claim was supported by School 3 (S3) PL1, *"We have a time frame to cover the syllabus and if a teacher is absent excessively, they will not cover the syllabus."* The participants added that, if the syllabus is not completed, it means that little or no knowledge is imparted to learners. When the teacher comes back, they rush through the syllabus to cover for the lost time. This rush may have a negative effect on learners grasping the information. School 1 (S1) (PL1) agreed that: *"If a teacher is absent for a month, it is impossible to cover for the lost time."* Even those learners who are more capable do not perform to the best of their ability. S1 HOD supported the statement that: *"Even those who are good are negatively affected by teacher absenteeism"*

because little is taught and the syllabus is not covered." The learner academic performance drops and grade 12 learners are the most affected ones because they have to get good results in order to be admitted in any tertiary institution. It is also claimed that teachers are not worried about grades 10 and 11 because they are assessed internally. Teachers allocate learners wrong marks and give them unsupervised tasks. Assessment is therefore, not the true reflection of the learners' performance. S4 PL1 alleged that, *"It (teacher absenteeism) affects learners in different ways. Teachers do not give learners the marks they deserve. They allocate marks, give them unsupervised tasks and they are not able to see the learners' actual performance because they manipulate their marks."* Learner participant from S4 indicated that, *"We are not taught what we are supposed to be taught and when they come back they rush through the syllabus. The teacher summarises and does not give full information."*

The responses of both teacher and learner participants indicate that teacher absenteeism is a concern for everyone affected. The study revealed that teacher absenteeism negatively affects the academic performance of learners. This finding is supported by Bipath et al. (2019) who assert that not only in South Africa also globally, teacher absenteeism is the most important factor that undermines the building of a conducive learning environment. When prescribed work for learners is not completed, that results in poor performance. Learners lose the desire to learn, and that leads to violence among learners in the classroom. Learners are thus disadvantaged, and as a result, perform badly academically. Even good learners do not perform to the best of their abilities. If a teacher is absent for a day, it means that the learners are not taught on that particular day. After being absent the teachers rush the syllabus, leaving learners with a content gap. They also give learners marks that they do not deserve. Learners' future is also affected, as they end up losing motivation and interest in their studies (Msosa 2020). The findings also revealed that teacher absenteeism affects planning because the syllabus is not finished timeously. This affects the time that was set for revision. In the end, learners find themselves faced with a situation where they see cer-

tain topics for the first time, during exams. It is evident from the literature review and the findings of the study that teacher absenteeism affects the academic performance of learners in a negative way.

How Learners are Affected by Their Own Absenteeism

All the participants agree that when learners are absent from school they miss out a lot and as a result most of them underperform and some fail. Their absence causes them to have a content gap because they miss certain topics, classwork and homework. S3 HOD stated that, *"Even if a learner has an ability to perform well, they won't do well because they are always absent from school and miss out on many things"*. S4 HOD added that, *"Learners miss out a lot and it is not easy for them to catch up."* School 2 (S2) PL1 narrated that, *"There is a learner in my class who sits at the back and is always absent. As a result, he always gets the lowest marks."* Learner participants, from all participating schools, agreed that learner absenteeism affects them negatively. Those who are frequently absent have a problem understanding the topics that were covered in their absence. They agree that learners cannot succeed by only reading the textbook. They need the teacher guidance, and that is why it is important for them to attend classes. They underperform and fail at the end of the year, which affects the whole class and school. S1 L had this to say, *"For some learners it does. There are topics they will miss when they are absent and they will not understand when they read on their own without the guidance of the teacher."* S2 L added that, *"Learners are not performing well and it is worse for those who are weak. Their performance affects the whole class and the whole school because they fail at the end of the year."* S3 L said, *"The learner is left behind and they cannot perform well. Even if they were absent because of stress back home, they won't be able to focus as they think about stress back home."* The learner from school 4 agreed with the learner from school 1 that there are things that are taught when some learners are absent and that those learners who are absent will not understand them on their own. S4 L explained, *"Learner performance is not good*

because there are things he cannot study on his own."

Evidence revealed that learners themselves are negatively affected by their absenteeism. The finding is corroborated by Kumar and Saqib (2017) that there is a strong correlation between school absenteeism and high rates of school dropout, grade repetition and low academic achievement, and health and physical disorders. Learners miss out a lot on what has been taught during their absence. It is not easy for them to catch up, especially if they have been absent for a long period of time. They may ask other learners about what was taught in school, but it may not be easy for them to understand if they are not taught by the teacher. It is not possible for them to get all the information on the topic that was taught during their absence. This results in them underperforming and even failing even if they have the potential to perform well. The finding is supported by Balkis et al. (2016) that learners who regularly attended school have a higher academic achievement rate than learners who have high absences. The finding also concurs with Garcia and Weiss (2020) that less instructional and learning time reduce learner performance. Learners who were absent from class performed poorly in class. This shows that absenteeism is a hindrance to good education.

It was also found that learners also have a content gap resulting from not knowing the topics that were covered during their absence. The finding was supported by Komakech and Osuu (2014) that learners who miss classes lose the benefit of having instructions explained and demonstrated to them by the teacher. They also lose auditory and visual supplementation of the textbook, the opportunity to learn from questions asked by other learners during lesson delivery and the explanation provided by the teacher thereof. Continued loss of class therefore, results in a content gap. Learners need to attend classes and be taught so that they can succeed academically. There is a problem if they do not attend classes because there will be no teaching and learning taking place. These learners are the cause of the increased failure rate in schools. In the long-term, they may develop low self-esteem because they will not be educated and will not be able to get good jobs and take care of themselves. There is also a possibility that the learn-

ers will forget what they were taught if they stay away from school for a long period of time. When learners are absent from school because of family problems, when they come back to school, they do not concentrate because they are thinking about the problem back home. When they fail at the end of the year, they are the cause of their failure.

Strategies that May be Employed to Curb Teacher and Learner Absenteeism

In most participating schools, the findings revealed that the strategies in place do not successfully curb teacher absenteeism in schools. When teachers are absent, they submit leave forms, so HODs monitor teacher attendance in their departments. S4 Principal said, *"A time book records teacher absenteeism. Teachers are then given leave forms which they sign and submit and teachers are not happy to sign leave forms."* To try and curb learner absenteeism, the School Management Team (SMT) and teachers encourage participation between the parent and the school. If the learner is going to be absent, the parent must report. There is also a subject attendance register that monitors learner attendance in each subject. S2 Deputy Principal had this to say, *"We call the meeting with parents and address them about learner absenteeism. The parent must inform the school if the learner is absent or is going to be. We also encourage the participation between the parents and the school."*

When teachers are absent, they have to submit medical certificates. The findings revealed that the strategies in place to curb teacher absenteeism are ineffective, as they are not properly managed. Teachers continue to be absent from school despite these strategies. The finding is supported by Naidoo (2017) that even though there are strategies in place to curb teacher absenteeism, it does not mean that they are managed successfully. The findings also indicated that post level 1 (PL1) teachers have no say as far as teacher absenteeism is concerned, as it is the responsibility of the SMT. If they notice that there is a teacher who is frequently absent, they advise the SMT. The finding is supported by Naidoo (2017) that the management of teacher absenteeism is the responsibility of

the SMT. They feel that it is inappropriate for them to talk to their colleagues about absenteeism.

In dealing with learner absenteeism, the SMT and teachers encourage participation between the school and the parents. The finding is supported by Kim and Barret (2019) that parental involvement can be viewed as parents' practices that they engage in to help their children develop academically and intellectually. Parents are encouraged to report to the school when the learner is going to absent. This does not seem to be working, as all the schools are still complaining about learner absenteeism. When learners are absent from school for a certain number of days with no valid reason, they are punished to do manual work or they are asked to call their parents since corporal punishment was abolished. The abolishment of the use of corporal punishment is regulated by the South African Schools Act (10) of 1996.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of the study was to establish the perceptions of the effects of absenteeism on performance. The study has been successful in achieving its aims. The study had to explore the perceptions of teachers and learners on the effects of absenteeism on performance. That, coupled with the literature reviewed, helped the study to get insight into the phenomenon under study. It emerged from the study that teacher and learner absenteeism negatively affect the academic performance of learners. The effects can be on a short-term or long-term basis. Learners do not only perform badly in their academic work, they may also face long-term consequences of ultimately dropping out of school and being unemployed or doing inadequate or odd jobs. This increases the rate of poverty. If the Department of Basic Education (DBE) and other stakeholders can make sure that the challenge of teacher and learner absenteeism is eradicated from its roots, that will bring an end to the challenge of poor academic performance in Eastern Cape, South Africa.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Policy Recommendations

The study revealed that there is a need for the South African government to come up with

policies that specifically regulate teacher and learner absenteeism. In the event where teachers produce fraudulent medical certificates, the policy ought to empower the educational leaders to challenge the invalid sick notes. The South African Schools Act (SASA) should be clearer on the responsibilities of learners and not only those of parents regarding learner attendance. The Act must hold learners accountable for not attending school for no apparent reasons.

Practical Recommendations

The study suggests that something needs to be done at the school level to curb teacher and learner absenteeism. The following framework is proposed to help curb teacher and learner absenteeism in secondary schools.

Proposed Framework for Curbing Teacher and Learner Absenteeism

The framework proposes enhanced participation between stakeholders such as the community members including parents and the school to try to curb or intervene in the challenge of teacher and learner absenteeism. The school together with the parents should design a teacher and learner attendance policy (TLAP) following the stipulation of the South African Labour Relations Act 66 of 1995 and the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996. Schools and parents should monitor both teacher and learner absenteeism. A committee that is responsible for teacher and learner attendance should be formed. It should consist of the SMT, parents through School Governing Body (SGB) members and teachers. This committee should be responsible for auditing and keeping records of teacher leave, teacher and learner attendance registers, teacher and learner period registers and they should keep records of absent teachers and absent learners. The committee should report to the principal and the deputy principal of the school, so that teachers account to the committee for their absences. Learners together with their parents should account to the same committee for the learners' absences. A comprehensive report regarding teacher and learner absences should be compiled by this committee and the report must be presented in a parents' meeting fortnightly.

When dealing with teacher absenteeism, the committee must make recommendations in accordance with the South African Labour Relations Act 66 of 1995 and when dealing with learner absenteeism, conditions of the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 should be considered. When teachers know that even though they might have an authentic medical certificate, they will still have to account, they may be reluctant to take leave unnecessarily and that may help reduce absenteeism on their part. The same applies to learners. When they know that they have to account before a committee with their parents, they may be scared to be absent for no reason and that may reduce their absenteeism and truancy. The researchers believe that this framework may assist and may be a solution to the challenges of teacher and learner absenteeism and serve as an intervention strategy to reduce or curb learner and teacher absenteeism. The increased rate of teacher and learner attendance may then improve learner academic performance since there might be improved teaching and learning as teachers and learners will be attending school regularly.

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Paper received for publication in November, 2021
Paper accepted for publication in April, 2022