

*Full Length Research Paper*

# **Dominant causes of teacher absenteeism in basic schools of East Gonja District**

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## **Abstract**

**The poor performance of pupils in schools of the East Gonja district was believed to be the outcome of teacher absenteeism and other related factors. 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 study revealed that teacher absenteeism was really prevalent in the East Gonja district with the rural schools recording higher levels of absenteeism compared with the urban schools. The dominant causes identified include: the rural nature of a school's community, poor working conditions, lack of accommodation, health challenges of teachers, teachers attending social functions, break down of motor bikes or vehicles of teachers who lived far away from their schools, among others. The recommendations for minimising this unfortunate situation include: the improvement in working conditions of teachers, providing patriotism advocacy for teachers and threats of pay cut of absentee teachers. Other measures were strict and constant supervision of teachers, active involvement of PTA and SMC in monitoring and supervision of teachers, guidance and counselling for teachers, and special incentives for rural school teachers.**

**Key Words: East Gonja district, teacher absenteeism, urban community, rural community, basic schools.**

## **Introduction**

Teachers are the fulcrum on which the entire educational system revolves. Expectations on the teaching profession are enormous as teachers have been entrusted with the arduous responsibility of educating the future leaders of Ghana. Government recognizing education as indispensable for social justice and participation has promised quality, affordability and access across the three levels of education such as basic, secondary and tertiary education. The dwindling trends in educational standards these days have painted a negative picture of the performance of teachers. This general perception has been confirmed by the education sector review (MoE, 2010). Teachers' negative conducts affect good quality education delivery in the country. These include: irregular attendance to work, absenteeism, and inadequate use of contact hours. These are just a few issues that affect quality education and performances and therefore need to be dealt with. One can hardly expect high quality education without good leadership on the part of the head teachers and active cooperation of teachers in school management.

In order to provide quality education, an important requirement is that the teachers teach whatever they are supposed to teach and students remain in class when teaching and learning is going on. If teachers are not present on 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. In order to promote high performance among teachers they need to have job satisfaction to enable them focus on their job without distractions. In addition, they need some amount of motivation in order to strive for greater achievements.

## **Statement of the Problem**

An investigation by the Ghana education service (GES) in the East Gonja district showed a decline in the performance of schools at the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE). Several Junior High Schools in the district recorded between zero and five percent passes in the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE). For example the BECE performance of pupils in the district from 2012 to 2014 showed poor results such as 22.5%,

8.7% and 23.48% passes respectively. The abysmal performance certainly closed the door to future academic advancement for many of the students involved.

On the average, teachers in Ghana miss 43 school days within an academic year through absenteeism. However, in the East Gonja district, teachers averagely miss 79 school days in an academic year (District Statistician, 2015). It was therefore important to find out the causes of teacher absenteeism in the district under study and provide recommendations to minimize the menace. There is a belief that education is the key to development and in the light of the importance of education greater attention is paid to it and more so a big chunk of the national budget of countries including Ghana (over 35%) is devoted to education. Thus, if there is any reason to believe that the sort of education being provided is not yielding the expected results, then it becomes necessary for research to be conducted into such relevant areas that affect quality education. One of such areas worth researching into is teacher absenteeism.

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

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

1. Do the levels of teacher absenteeism differ between rural and urban schools in the East Gonja district?
2. Which factors account for teacher absenteeism in schools of the district?
3. What measures should be put in place to control teacher absenteeism in the district?

### **Objectives of the Study**

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

Specifically, the objectives of the study include:

1. To compare the levels of teacher absenteeism between rural and urban schools in the East Gonja district.
2. To identify the factors accounting for teacher absenteeism in schools of the district.
3. To recommend measures to control teacher absenteeism in the district.

### **Literature Review**

#### ***Absenteeism***

There are many variations to the definition of absenteeism. For the purpose of this study, an overview of some of the definitions of absenteeism was presented as follows:

According to the South African Labour Guide, absenteeism is not just about not being at work but it also include, 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 or her duty or obligation becomes habitual but not accidental (Gyansah et al., 2014).

In addition, Iannuzzi (2013, as cited in Gyansah et al., 2014) indicated that absenteeism has to do with indulging in acts that take the worker away from his or her 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.

Similar to Iannuzzi's definition, Vanderweerd (2013) identified two forms of absenteeism which include:

- Innocent Absenteeism - which refers to employees who are 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, as cited in Gyansah et al., 2014) 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.

#### ***Meaning of teacher absenteeism***

According to Gyansah 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. In the definition, emphasis should be placed on two important phrases, contractual days and permanent teachers. That is, a teacher's contractual days refer to those days when he or she is bound by law to be with his or 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 (Gyansah 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.

Besides, Norton (1998) conducted a state-wide study concerning school administrators, and found that 71% of them reported teacher absenteeism as one of the leading problems facing them. The study reported substitute teaching as the third highest-ranked "serious" problem facing school personnel or directors and named teacher absenteeism as the number one ranked "general problem" encountered in their work. Not only are the monetary costs of teacher absenteeism escalating, but the difficulty of finding qualified substitute personnel is also a growing problem for many school districts (Basiru, 2013).

### ***Reasons for teacher absenteeism***

According to Bullington (2002, as cited in Basiru, 2013) many teachers do absent themselves from school due to illness. Sometimes some sick teachers are forced to go to school which can result in transmitting communicable diseases to their colleague teachers. This can eventually lead to even greater absenteeism and reduced productivity among other teachers who try to work while ill. Workforces often excuse absenteeism caused by medical reasons if the worker presents a doctor's note or any other form of documentation. There is however other absenteeism in which a teacher does not seek any excuse for not coming to school. School authorities and pupils do expect this teacher in school but they get to school only to meet his or her absence. Others however, seek permission from the authorities for not coming to school (Basiru, 2013).

Corollary to Blau's argument, Nelson and Quick (2008) indicated that people who are dissatisfied with their jobs are more frequently absent from their work. They went on to say that the type of dissatisfaction that most often leads employees to miss work is dissatisfaction with the work itself. Other cases on which employees can absent themselves are dissatisfaction with their salaries and poor motivation.

Moreover, Mary et al. (2015) identified five broad categories of factors that influence teacher absenteeism. The categories include issues about pay structure, management, working conditions, community conditions, and social and cultural responsibilities.

### ***Issues about pay structure***

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).

### ***Contractual status***

In Indonesia contract teachers are absent at significantly higher rates than non-contract teachers (Usman & Suryadarma, 2007). Basically, contract teachers are non-civil service employees who are hired by local schools on fixed-term contracts and who often have less professional training than civil servant teachers and are paid less (Muralidharan & Sundararaman, 2013). The other problem that contract teachers face is that their prospects of acquiring permanent teaching positions are low (Usman & Suryadarma, 2007).

### ***Issues about management***

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). Contrary to the conventional notion that private schools serve the needs of small minorities from wealthy families, "a lower cost private sector has emerged to meet the demands of poor households," delivering higher quality education than public and government schools (Tooley et

al., 2005, p. 125). This trend appears not only in Nigeria, but across Sub-Saharan Africa, including in Malawi and Uganda. While cautioning against the unconditional acceptance of this claim (as private schools also can exhibit considerable problems), Tooley et al. (2005) describe government school conditions such as overpopulated classrooms, high student poverty, and poor school planning as likely contributory factors to higher absence rates among public school teachers.

Furthermore, 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. This difference was statistically significant; however, no specific reasons were given to explain this finding.

### **Issues about working conditions**

The nature of working conditions at a school, such as the culture of the school, its physical condition, and responsibilities or expectations assigned to teachers, can influence absence rates. Five factors involving working conditions that relate to teacher absenteeism are: *School culture*, where poor attendance by some teachers had a ripple effect on others at their school. For example, in Ghana the absenteeism of teachers in a school district affected the motivation of fellow teachers, who were left to take on additional planning and instruction (Obeng-Denteh et al., 2011).

#### **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). In India teachers were less likely to be absent at schools that were inspected regularly (Kremer et al., 2005). 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).

### **Issue about community conditions**

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).

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 (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).

### **Social and cultural norms, including expectations for female teachers**

Specific social and cultural expectations and traditions in the Pacific Region may also relate to high absenteeism. For example, traditional feasts and funerals can feature as an important part of village life, and attendance obligations can override professional ones. An individual teacher's status among family and village relationships may also determine whether teacher absenteeism is overlooked within a public school system (PREL & Research and Development Cadre, 1998). Gendered patterns of absenteeism can also be understood as an indication of broader societal expectations of women. In Bangladesh, Ecuador, India, Indonesia, Peru, Tanzania, and Uganda female workers tend to be absent more often because their professional responsibilities as teachers are sometimes at odds with the domestic and caregiver duties they are expected to perform in the home (Tao, 2013; Alcázar et al. 2006; Chaudhury et al., 2006).

## **Methodology**

### **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<sup>0</sup>N & 9.29<sup>0</sup>N and, Longitude 0.29E and 1.26<sup>0</sup>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).

## **Research Design**

The study was both qualitative and quantitative in nature. Primary data under a cross-sectional survey were collected. As a complement, 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 teachers, 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 respondents 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 below presents the distribution of respondents based on the selected schools:

**Table 1:** 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

## 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 larger 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, graphs, 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

Some empirical findings of the study were related to characteristics such as marital status, position of respondents in school, education qualification, among others that relate directly to a specific respondent.

### Marital status of respondents

Figure 1 shows the marital status of the sampled teachers. It indicates that 59.2% of all the respondents were married; 36.7% indicated that they had never married; and 4.1% were divorced. Also, the figure indicates that 60.9% of respondents in the rural schools were married, 33.3% had never married while 5.8% were divorced. For the respondents in the urban schools, 55.2% of the previous section indicates that the average age of the respondents was over 30 years. That is, on the average, 30% were married and 44.8% had never married. The findings conform to those of the older respondents who were supposed to be married if other factors were held constant. Thus, on the average, the sampled teachers were responsible and should understand and appreciate the irresponsibility associated with absenteeism for no valid reason.

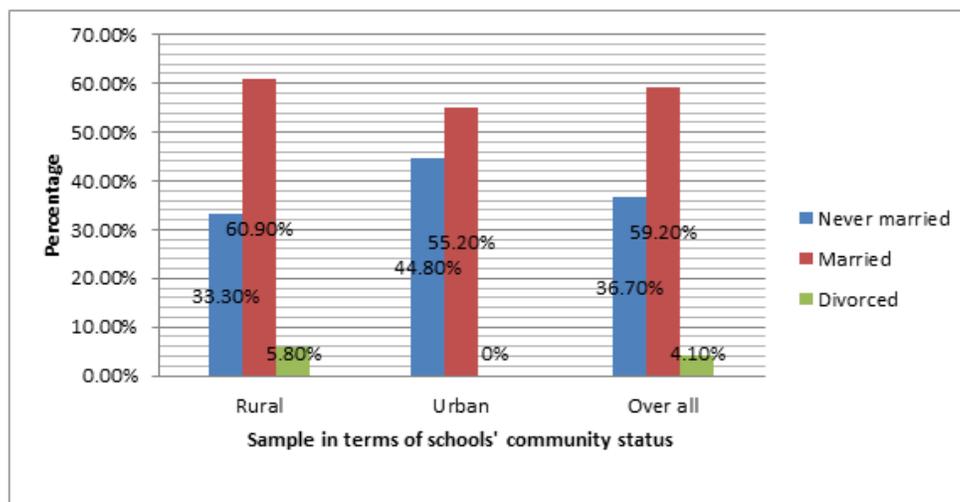


Figure 1 distribution of respondents' marital status  
Source: Field data, 2015

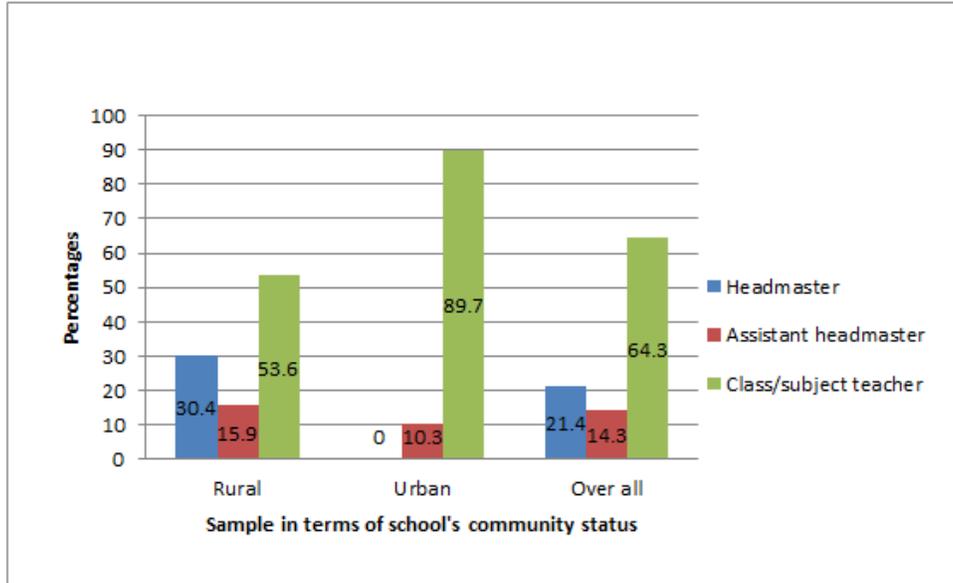
### Position of respondents in school

Figure 2 represents the position occupied by the respondents in their various schools. The figure indicates that majority of the respondents (64.3%) were class or subject teachers, followed by 21.4% being head teachers,

with the least (14.3%) being assistant head teachers. The pooled distribution is similar to those of the rural and urban samples. This is realistic because an average of 5 teachers was selected from each school, out of which at least 3 should be class or subject teachers. The distribution as shown in Figure 2 is relevant, since the

class or subject teachers are mostly those who indulge in absenteeism and should be in good position to tell the

story as it occurs.

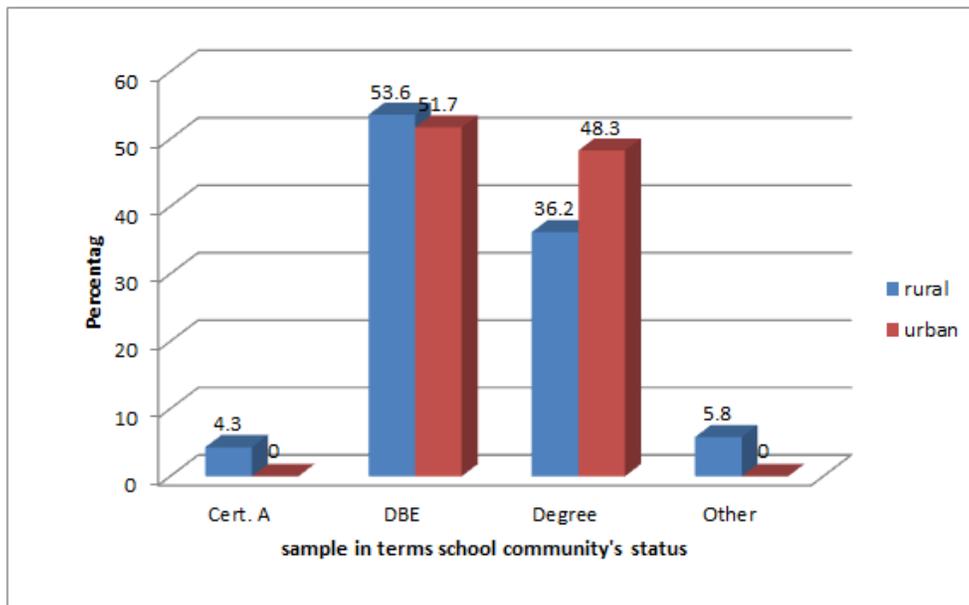


**Figure 2:** distribution of respondents' positions in school  
**Source:** Field data, 2015

**Educational qualification of respondents**

Figure 3 presents the levels of education acquired by the respondents. It indicates that majority of the respondents had Diploma in Basic Education as the highest educational certificate. That is, 53.6% and 51.7% of the rural and urban teachers respectively had DBE, with 36.2% and 48.3% of the rural and urban teachers respectively, had Degree. Thus as far as, the GES is

concerned, the respondents had a considerably higher educational qualification. Scott and McClellan (1990), however, indicate that the class level which one teaches and the level of qualification were two primary predictors of teacher absenteeism. That is, the higher the degree obtained by the teacher, the higher the number of days they are likely to be absent from the classroom.



**Figure: 3:** distribution of respondents' education qualification  
**Source:** Field data, 2015

**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. Table 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 4.5 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.

**Table 2:** Frequent teacher absenteeism in the rural and urban schools

| School's community status | Do teacher frequently absent themselves in your school? |      |       |      | Total | $\chi^2$<br>$\chi^2 = 0.971$<br>Df = 1<br>Sig. (p = 0.32) |
|---------------------------|---|------|-------|------|-------|---|
|                           | Yes   |      | No    |      |       |   |
|                           | 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

**Average level of teacher absenteeism in school**

Table 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 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.

**Table 3:** Distribution of average level of teacher absenteeism in sampled schools

| School's community status | Average period of absenteeism |      |                         |      | Total | $\chi^2$<br>$\chi^2 = 2.57$<br>Df = 1<br>Sig. (p = 0.083) |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------|------|-------------------------|------|-------|---|
|                           | 1 to 3 days in a week         |      | 1 to 2 weeks in a month |      |       |   |
|                           | 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

**Proximity of teachers to their school and the likelihood of them to be absent**

In literature, several factors influence absenteeism one of which is nearness of the worker to the work place. That is,

if a worker stays closer to his work place, chances are that his rate of absenteeism will be lesser compared to someone who lives far away from the work place. Similarly, the setting in which the work place is located (whether rural or urban) can influence the rates of

absenteeism of the workers. Table 4 presents the rating of absenteeism by teachers in rural and urban schools with respect to proximity of the school to where the teachers lived.

On the average, the respondents rated the phenomenon as having very low effect on absenteeism (that 34.7% and 20.4% for the rural and urban teachers respectively). The finding, however contradicts the findings of Alcázar et al., (2006) and Chaudhury et al.

(2006) who reported that in Bangladesh, Ecuador, India, Indonesia, Peru, and Uganda teachers who are locals to the school community tended to be absent less often than those who commuted from outside the community. Similarly, the finding contradicts that of UNICEF (2012) which revealed that teachers in Papua and West Papua, Indonesia, who lived in the same district as their schools had an average absence rate of 19%, compared with 25% for teachers who lived farther out in a sub-district.

**Table 4:** School’s community status and the absenteeism rate of teachers from far away

| School’s community status | Teachers who stay far from the school are mostly absent |     |       |     |         |     |       |      |          |      |       |       |
|---------------------------|---|-----|-------|-----|---------|-----|-------|------|----------|------|-------|-------|
|                           | Very high   |     | High  |     | Average |     | Low   |      | Very low |      | Total |       |
|                           | Freq.   | %   | Freq. | %   | Freq.   | %   | Freq. | %    | Freq.    | %    | Freq. | %     |
| Rural                     | 0   | 0   | 7     | 7.1 | 9       | 9.2 | 19    | 19.4 | 34       | 34.7 | 69    | 70.4  |
| Urban                     | 3   | 3.1 | 0     | 0.0 | 0       | 0.0 | 6     | 6.1  | 20       | 20.4 | 29    | 29.6  |
| Total                     | 3   | 3.1 | 7     | 7.1 | 9       | 9.2 | 25    | 25.5 | 54       | 55.1 | 98    | 100.0 |

Source: Field data, 2015

Table 5 presents the ratings of three categories of people who are likely to be agents of teacher absenteeism. From the table, the mean rank for “female teachers are mostly absent” is the lowest which implies that out of the three groups the respondents felt that there is a higher likelihood of a female teacher to be an absentee, followed

by younger teachers, whilst non-professional teachers are rated as having lesser chance of being absentees. The finding agrees with that of Malungo (2010) who found female teachers as being more absentees for reasons such as post and antenatal visits, taking care of the sick, elderly and children at home, as well as laziness.

**Table 5:** Rating of categories of people who may be agents of teacher absenteeism

| Variable   | Rates     |   |       |   |         |   |       |   |          |   | Mean |
|--|-----------|---|-------|---|---------|---|-------|---|----------|---|------|
|  | Very high |   | High  |   | Average |   | Low   |   | Very low |   |      |
|  | Freq.     | % | Freq. | % | Freq.   | % | Freq. | % | Freq.    | % |      |
| Female teachers are mostly absent                  | 0         |   | 8     |   | 17      |   | 21    |   | 49       |   | 4.17 |
| Young teachers mostly absent themselves            | 0         |   | 14    |   | 10      |   | 15    |   | 59       |   | 4.21 |
| Non-professional teachers mostly absent themselves | 4         |   | 3     |   | 7       |   | 7     |   | 77       |   | 4.53 |

Source: Field data, 2015

**Levels of agreement on possible reasons for teacher absenteeism**

Table 6 presents the levels of agreement by respondents about some variables which can lead to higher teacher absenteeism. From the table, 46% and 46.9% of the teacher responded that they strongly agree and agree respectively that lack of accommodation is a determinant of teacher absenteeism; 44% and 44.9% strongly agreed and agreed respectively that poor working condition is a determinant of teacher absenteeism; and 42% and 42.9% strongly agreed and agreed that school in rural community is a determinant of teacher absenteeism. However, the

means for the various variables indicate that poor working condition is the greatest reason for teacher absenteeism, followed by school in rural community, lack of accommodation, health challenges of teachers, teachers attending social functions; with no professionalism on the part of teachers being the lowest determinant of teacher absenteeism. The findings agree with those of Malungo (2010) who found poor conditions of service and lack of accommodation as the major reason for teacher absenteeism.

**Table 6:** variables that may cause teacher absenteeism

| Variable                                   | Rates          |      |       |      |           |      |          |      |                   |      | Mean |
|--|----------------|------|-------|------|-----------|------|----------|------|-------------------|------|------|
|  | Strongly agree |      | Agree |      | Uncertain |      | Disagree |      | Strongly disagree |      |      |
|  | Freq.          | %    | Freq. | %    | Freq.     | %    | Freq.    | %    | Freq.             | %    |      |
| School in a rural community                | 42             | 42.9 | 27    | 27.6 | 3         | 3.1  | 15       | 15.3 | 11                | 11.2 | 2.24 |
| Poor working condition                     | 44             | 44.9 | 24    | 24.5 | 0         | 0    | 26       | 26.5 | 4                 | 4.1  | 2.20 |
| Teachers attend social functions           | 23             | 23.5 | 32    | 32.7 | 15        | 15.3 | 16       | 16.3 | 12                | 12.2 | 2.61 |
| Lack of accommodation in school            | 46             | 46.9 | 16    | 16.3 | 4         | 4.1  | 19       | 19.4 | 13                | 13.3 | 2.36 |
| Health challenges of teachers              | 25             | 25.5 | 32    | 32.7 | 10        | 10.2 | 22       | 22.4 | 9                 | 9.2  | 2.57 |
| No professionalism on the part of teachers | 0              | 0.0  | 15    | 15.3 | 7         | 7.1  | 31       | 31.6 | 45                | 45.9 | 4.08 |

Source: Field data, 2015

**Status of school's community and the means with which teachers go to school**

From table 7, none of the respondents in the rural schools indicated that teachers of their schools go to school walking, 21.7% indicated that teachers of their schools use bicycle and 79.7% indicated that their schools' teachers use motor bike. For the urban areas, 5.1% of the respondents indicated that their schools' teachers walk to school, 10.3% said they use bicycle and 75.9% said they use motor bike. Thus, majority of the teachers in the selected schools use motor bike as a means of transport to go to school, especially those in the rural schools. This can be one of the reasons why the rural school teachers

are more likely to be absent from school since the motor bike can break down or the teacher may not have money to buy fuel to go to school. It also implies that the rural teachers can be involuntarily absent, but they can also give false excuses relating to the motor bike and similar issues to stay away from school. Besides, the probability of 0.004 associated with the chi-square statistic is far less than 0.01 which implies that there is a significant difference between the status of a school's community (rural or urban) and the means of transport with which the school's teachers go to school. That is, if the means with which a rural teacher goes to school is significantly different from the means with which an urban goes to school.

**Table 7:** The means with which teachers in the selected schools go to school

| School's community status | Means by which teachers go to school |     |         |      |            |      |       | $\chi^2$                                       |
|---------------------------|--------------------------------------|-----|---------|------|------------|------|-------|--|
|                           | Walking                              |     | Bicycle |      | Motor bike |      | Total | $\chi^2 = 10.98$<br>Df = 2<br>Sig. (p = 0.004) |
|                           | Freq.                                | %   | Freq.   | %    | Freq.      | %    | Freq. |  |
| Rural                     | 0                                    | 0.0 | 15      | 21.7 | 54         | 79.7 | 69    |  |
| Urban                     | 4                                    | 5.1 | 3       | 10.3 | 22         | 75.9 | 29    |  |
| Total                     | 4                                    |     | 18      |      | 76         |      | 98    |  |

Source: Field data, 2015

## Findings, Conclusion and Recommendations

The main aim of the research was to bring to bear the causes of teacher absenteeism within the basic schools in the East Gonja district. From the synopsis of the findings based on the research objectives and research questions conclusion was drawn. The main causes of teacher absenteeism touched on circumstances such as ill-health, long distances, social gathering, economic and political factors in the district. Attention was also focused on existing capacity building measures that could be taken to minimize the problem if not eradicated completely. Recommendations were made based on the conclusion drawn.

### Health challenges

The research revealed ill-health of teachers as one of the causes of teacher absenteeism in the East Gonja district. It was established that 29% and 27.6% of teachers in the rural and urban areas respectively, absent themselves from school as a result of ill-health. It also came to light that sick teachers who managed to go to school end up transmitting the disease to their colleagues and the pupils they teach. This situation leads to the increase in the number of absentee teachers and a reduction in productivity.

### Long distance

Long distance was another factor that contributed to teacher absenteeism in the district. It was established that 86.5% of teachers in the urban areas and 76.8% of teachers in the rural areas lived a distance of five (5) kilometres or more from schools where they teach. Consequently, those who did not have any means of transport and therefore go to school on foot, go to school very late or absent themselves from school for two (2) or more days in a week as they become tired from the long distance walk. It was also revealed that the 20.3% and 13.8% of teachers living in the rural and urban areas respectively who had their own means of transport such as motor bikes and bicycles were not better as they also absent themselves from school sometimes due to breakdowns of their vehicles or lack of money to buy fuel.

## Funerals and Friday prayers

The research also revealed that social gatherings such as funerals and Friday prayers (by Muslims) were other major causes of teacher absenteeism in the district under consideration. For example, 18.8% of teachers living in the rural areas and 37.9% of those in the urban areas of the district absent themselves from school because they either attend funerals or go to the Mosque, especially on Fridays, to pray. These practices have a negative effect on teaching and learning in the district, considering the fact that the district is dominated by Muslims.

### Inadequate water supply

The research also revealed that inadequate water supply in the East Gonja district was one of the causes of teacher absenteeism in the district. It came to light that 10.1% of teachers living in the, rural areas and 7.1% of those living in the urban areas of the district failed to go to school because they have no water to wash their clothing or to bath. The situation becomes worse during the dry season when there is little or no rain fall in the district. The contact hours lost as a result of the teachers' absence, go a long way to adversely affect output in the school.

### Delay in regularizing teachers' salary

During the research it was discovered that another factor that was responsible for teacher absenteeism in schools within the community was government's inability to regularize newly trained teachers' salary on time. According to the research, 72% of teachers living in the rural areas of the district who were still on allowance attributed their failure to attend school to inadequate resources for their upkeep since they lived on allowances.

### Poor conditions of service

Poor condition of service was one factor that was also responsible for teacher absenteeism in schools in the area. It was established that teachers received low salary which made it difficult for them to care of and provide for their children and other family members. To be able to live in a satisfactory home that offers security and emotional stability, there is the need to look for money necessary to attain these goals (Tao, 2013). In the light of this, teachers

take on secondary jobs or employment to supplement their income.

### **Lack of Accommodation**

The research also revealed that there were no accommodations for teachers in the communities they teach. Teachers who were posted to areas where there were no ready accommodations for them failed to stay at post until a place was found for them. The absence from post negatively affected teaching and learning.

### **Staff development**

Teachers' desire to upgrade their status in the teaching service was one factor that contributed to teacher absenteeism in schools in the district. Many teachers were on study leave. In many cases these created some vacuum in the absence of immediate replacements. Other teachers also opted for sandwich and distance courses. Those pursuing sandwich courses leave the school for some weeks to attend lectures and prepare for examinations. This practice also affected teaching and learning negatively.

### **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 accounts 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 regularizing salaries of newly trained teachers were most of the factors that accounted for teacher absenteeism in the East Gonja district.

### **Recommendations**

The study identified some key factors that accounted for teacher absenteeism in the East Gonja district. Based on the findings stated above the following recommendations are provided to minimise the issue at stake:

- Stakeholders such as NGOs and philanthropists should assist in the provision of safe drinking water, toilet facilities and put in place other sanitary measures to improve the health of the people.
- According to the research, the long distances that some teachers cover to and from their places of work, contributed in no small way to teacher absenteeism in the district. By way of minimizing the problem, government is urged to 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. Apart from the fact that these logistics could help address the problem of teacher absenteeism, it could also serve as a source of motivation to teachers who will give off their best to promote effective teaching and learning.

- 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. If a teacher or two are punished for attending Friday prayers at the expense of their work, others will refrain from the bad practice and this will surely improve upon the teaching and learning process within the schools in the district.
- The government, NGOs, philanthropists and all other stakeholders should assist in the provision of portable drinking water or bore holes especially in the rural areas of the district to ensure constant water supply in the communities.
- The salaries of new teachers upon completion of college should be regularized, at most three months after completion of their courses. Scheduled officers who sometimes delay the submission of inputs to the headquarters must be severely sanctioned. The government should take immediate steps to improve upon the current conditions of service of all personnel in the GES. They should be made to match with their counterparts in other services such as the Ghana Health service. If this is done, it would improve upon teachers' income which would in turn, prevent them from engaging in secondary jobs that are likely to conflict with their responsibilities.
- Stakeholders such as the government, NGOs who are into education, parent-teacher associations, school management committees among others should as a matter of urgency provide accommodation in the schools within the district. 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 classroom for further studies, the researcher suggests to government to encourage teachers who want to further their education to do so through the on-line programmes. When this happens, the time which would have been spent by the teachers concerned to write semester exams or attend lectures elsewhere would be drastically reduced.

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