



QUALITATIVE STUDY OF ABSENTEEISM AMONG HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

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Abstract

Education is an important need of any society and human beings, as well. Next to Secondary education high schools, secondary education is perhaps the most important segment of the whole education. That is why after achieving the goal of universalization of elementary education, secondary education becomes important step of education with important targets of achieving vocational abilities and skills at one hand and achieving optimum development, empowerment and economic, social and personal well-being of her citizens. To achieve these targets every society uses education as its tested tool and mechanism. The phenomenon of absenteeism has been one of the major obstacles in the path of achieving these targets at secondary level of education. High school classes in secondary schools are facing the problem of absenteeism. Absenteeism is high in rural area high schools in Uttar Pradesh. India has the second largest education system in the world after the China. India has made great strides in improving the education system but much still remains to be done. Hence, present study is a community based qualitative study of reason and remedies of absenteeism among rural high school students.

Keywords: 1. Absenteeism 2. High School Students

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY: Education is an important need of any society and human beings, as well. Next to Secondary education high schools, secondary education is perhaps the most important segment of the whole education. That is why after achieving the goal of universalization of elementary education, secondary education becomes important step of education with important targets of achieving vocational abilities and skills at one hand and achieving optimum development, empowerment and economic, social and personal well-being of her citizens. To achieve these targets every society uses education as its tested tool and mechanism. The phenomenon of absenteeism has been one of the major obstacles in the path of

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achieving these targets at secondary level of education. High school classes in secondary schools are facing the problem of absenteeism. Absenteeism is high in rural area high schools in Uttar Pradesh. India has made great strides in improving the education system but much still remains to be done.

Although literacy rate in our country is consistently increasing yet, it is alarming that situation of high school absenteeism among children of the age between 14 to 16 years is also increasing. In the last decades, efforts have been made to improve the condition of secondary education. From independence, various commission, committees and policy papers are being shaping the action plan of eradicating these obstacles. Our constitution in its article-45 has stressed on the elementary education but cent per cent attendance is still a distant dream. The phenomenon of school absenteeism at high school level still remains a blot on the progress of education in India.

Absenteeism is habitual pattern of absence from class by a student. More recently, student seeks to understand absenteeism as an indicator of social adjustment. The problem of absenteeism has been continually troubling the system of secondary education at high schools across the country. Absenteeism increases drop-out rate as the students who are frequently and continuously absent from classes tend to leaves schools before the final year of the educational cycle of high school level education. Thus, absenteeism from classes certainly reduces the student opportunity to learn as they leave school before completing an educational cycle. It is the responsibility of teachers to manage and reduce the high incidence of absenteeism and of dropping out of learners in schools, in long turn. The reasons for absenteeism need to be identified and solutions to this problem need to be suggested. The increase in absenteeism adverse effect the children as victims of school drop-out, they end up being entangled in anti-social behavior, and the major social cost of dropping out of school increased demand for social services.

The Nation's children are its future workers, citizens, and leaders. Education remains the major tool but unfortunately, the education industry has suffered low completion due to several factors exposed in various studies. Absenteeism and high drop-out rate diminishes the pool of qualified people from diverse backgrounds who will enter the professional and political ranks that make important public policy decisions (American Psychological Association, 1996). Whereas, the mission of every school should be to educate students and to equip them to become

knowledgeable, responsible, socially skilled, healthy, caring, and contributing citizens (Greenberg et al., 2015). Factors of dropping out are grouped into six categories, namely, demographic, family, socio-economic status, school-related, behavioral, and psychological. Factors that lead to drop-out also include low parental education, disruptive behavior conduct, not liking school, harsh disciplines and having friends and siblings who are dropouts (Freedenberg and Ruglls, 2007). The plight of poverty stricken students is exasperated by stringent school policies that pertain to the payment of fees, attitudes by teachers and fellow students, shortage of food, school wear and stationery (Moyo, 2013). Sometimes pupils' emotions are shattered by experiencing such harsh and unsupportive environments and so they finally opt to absenteeism from the schools. Some researchers have concluded that absenteeism (and drop-out rates) particularly correlated with high poverty rates, poor school attendance, poor academic performance, retention and disengagement from school.

Whereas in United States of America, poverty is high among Hispanics and African Americans and dropout rates among these groups are higher than those of non-Hispanics (National Center for Education Statistics, 2004). There is no single prominent risk factor predicting drop-out. Rather, there are numerous risk factors that work in combination with each other to raise the probability of youth leaving school early. These factors fall into four broad categories related to *individuals* (e.g., truancy, poor school attitude), *families* (e.g., low-income, lack of parental involvement), *schools* (e.g., negative school climate, low expectations), and *communities* (e.g., high crime, lack of community support for schools), (Center for Mental Health in Schools, 2007). There are as many factors that lead to absenteeism and dropout. Thus, the problems of absenteeism and drop-out at primary level of education are important, significant and so worth study.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY: Following were the objectives of the study;

1. To study the factors responsible for absenteeism among students of rural high schools.
2. To suggest remedies for absenteeism among students of rural high schools.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY: The researcher has applied qualitative interpretive approach. The qualitative approach was preferred because it allows the researcher to gain understanding of this social phenomenon from participants' perspectives in their natural

settings, (McMillan and Schumacher, 2010). Qualitative Mixed Method Study was applied to conduct this study. The study was conducted taking high schools of rural areas of Gorakhpur district. Five high schools situated in different rural area Development Blocks of Gorakhpur district and all the participants of the study including teachers and parents were purposively sampled. In the first round, required evidences were gathered through open ended Questionnaire of Student Absenteeism served to teachers as well as to parents, in the second round semi structured interviews to cross validate the evidences gathered through the questionnaire on causes and remedies of absenteeism among students were organized with teachers as well as with parents. Five head teachers from each rural area situated high school and five parents were served questionnaire and then same head teachers and parents were individually interviewed and the responses were recorded and further explored by another explanatory focus group interview. Three focus groups each made of purposively sampled one assistant teacher, one Shiksha Mitra and one parent concerned to same high schools were conducted at three different high schools. This study had chosen to use various sources of data analysis so that diverse points of views can be explored to cast light on the issue under study. Thus, cross validation of data and triangulation of data sources were ensured to make account rich, robust, comprehensive, valid and well-developed. All the data gathered in this study were analyzed thematically in line with qualitative research approaches.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION:

FACTORS LEADING TO ABSENTEEISM: This study sought to find out the factors that that are responsible for absenteeism among high school 9th and 10th class students of Gorakhpur (rural areas). All the factors found responsible for absenteeism among high school students were categorized into family related factors, community related factors, school related factors and teaching related factors. Interpretation and discussion of the findings has been done as follows;

A. Family Related Factors: Family problems such as parental divorce, domestic violence and death of parent or either of the parents have a highly increased student's absenteeism in high school. This was found so because in such cases, students lack concern, ("*do char din school na jaane se kya kie toofan aa jayega*" said a parent) parental love and affection, parental care and control, self orientation, motivation and love for school activities ("*maan baap apne bacchon ki padhai likaai ke bare men kabhi nahin sochte hai*" stated many teachers) . They

become more inclined to show aimlessness and increased absenteeism. Lack of parent's education, lack of required involvement and disregard for education as fruitful has also been reported to be a cause responsible for absenteeism among students. Girls are forced to get married at an early age and are forcefully kept at home for household help.

B. Finance Related Factors: The study found that finance related factors led children to absenteeism. According to World Bank (2003) financial problems contribute to drop-out (permanent absenteeism) in developing countries. Almost all rural area high school faced the problem of children absenteeism. Absenteeism among children has been found emerged as parents shoulder all the responsibilities of paying for their children's school requirements that seems hard to bear for them. Following statements illustrate the views of the individual teachers and parents;

“kaapi kitabe aur pencil khareedne ke liye jugaad banana padta hai”.

“Khana jyada jaroori hai”.

“kheti ke elaba aur to kuchh nahin karta hun”.

“Mata pita ki arthik sthiti bahut kharaab hone ke karan bhi bachchhe school nahi aate”.

Several of these statements were echoed. Financial difficult was a common problem in this study. Sixty three percent of teachers and parents highlighted financial challenges as major reason for absenteeism rural area high school of Gorakhpur district. The head teachers revealed that most of the absentees were due to non-payment for school requirements. This suggests that most parents in these areas are commonly vulnerable to not to sustain children's even secondary education high schools. Furthermore, it is also apparent that access to school completion is difficult particularly in poor rural communities. Where such challenges dog the community members, priority is given to having food on the table and the children drop out of the schools.

C. Extreme Poverty Related Factors: Extreme poverty related issues have been found militating against children's education. **Davidoff (1987)** points out that poverty is associated with a number of educational disadvantages that entail poor attitudes to school, low academic skills, little interest in formal lessons and pessimism on the part of parents. The study's participants cited lack of motivation on part of the pupils and parents leading to poor academic

achievements and eventually leading pupils to drop-out. The views from focus group were arrayed as follows;

“Kuchh to bahut he garib hai. Kisi tarah se gujara kar rahe hain”.

“Jab rasan bantaa hai to bachchon ko gharpar hi rahna padta hai aur roz hi kuchh na kuchh bantata rahta hai aur bachche school nahin aa paate”.

“Barsaat ke dinon mein to bachche aate hi nahin kyonki we kheton mein kaam karte hain”.

“Kam umar mein shaadi hone se jyada bachche hotein hain aur sb ki dekhbhal nahin ho pati”.

The head teachers, assistant teachers, Shiksha Mitras and some of the parents who were interviewed expressed that they have always got reports of pupils who not attending high school classes regularly due to cases motioned above. It emerged that in poverty stricken families, pupils become victims of circumstances and those affected ended up dropping-out of school. Thus poverty is undercutting in rural private schools and has severely compromised children’s education to fend for food and other basics for life.

D. School Related Factors: The school as an agent of educational environment plays an important role in increasing pupils’ learning and retention in school. Parents’ ability to buy books, exercise books, pen-pencil, other equipments and other the necessary clothing for school also influenced whether or not the enrolled children will attend the schools regularly or will be withdrawn from high school classes (**Rose & Al Samarrai, 2001**). The research revealed that school requirements such as exercise books and pens make learning too difficult for children. Most of the teachers interviewed confirmed that absenteeism is a result of inadequate effective learning materials available in high schools. When asked why pupils are not regularly attending school one teacher asserted as following;

“Kuchh teachers aise bachchon ke prati anudaar rahte hain johome work nahin karte, kapiyan check nahin karwate hain”.

“bachchonke pas uniform nahin hai, school uniform par jarurat se jyada jor deta hai”.

The head teachers who were interviewed in focus groups confirmed the incidences of repeated absenteeism and eventually drop-out due to shortage of learning materials in high schools. In perusing school documents such as the registers and progress record books evidence abound that those who were absentees had several missing marks against their names in the record books. It is inferred from this study that teachers were annoyed with pupils who do not write

and such pupils may even be beaten or discriminated in the schools. There is dire absence of adequate communication between the school and community on how best the teachers and parents can assist children with chronic learning problems. The research revealed that there is misinformation on the part of parents on free secondary education high schools.

E. Student Related Factors: The study established that distance to school contributed to problems like absenteeism, drop-out and retention. Evidences gathered from the group focus groups were highlighted as follows:-

“Door se aane wale vidyarthi pratidin nahin aa paate”.

“Jyada doori se aane wali ladkiyan shuru men to regular rahti hain par waad ke dinon men absent rahne lagatin hain”.

Such statements were given and also emerged from the open-ended questions. The study found out that weariness to travel to school on an empty stomach makes learning unpleasant leading to absenteeism. Some head teachers confirmed that they had received reports that parents of girls are over concerned with safety. Some parents became worried for the sexual safety of their children, also. So distance of high schools from home of the students was a deterrent for girl’s education in rural areas. Some women teachers in the focus group highlighted that there is a gross sexual abuse for students.

F. Teacher Related Factors: In high school classes, besides consultation days and general meetings with parents and guardians a two-way communication is also required to improve interaction and interventions. Class teachers need to be encouraged to have guidance and counselling sessions at school so that pupils can develop confidence both in school work and in their teachers when effort and concern to solve pupils’ problems are shown.

Conclusions: From the findings it is clear that there were various factors that contributed to the problem among children enrolled in high school classes. The researcher admittedly contends that the problem of absenteeism among high school class students can be sorted out through School-teacher- parents’ support. Teachers need to undergo continuous professional orientations and training programs on classroom management, learner psychology, and Adolescence Care and Education in order to do their work professionally without undermining, marginalizing or victimizing the children for absenteeism and not writing homework. Government needs to roll out programs of adult education in all parts of the country. The importance of adult education is

envisaged to aid in enhancing attitudinal change among illiterate and poor parents in favor of secondary education high schools and their wards. Communities should develop collaborative solutions to their educational problem. For instance, the female children can be encouraged to attend school by establishing attendance incentives even in high school classes. Government and donor organizations should embark on poverty eradication programs that will make poverty stricken parent able to afford at least secondary education high schools of their children. Donor community is urged to consider funding education for orphans and those pupils who belong to impoverished families in order to reduce the absenteeism in high schools. Governments may unfold their helping hands to fund high schools and to ensure universalization of secondary education also.

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