

## We all need more education: What can be done to reduce teachers' absenteeism?



© Takashi Kurosaki

### Overview

Monitoring and financial incentives have been shown to have a significant impact on absenteeism, whereas local monitoring of attendance has failed to have such an impact. However, more evidence is required to strengthen these conclusions.

**Key words:** Quality education for All

### Mind the gap

Teacher absenteeism is a substantial and growing problem in developing countries (OED, 2004). The benefits from the growing success in getting children in school are thus undermined as learning time is reduced. However, there has been little rigorous analysis of the determinants of absenteeism and few impact evaluations of measures designed specifically to reduce it.

**On an average 19 percent of teachers were absent from schools in Bangladesh, Ecuador, India, Indonesia, Peru, and Uganda. Of those present, not all were actually 'working'. In India, 1 in 4 school teachers in government schools were absent and only half of the teachers were actually teaching**

A World Bank study showed that on an average 19 percent of teachers were absent from schools in Bangladesh, Ecuador, India, Indonesia, Peru, and Uganda. Of those present, not all were actually 'working'. In India, 1 in 4 school teachers in government schools were absent and only half of the teachers were actually teaching when the survey team arrived at the schools (Chaudhury et al, 2005).

The evidence linking teacher absenteeism to student outcomes is also thin, even for developed countries (Woods and Montago, 1997). As an exception, the study of Zambian schools shows "a 5 percent increase in teacher absence rate reduced learning by 4 to 8 percent of average gains over the year, for both Mathematics and English" (Das et al, 2005). An evaluation in India found that reduced absenteeism meant students learn more (Duflo et al, 2008). There is also some evidence in the country studies of the World Bank's recent absenteeism project (Rogers, 2006).

## Lessons learned

The first rigorous analysis of absenteeism was conducted amongst health workers in Bangladesh (Hammer and Chaudhury, 2004), where absenteeism was measured on the basis of surprise visits. More recently this approach has been extended to Ecuador, India, Indonesia, and Peru (Rogers, 2006). These studies confirm that rural, especially remote, locations suffered more from absenteeism. Services, including electrification, make it more likely for workers to be present. Private schools have lower absenteeism rates compared to public ones.

Similar results were found in a study of Ghana, which also showed that absenteeism has grown worse in the period 1988-2003 (OED, 2004). However, none of these studies address specific interventions designed to reduce absenteeism.

Five Randomized Control Trials (RCTs) carried out in collaboration with MIT's Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL) have assessed different interventions in Kenya and India (Banerjee and Duflo, 2006). The analysis shows that monitoring alone does not work and incentives can require some independent verification or objective monitoring. In Kenya for instance, headmaster administered incentives were given to all teachers although the data showed no improvement in attendance.

In addition, there is an on-going study under the World Bank's Africa Impact Evaluation Initiative addressing teacher absenteeism in Ghana. The study uses a randomized design to compare the impact of parent council monitoring of teacher absenteeism with stronger reporting mechanisms at district level.

The study is due to be completed in 2009 and lessons learned will be made available at: <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/AFRICAEXT/EXTIMPEVA/0,,menuPK:2620040~pagePK:64168427~piPK:64168435~theSitePK:2620018,00.html>

## Closing the evaluation gap

Areas need further investigation on: the impact and cost effectiveness of different measures to reduce teacher absenteeism. Research proposal should establish a more complete list of measures such as parent monitoring, teacher incentives, and improved teacher housing.

## References

Chaudhury, Nazmul, Jeffrey S. Hammer, Michael Kremer, Karthik Muralidharan, and F. Halsey Rogers. "[Missing in Action: Teacher and Health Worker Absence in Developing Countries](#)":

<http://econ.worldbank.org/external/default/main?theSitePK=477916&contentMDK=20661279&pagePK=64168182&piPK=64168060>

Banerjee, Abhijit and Esther Duflo (2006) 'Addressing Absence' *Journal of Economic Perspectives* **20**(1) 117-132.

Das, Jishnu, Stefan Dercon, James Habyarimana, and Pramila Krishnan (2005) Teacher Shocks and Student Learning: Evidence from Zambia. <http://www.econ.cam.ac.uk/dae/repec/cam/pdf/cwpe0514.pdf>

Hammer, Jeffrey S. and Nazmul Chaudhury, "Ghost Doctors: Absenteeism in Bangladeshi Health Facilities." *World Bank Economic Review* 18: 423-441, 2004.

OED (2004) *Books, Buildings and Learning Outcomes: an impact evaluation of World Bank support to basic education in Ghana* Washington D.C.: Operations Evaluation Department, World Bank.

Rogers, Halsey (2006) 'Missing in Action: Teacher and Medical Provider Absence in Developing Countries'. <http://econ.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/EXTDEC/EXTRESEARCH/0,,contentMDK:20824881~pagePK:64165401~piPK:64165026~theSitePK:469382,00.html>

Woods, Robert and Ray V. Montago (1997) 'Determining the negative effect of teacher attendance on student achievement' *Education* 118(2).

## Credits

This brief was written by Howard White, and edited by Christelle Chapoy.

© 3ie, 2009 - EQ briefs are published by the International Initiative for Impact Evaluation 3ie.

EQ briefs are works in progress. We welcome comments and suggestions regarding topics for briefs and additional studies to be included in any EQs. Ideas and feedback should be sent to Christelle Chapoy at: [chapoy@3ieimpact.org](mailto:chapoy@3ieimpact.org)

To subscribe, please email: [bjoy@3ieimpact.org](mailto:bjoy@3ieimpact.org)