

SOCIAL FACTORS INFLUENCING TEACHER ABSENTEEISM IN PUBLIC PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN KENYA

A CASE OF NYAMIRA SOUTH SUB-COUNTY

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Abstract

Teacher absenteeism is a big challenge posed to full realization of quality education for all in the world. This is especially so in developing nations. The purpose of the study was to Analyse social factors influencing teacher absenteeism in public primary schools in Kenya; with special reference to Nyamira South Subcounty. The specific objectives were; to determine the influence of social ties on teacher absenteeism, to establish the influence of schools' culture on teacher absenteeism, and to determine the influence of transfers on teacher absenteeism. The study employed causal comparative research. The study targeted a population of 1,066 teachers from 100 public primary schools. A sample size of 106 teachers was identified through stratified sampling. Investigator administered questionnaire was used and analyzed through averages, percentages, measures of dispersion and various coefficients. Analyzed data was presented using frequency distribution tables, histograms and pie charts. The study revealed that social ties created over time among teachers in an institution can have overwhelming influence in the way a teacher sees and interprets issues. The study also revealed that organizational culture may influence absenteeism; it also revealed that work absence is a misbehavior that benefits the self. The study also established that Fridays experienced worst levels of absenteeism.

Keywords: *Education management, Social ties, School culture, Transfers, Teacher Absenteeism*

INTRODUCTION

According to Gupta (2003), excessive absenteeism among school personnel is one of the most neglected problems in public education. High income countries have good administrative system; hence the extent of teacher absence can be calculated. Studies in these countries have focused on reasons for taking leave (which are largely personal reasons) and strategies to reduce the number of absent days (Reddy et al, 2010). Balou (1996) and Pudgursky cited in Miller et al (2007) found on average, public school teachers in the United States are absent between 5% to 6% of the school days.

A study by Bowers and Mclver (2000) in England found teacher absence rate of 3.2%. In Canada in 2008, elementary and secondary teachers were absent on average for 10.1 days at 5%. Israel reported an absenteeism rate of 5.8% in 2002-2003 (Reddy et al, 2010). Studies of government teacher absence in six countries (Bangladesh, Ecuador, India, Indonesia, Peru and Uganda) found teacher absence rates to be between 11% and 27% (Chaudhry et al, 2005). In Nigeria, it is currently estimated that about 20% of teaching workforce in government primary schools are absent on a given work day (World Bank, 2010; Champion, 2010). World Development Report (2004) indicates that up to 45% of teachers in Ethiopia are absent during one week (Bennell, 2004:26). A recent report by Human Science Research Council (2010) commissioned by UNICEF, found teacher absenteeism in South Africa to be between 10% to 12% with an average absenteeism of 20 and 24 days a year per teacher. Another report found that 20% of teachers in rural Western Kenyan primary schools could not be found during school hours, while in Uganda two surveys found teacher absence rates of 27% in 2002 and 20% in 2007. Glewwe et al. 2009 shows that in a region of Kenya, the teacher absence rate averaged at 28.4%.

According to TSC annual reports for 2010/2011, 2011/2012 and 2012/2013, Nationwide, there were 854, 781 and 733 registered cases of desertion respectively. Similarly in the same reports, there were 60, 18, and 10 registered cases of absenteeism in the same period indicated above in that order. Therefore, teacher absenteeism is a real and growing problem in developing countries (OECD, 2004). A survey of literature of various studies on teacher absence concludes that there are very view clear determinants of teacher absences (Norton, 2008).

Statement of the problem

The cost or impact of teacher absenteeism goes beyond poor scholastic outcomes to include economic and social costs. In schools, absenteeism has a monetary cost to the authorities with regard to substitute teachers. In cases of excused (illegitimate) absence, payment of such

teachers, represent unproductive public expenditure. It is investment without returns. It can be considered as waste of scarce resources and a threat to instructional quality (Chapman, 2004). In many countries (Kenya included), investment in education takes the lion's share of the total budget. For example, El Salvador, Guinea, Morocco, Kenya and Yemen, in which one-fifth to one-third of public budget are allocated to education (World Bank 2006).

A small but growing volume of research on teachers' absence behavior indicates that this problem is particularly severe among school teachers in underdeveloped nations (Alcazar et al., 2006; Chaudhury, Hammer, Kremer, Muralidharan and Rodgers, 2006). Thus the impact of teacher absenteeism is real and hence the need to dig into its causes with a view to addressing it. Reducing teacher absenteeism will mean a great saving and justified public expenditure in form of teacher salaries.

Although earlier work to identify the causes of employee absenteeism has focused on analyzing individual-level characteristics, such as age, gender, or years of experience to explain absence patterns (Muchinsky, 2007; Steers & Rhodes, 2008), not much has been done on social factors influencing absenteeism. Thus, it has been difficult to address the problem of absenteeism without a proper understanding of its determinants.

The proposed study tried to fill this gap by tackling social factors influencing teacher absenteeism comprehensively, thus, the proposed research topic entitled: Analysis of Social Factors influencing Teacher Absenteeism in Public Primary Schools in Kenya. This study was guided by the general and specific objectives.

Research Objectives

The general objective of the study was:

To determine the influence of social factors on teacher absenteeism in the public primary schools in Nyamira South Sub-county

The specific objectives of the study were:

- i. To determine the influence of social ties on teacher absenteeism in the public primary schools in Nyamira South Sub-county.
- ii. To examine the influence of schools culture on teacher absenteeism in the public primary schools in Nyamira sub-county.
- iii. To explore the influence of level transfers on teacher absenteeism in the public primary schools in Nyamira sub-county.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

This study was guided by and grounded in social exchange theory, Herzberg's theory of motivators and hygiene factors and Maslow's theory of motivation and personality as discussed below.

Social exchange theory

The workplace absenteeism cannot be explained without relating it to some relevant theories. One of the theories to ground the conceptual framework (social factors that influence absenteeism) is borrowed from social exchange theory (Blau, 2004), which postulated that co-workers have an influence in attenuating certain behaviors or curtailing certain conducts at the place of work. The reciprocity inherent implies a support system with norms and beliefs necessary to sustain the system. Exchange theory is based on the premise that human behavior or social interaction is an exchange of activity, tangible and intangible (Homans, 2001), particularly of rewards and costs (Homans 2001). It treats the exchange of benefits, notably giving others something more valuable to them than is costly to the giver, and vice versa (Homans, 2001), as the underlying basis or open secret of human behavior (Homans, 2001) and so a phenomenon permeating all social life. Not only is the market permeated by exchange but also the non-economic realm-the social relations situated between extremes of intimacy, self-interest or cost-benefit calculation and disinterested, expressive behavior (Blau, 2004).

From a social exchange perspective, relations between two co-workers are the joint product of the actions of both parties, with the actions of each being dependent on those of the other (Blau, 2004). Thus supportive interactions generate a sense of commitment and obligation, with the understanding each party in the support system should respond in kind and in turns. While previous research suggests that coworkers are likely to be adversely affected by an individual's absence from work (Johns 2007), these adverse affects on coworkers are likely to be more salient to the individual and thus impose increased social costs on the individual to the extent that the individual feels more obligated and committed to these coworkers (Lawler et al., 2006).

Accordingly, recognizing the potential adverse impact of absenteeism on one's co-workers (in the form of work overload, overtime demands, and/or the need for them to perform tasks for which they may not be adequately trained), individuals perceiving their co-workers as being more supportive may be less willing to impose these costs on their co-workers and attend work despite alcohol-related impairment. Such a notion is consistent with recent trends in absenteeism research suggesting that employee attendance behavior is influenced by social

control in general (Johns, 2008) and perceptions of equity and psychological contract breach in particular (Johns, 2008).

Herzberg's theory of motivators and hygiene factors

Maslow, a behavioral scientist and contemporary of Herzberg's, developed a theory about the rank and satisfaction of various human needs and how people pursue these needs. These theories are widely cited in the business literature. Herzberg (2009) constructed a two-dimensional paradigm of factors affecting people's attitudes about work. He concluded that such factors as company policy, supervision, interpersonal relations, working conditions, and salary are hygiene factors rather than motivators. This theory can be used to understand some of the social causes of teacher absenteeism, for example supervisory style, and interpersonal relations.

Maslow's theory of motivation and personality

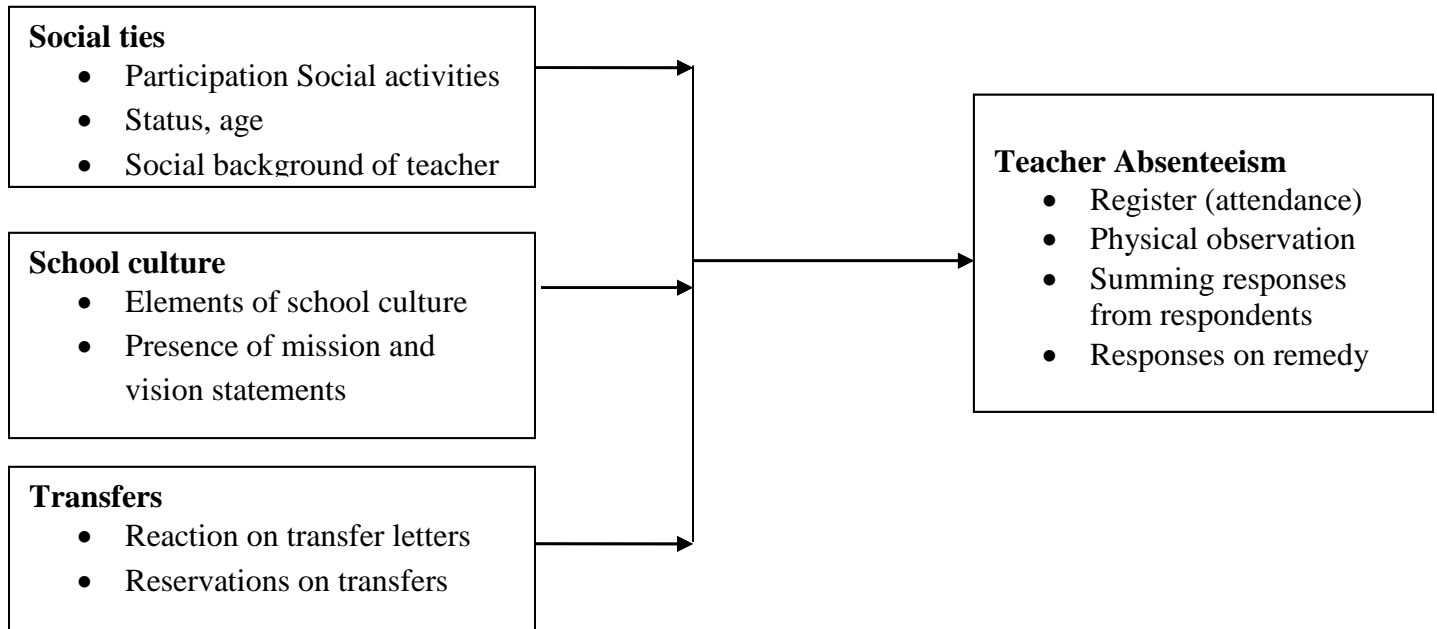
Maslow (2004) introduced his theory about how people satisfy various personal needs in the context of their work. He postulated, based on his observations as a humanistic psychologist, that there is a general pattern of needs recognition and satisfaction that people follow in generally the same sequence. He also theorized that a person could not recognize or pursue the next higher need in the hierarchy until her or his currently recognized need was substantially or completely satisfied, a concept called prepotency. It is often illustrated as a pyramid with the survival need at the broad-based bottom and the self-actualization need at the narrow top.

Work environment that does not support the meeting of teachers needs will tend to elicit teacher absenteeism. The need for safety, security, stability and protection if not well defined by individual teachers may be exploited to promote protected absenteeism behavior. These theories are very relevant to this study as they help explain why teachers absent themselves from work. They relate to the study in the sense that they underpin underlying factors that if present or absent at the work place either tolerate or deter teacher absenteeism.

Conceptual Framework

The review of this literature on teacher absenteeism has been motivated by the curiosity to understand the social factors influencing teacher absenteeism in Nyamira South Sub-County. The literature review under consideration is based on the following conceptual framework: it is assumed that the independent variables (social ties, school's culture, school's infrastructure and teacher's education level) have a great influence on teacher absenteeism.

Figure 1: Conceptual framework



Knowledge Gap

While research has clearly demonstrated that teacher absence has a negative effect on student achievement (Ehrenberg *et al.*, 2001; Clotfelter, 2007; Miller *et al.*, 2007), it has not been as demonstrative about the social factors influencing teacher absence. A survey of the literature of various studies on teacher absence concludes that there are very few clear determinants of teacher absences (Norton, 2008). An analysis of social factors influencing teacher absenteeism has not been clearly tackled in Kenya; hence the need for the proposed study.

In Ongeri Lucas *et al.* (2012), a study in Kitale on School Principal's Leadership Style: A Factor Affecting Staff Absenteeism in Secondary Schools concentrated on leadership style of the principal as a determinant of absenteeism, missed on social factors as determinants of absenteeism.

Another Study by Lorena Alcazar *et al.* (2000) was based in Peru and looked into why teachers are absent? It generally probed into service delivery in Peruvian Primary Schools and was done across Peru and failed to tackle fully social causes of absenteeism.

Another study on Absenteeism in Israeli School Teachers by Shapira-LishChinsky, O. (2007) focused on An Organizational Ethics Perspective and missed out to fully delve into social factors that influence absenteeism.

Although governments and International agencies may be happy with overall percentage figures of teacher absenteeism for comparative purposes, when it comes to the analysis of

individual institutions, and in some circumstances, school sub - county records, then the composite figures may have little or no meaning. Overall absence rates may be less problematic than getting to understand the number of spells of absenteeism according to Bowers 2001 with whom I concur. Furthermore, earlier work to identify the causes of employee absenteeism has focused on analyzing individual-level characteristics, such as age, gender, or years of experience to explain absence patterns (Muchinsky, 2007; Steers & Rhodes, 2008). These gaps have made results into strategies and policies of addressing teacher absenteeism less effective than should it be. The proposed study will therefore try to fill this gap by tackling social factors influencing teacher absenteeism comprehensively.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research problem was studied through the use of descriptive survey research design. , the study targeted a population of 1,066 teachers from 100 public primary schools spread across six administrative zones. Stratified sampling design was used to get the number of teachers to participate in the research study. The sampling frame for this study was the list of teachers working in each of schools in the six zones of Nyamira South sub-county. The sample size shall be of 106 respondents. This research study adopted the 10% of the total population the sample size as shown in the table below:

Table 1. Sample size

Zone/ Strata	Keera	Nyamaiya	Township	Nyagachi	Gesiaga	Kebirigo	Strata Total	Sample size for each strata (10% of total population)
H/teachers	12	18	18	14	13	24	99	10
D/Head teachers	12	18	18	14	13	24	99	10
Assistant teachers	128	155	169	106	95	215	868	86

The proposed research collected data using researcher administered questionnaires to interview respondents. The study carried out a pilot study to test the reliability of the questionnaire. The researcher determined reliability by use of Cronbach's alpha. If the reliability coefficient is more than 0.7, then data was reliable. Cronbach's alpha measures the average of measurable items and its correlation the study therefore established that School culture had the highest reliability ($\alpha = 0.815$), followed by Social ties ($\alpha = 0.812$) and Transfers ($\alpha = 0.715$). This

illustrates that all the four variables were reliable as their reliability values exceeded the prescribed threshold of 0.7. Data analysis involved describing or summarizing the data using descriptive statistics. Data analysis involved statistical computations such as averages, percentages, measures of dispersion and various coefficients. SPSS software was used to enter data and make summarized categories which enabled the establishment of relationships and patterns among the data. In this way, it was possible to interpret responses. Analyzed data was presented using frequency distribution tables, histograms and pie charts.

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Descriptive statistics was used to discuss the findings of the study. The study targeted a sample size of 106 respondents from which 102 filled in and returned the questionnaires making a response rate of 96.2%, this response rate was satisfactory to make conclusions for the study as Cooper and Schindler (2003), states that a response rate of between 30 to 80% of the total sample size can be used to represent the opinion of the entire population.

Social Ties

Table 2: Statements on why mostly teachers absent themselves

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Moderate	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Mean
Attend funerals	25	20	8	3	1	11.4
Peer/colleagues' influence	30	58	12	2	0	20.4
Attend church activities of the sponsor	28	10	24	6	1	13.8
To join colleagues and friends in social events e.g weddings	10	14	34	8	1	13.4
To attend welfare activities e.g merry go rounds	16	33	7	4	2	12.4
Attend sponsor organized activities	49	12	4	4	1	14.4
To take care of sick family members	3	67	1	8	1	16.0

The study sought to determine the extent to which respondents agreed with the above statements relating to why mostly teachers absent themselves, from the finding majority of the respondents agreed that Attend funerals is positively significant to influence teachers'

absenteeism as shown by a mean of 11.4, attending welfare activities e.g merry go rounds also lead to absenteeism of teachers in schools as shown by mean of 12.4. Joining colleagues and friends in social events e,g weddings as shown by mean of 13.4 leads also to absenteeism.. attend church activities of the sponsor attend sponsor organized activities to take care of sick family members peer/colleagues' influence as shown by a mean of 13.8, 14.4, 16.0 and 20.4 respectively had an influence on teachers absenteeism in schools. The above findings concurs with study findings by Rosenblatt (2004) he asserts that the social ties created over time among teachers in an institution can have overwhelming influence in the way a teacher sees and interprets issues and also the way he/she make decisions. It also influences the seriousness with which the management handles absentee problems or even it makes the head teacher not to apply policy measures firmly and fairly. Such social ties (sometimes negative to acceptable work requirements) tend to create tolerance on misbehavior such as absenteeism. Teachers tend to adopt environmental norms regarding absenteeism, thus exhibiting similar behaviors.

School Culture

Table 3: Statements on the effect of school culture on teacher absenteeism

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Moderate	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Mean
There is obvious team work in my school	49	20	8	3	1	16.2
There is openness and trust among teachers	30	11	24	5	1	14.2
There is strong support system among teachers	17	42	12	3	0	14.8
Every teacher value their daily contribution to the common goal	8	59	10	6	1	16.8
Every teacher commits themselves wholly school's success	7	1	41	2	6	11.4
The school has set goals and values that guide teachers	60	2	3	8	3	15.2
The management involves teachers in plans and decisions	24	36	4	1	2	13.4

The study sought to determine the extent to which respondents agreed with the above statements relating to the effect of school culture on teacher absenteeism in public primary schools, from the finding majority of the respondents agreed that Every teacher commits themselves wholly school's success as shown by a mean of 11.4, The management involves teachers in plans and decisions as shown by mean of 13.4, There is openness and trust among teachers as shown by mean of 14.2, There is strong support system among teachers as shown by mean of 14.8, The school has set goals and values that guide teachers as shown by mean of 15.2. There is obvious team work in my school as shown by mean of 16.2, and finally every teacher value their daily contribution to the common goal as shown by mean of 16.8. The above findings concurs with study findings by Rosenblatt (2004) according to Rosenblatt teachers tend to adopt environmental norms regarding absenteeism, thus exhibiting similar behaviors. Many studies refer to levels of teacher absenteeism as being a manifestation of school, or administrative educational district, which has an endemic culture of absenteeism.

Transfers

Table 4: Statements relating to effect of transfers on teacher absenteeism

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Moderate	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Mean
Teachers with own request transfers move on immediately to new station	19	56	5	2	20	20.4
Teachers with transfers decided by TSC delay moving on to new station	27	17	24	31	1	20.0
Teachers deployed upward avoid being absent	32	10	7	49	0	19.6
Teachers who fail to get upward deployment mostly become absent	24	15	26	14	12	18.2

The study sought to determine the respondent's level of agreement with the above statements relating to the effect of transfers on teacher absenteeism. From the research findings the study established that majority of the respondents agreed that Teachers who fail to get upward deployment mostly become absent as shown by 18.2. Teachers deployed upward avoid being absent as shown by a mean of 19.6, also that teachers with transfers decided by TSC delay moving on to new station as shown by a mean of 20.0 and finally teachers with own request

transfers move on immediately to new station as shown by a mean of 20.4. The above findings concurs with the findings by (Dalton, 2002) according to Dalton (2002), employees who were denied work transfers against their will were more likely to be absent after these decisions were made than employees whose requests were granted. Also in comparison of absence rates between Israeli employees who were promoted and those who were not, the latter were found to have higher absence rates. Work absence, particularly when considering those that are voluntary, may be viewed as shirking. Whether self initiated or management triggered, transfers seem to be a major cause for teachers' shirking behavior

Absenteeism

Table 5: Extent on how teacher absenteeism could be minimized

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Moderate	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Mean
Post and or transfer teachers in schools far away from their communities of birth	78	15	6	1	2	20.4
Post and or transfer teachers in schools within or near their communities of birth	12	6	77	3	2	20.0
Promote teachers who show consistency in attendance	6	68	15	2	1	18.4
Make it more severe rather than just recovering salary for days of absence	2	4	2	90	9	21.4
Create awareness of host communities to blow a whistle when they observe abnormal teacher absence e.g. teacher taking liquor with villagers during working hour and day	4	9	6	6	88	22.6

The study sought to establish the extent on how teacher absenteeism could be minimized. From the research findings majority of the respondents agreed that Promote teachers who show consistency in attendance as shown by a mean of 18.4, Post and or transfer teachers in schools within or near their communities of birth as shown by a mean of 20.0 Post and or transfer teachers in schools far away from their communities of birth as shown by a mean of 20.4 Make it more severe rather than just recovering salary for days of absence as shown by a mean of 21.4 and finally creating awareness of host communities to blow a whistle when they observe abnormal teacher absence e.g. teacher taking liquor with villagers during working hour

and day as shown by a mean of 22.6 in which view echoes the findings of a study by Alcazar (2012) in the study to investigate the factor affecting Staff Absenteeism in Secondary Schools concentrated on leadership style of the principal as a determinant of absenteeism, missed on social factors as determinants of absenteeism, general probing into service delivery in public Primary Schools and failed to tackle fully social causes of absenteeism.

CONCLUSIONS

From the findings the study established that that although the social ties differ and may be complex in different beverages schools, the social ties of these strategies and teacher absenteeism should be applicable in the organization to ensure effective performance of public primary schools.

The study also established that employee absenteeism should not be merely an individual, private behavior but that group and organizational-level factors, such as organizational culture, may influence absenteeism; culture is a system of shared meaning, therefore individuals of dissimilar backgrounds or at varying levels in the organization should describe the organization's culture in similar terms despite their differences.

The study revealed that if employees were denied work transfers against their will they were more likely to be absent after these decisions were made than employees whose requests were granted. Work absence, particularly when considering those that are voluntary, may be viewed as shirking. Whether self initiated or management triggered, transfers seem to be a major cause for teachers' shirking behavior thus affecting performance of public primary schools.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the study recommends that the management should embrace collective social factor that utilize social ties for tracking the teachers' absenteeism in public primary schools. The study also recommends that it is very crucial that the organization puts effective cultural factors in place through a reporting and review structure to ensure that teacher absenteeism in public primary schools is effectively avoided and assessed and that appropriate controls and responses are in place to ensure performance of public primary schools is maintained.

The study recommends that the management keeps on adopting new strategy measurement to determine the influence of social factors on teacher absenteeism in the public primary schools in Nyamira South Sub-county, Kenya and ensuring that proper measures are put in place.

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APPENDIX: QUESTIONNAIRE

Social Ties

On a scale of 1-5 rate the following statements concerning reasons why mostly teachers absent themselves. 1= Strongly agree 2 = Agree 3 = Moderate 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly disagree

	1	2	3	4	5
Attend funerals					
Peer/colleagues' influence					
Attend church activities of the sponsor					
To join colleagues and friends in social events e.g. weddings					
To attend welfare activities e.g. merry go round					
Attend sponsor organized activities					
To take care of sick family members					

School Culture

How would you rate each of the following statements about your school on a scale of 1-5
(Tick within box)

1= Strongly agree 2= Agree 3= Moderate 4= Disagree 5= Strongly disagree

	1	2	3	4	5
There is obvious team work in my school					
There is openness and trust among teachers					
There is strong support system among teachers					
Every teacher value their daily contribution to the common goal					
Every teacher commits themselves wholly school's success					
The school has set goals and values that guide teachers					
The management involves teachers in plans and decisions					

Transfers

What is your opinion about the following statements on a scale of 1-5

1= Strongly agree 2= Agree 3= Moderate 4= Disagree 5= Strongly disagree

	1	2	3	4	5
Teachers with own request transfers move on immediately to new station					
Teachers with transfers decided by TSC delay moving on to new station					
Teachers deployed upward avoid being absent					
Teachers who fail to get upward deployment mostly become absent					

Absenteeism

1 Rate the following statements about how teacher absenteeism could be minimized on a scale 1-5

	1	2	3	4	5
Post and or transfer teachers in schools far away from their communities of birth					
Post and or transfer teachers in schools within or near their communities of birth					
Promote teachers who show consistency in attendance					
Make it more severe rather than just recovering salary for days of absence					
Create awareness of host communities to blow a whistle when they observe abnormal teacher absence e.g. teacher taking liquor with villagers during working hour and day					