An Analysis on Teacher Absenteeism in Ugandan Public Primary Schools

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1 Summary

1.1 English Summary

This study tried to clarify determinants of teacher absenteeism in Ugandan public primary schools. This field research focused particularly on teachers’ motivation, revealing its three key factors that were teachers’ working environment, supervision and pupils as such.

In 2000, Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and targets for “Education For All (EFA)” were adopted. While the access to primary education in developing countries has made a rapid progress in the last fifteen years (United Nations, 2015), the quality of education has been decreasing. This tendency has been acute especially among Sub-Saharan African countries, including Uganda. It has introduced the Universal Primary Education (UPE) policy since 1997, which led to rapid increase in enrollment ratio. Though access to primary education in Uganda improved, the repetition rate has been around 10%, and the completion rate has been about 50% in recent years (World Bank, 2016b). These numbers show that the quality of primary education in Uganda has not been quite high. The low quality is partly explained by the high rate of teacher absenteeism, which counted 27% of 2,000 teachers of the sampled public schools (World Bank, 2013).

Reflecting the background above, this study examined why teacher absenteeism happens so highly in Ugandan public primary schools. The field research focused in particular on factors which affect teachers’ motivation, conducting semi-structured interviews for stakeholders of public primary schools. Since the same topic was already examined in Northern region last year, the study areas were Wakiso and Mukono district of the Central region this time. Five public schools were surveyed in total and at least two teachers, including a head or deputy head teacher and classroom teacher were interviewed in person in each school. In addition, I also conducted interviews at the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) and District Education Office (DEO) for obtaining supplemental information.

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1 Repetition rate is the proportion of pupils in any grade of primary in a given school year and who also attend that same grade in the following school year. Pupils who actually move backwards from one school year to the next are counted as repeaters (World Bank, 2016a).
2 Completion rate is the total number of students regardless of age in the last grade of primary school, minus the number of repeaters in that grade, divided by the number of children of official graduation age (World Bank, 2016a).
As a result, three factors which affected teachers’ motivation were found: teachers’ working environment, authorities’ supervision over them, and their pupils as such. In terms of working environment, especially salary, school feeding and the quality of school facilities were mentioned. In addition, both the government and School Management Committee (SMC) have been involved in supervision over teachers, which seemed to have the effect on their motivation. Furthermore, some teachers are expected to fulfill pupils’ achievement, and their motivation depends on pupils as such. It is considered that these three factors affect teachers’ motivation, resulting in having an influence on absenteeism.

1.2 Japanese Summary

本研究はウガンダの公立小学校における教師の欠勤の要因を明らかにしようとしたものである。今回の中間調査では特に教師のモチベーションに影響する要因に注目した。その結果、教師の労働環境、教師に対する監督、そして生徒の存在の三つが主要な要因と分かった。

2000年に国連ミレニアム開発目標および「万人のための教育」が提唱され、発展途上国における初等教育へのアクセスの向上が進歩されてきた。それから15年が経過した現在、初等教育の就学率は大きく向上した。しかし一方で、急激な就学率の上昇に伴う教育の質低下も問題となってきている。この傾向は特にサハラ以南アフリカの地域で強く、ウガンダもまた例外ではない。ウガンダは周辺国に先駆けて1997年に初等教育無償化政策を導入し、以降就学率が急激に上昇したが、一方で留年率は近年で10%付近を推移しており、修了率は50%程度に留まっている（World Bank, 2016b）。こうした指標に見られるように、ウガンダの教育の質は決して高くはない。これを説明する要因として、教師の欠勤の高さが挙げられる。World Bank (2013)による調査では、公立小学校の教師の27%が欠勤していたことが明らかになっている。

こうした現状を受けて、本研究はウガンダの公立小学校における教師の欠勤の要因を調査した。特に今回は教師のモチベーションに影響する要因に注目し、公立小学校の関係者に半構造化インタビューを行った。報告者は昨年にもウガンダ北部州で同様の調査を行ったため、今回は調査地域は中央州の2県、ワキソ県とムコノ県とした。公立校は計5校を訪問し、各校では最低2名にインタビューを行った。その際、校長もしくは副校長と、担任教師を必ず含むようにした。また補足調査のため、公立小学校を統括する教育省および県教育事務所にも聞き取り調査を行った。

インタビューの結果、教師の労働環境、教師に対する監督、そして生徒の存在の三つが教師のモチベーションに影響する要因として明らかになった。教師の労働環境に関しては、特に給料、給食、学校設備に関しての発言が多くみられた。また教師に対する監督に関しては、教育省、教育事務所、そして地域主体の学校運営委員会が関わっており、これらも教師のモチベーションに影響していることが示唆された。最後に生徒に関しては、生徒の成績を上げること等が目標となっており、その存在そのものが教師の動機付けとなっていることが分かった。これらの要因は教師のモチベーションや欠勤に影響していると考えられる。

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3 SMC consists of twelve representatives of stakeholders including parents, together with school staffs. They have duties to supervise school plans, annual budget, and teacher attendance and performance in the meeting held at least once in a school term (Torres, 2012).
Research Activity

2.1 Introduction

Fifteen years have passed since Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and targets for “Education For All (EFA)” were adopted. Both initiatives have aimed to achieve universal access to primary education, and a lot of countries agreed with them, having made efforts to improve enrollment rate (United Nations, 2015). Uganda, a landlocked state surrounded by five countries, namely South Sudan, Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda and Democratic Republic of Congo, has also followed this trend and tried to improve the access to primary education. Uganda has introduced the Universal Primary Education (UPE) policy since 1997, which was an earlier introduction than many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. This policy has provided free primary education to all children at primary school age. As a result, the Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) reached 129% in 2000. In 2013, GER was recorded as 107% (World Bank, 2016b).

However, the internal efficiency of primary education in Uganda has not been achieved successfully. The repetition rate marked 10% despite its automatic promotion, and completion rate still remained 54% in 2013. These indicators suggest that the quality of Ugandan primary education has not been so high.

Figure 1: Primary Education Indicators in Uganda

*From the top, the first line shows gross enrollment ratio, the second shows completion rate, and the third shows repetition rate.

Source: Created by the author based on World Bank (2016b).

As part of the global trend the quality of education has been discussed, and “Quality Education for All” was advocated in the conference “Education For All”, which was held in Muscat, Oman in 2014. The conference adopted eight targets, and one of them relates to teacher (UNESCO, 2014b). In Uganda, one of the reasons why the quality of education has still been low stems from teachers, especially teacher absenteeism. Chaudhury et al. (2006) study teacher absenteeism in six countries, showing that Uganda has the highest rate (see Figure 2). World Bank report (2013) shows the higher rate of teacher’s absence in Uganda than other neighboring countries; surprisingly, 27% of public school teachers were absent on its visit of survey team. As several studies
point out (Das et al., 2005; Suryadarma et al., 2006), teacher’s absence has a significantly negative effect on pupil’s learning achievement.

**Figure 2: Rate of Teacher Absenteeism in six countries**

*In the survey, each individual teacher was checked whether he or she was present.

Source: Created by the author based on Chaudhury et al. (2006).

Therefore, this field research investigated determinants of teacher’s absence in Ugandan public primary schools, especially focusing on teacher’s motivation to work through a qualitative approach. Pole de Dakar et al. (2009) argue that one of the factors causing teacher absenteeism in Sub-Saharan Africa was a lack of motivation, so this study also follows what they say. Since teacher absenteeism is usually not easy to be illuminated, there are several definitions of teacher absenteeism. According to Jacobs and Kritsonis (2007), teacher absenteeism is represented by the period in which a teacher does not attend school to comply with his/her service provision. World Bank report (2013) also uses the similar definition for identifying whether a teacher is present or not on its spot check. This study applied these definitions for the field survey.

The reason why this study focused only on public schools was that frequent teacher absenteeism in Uganda was particularly reported in public schools. In addition, the government has invested in public schools since they introduced UPE policy, which made most schools have many commonalities. This fact may contribute to generalize the findings to apply for all countries including Sub-Saharan Africa.

### 2.2 Study Area

This field research was mainly conducted in Mukono and Wakiso districts, which are next to the capital city, Kampala and at Central region. Both public and private schools were visited. The detailed number of them is listed below.
### Table 1: Visited Schools in Mukono and Wakiso

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Public Primary School</th>
<th>Private Primary School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mukono</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wakiso</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Created by the author

### Figure 3: Map of Uganda

Source: reliefweb

#### 2.3 Methodology

This field research employed a qualitative methodology involving semi-structured interviews\(^4\) for head teachers, deputy head teachers\(^5\) and classroom teachers, in order to investigate determinants of teachers’ motivation. Some officers of Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) and District Education Office (DEO) were also interviewed for relevant supplemental information. Collected information was analyzed through the conceptual framework proposed by Banerjee et al. (2012), who conducted a systematic study on teacher absenteeism in Pakistan. Though the methodology of their study is suited to the context of Pakistani schooling, it was still applicable for Ugandan cases, illuminating significant factors in its school system, which includes school feeding. Below is the whole picture of the conceptual framework on which this research draws.

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\(^4\) Interview protocol is shown in Appendix.

\(^5\) In Uganda, a principal of school is called as “head teacher”, and a vice principal is called “deputy head teacher”.

2.4 Research Findings

Through the interviews, factors which affect teachers’ motivation were found. Based on the conceptual framework shown above, they were classified into three groups, namely, working environment, supervision and pupils.

- **Working Environment**

  In terms of working environment, teachers mainly noted three points: salary, school feeding and the quality of school facilities. First, many of them complained the amount of salary is too low to make ends meet. Some of them also said that they became a teacher because a teacher is a civil servant and the government gives them pension after retirement. One teacher said that:

  *The salary is very low. We are paid less than private school teachers. But I will be paid pension by the government. That is why I became a teacher (Teacher A at Public School A in Wakiso).*
Though late payment was also one of the popular issues last year, it has not been heard from teachers this year. Second, the lack of school feeding was also indicated by many teachers. Even in urban areas, many schools did not provide teachers with meals. According to the surveyed teachers, school feeding was funded not by the government, but by the parents. Third, they said about the low quality of school facilities. For example, they needed more classrooms, chairs, and textbooks. None of the observed schools had the enough number of textbooks for every pupil, and the school size was over 70 on average.

- **Supervision**

  Some head teachers pointed out that authorities’ supervision on schools affected teachers’ motivation. Though Banerjee et al. (2012) pointed out peer teachers in their conceptual framework, several stakeholders are engaged in supervision over schools in Uganda. For example, MoES, DEO and SMC are responsible for it. The Directorate of Education Standards (DES) of MoES and DEO conduct school inspection several times in a year. According to one officer of DEO, every school should be inspected at least once a year. Schools are inspected in terms of the attendance of teachers and the number of lessons conducted in one term, which can affect teachers’ motivation. In addition, the government has made sure that every public primary school should have its School Management Committee (SMC), which is managed by parents, local stakeholders and school teachers to discuss school governance. SMC has several missions, one of which is to check teacher attendance. Such supervision over schools seems to have a somewhat effect on teachers’ motivation.

- **Pupils**

  Some of the teachers told that pupils were their motivation to work. They felt the joy of teaching as well as raising them for their future and expected their success. Teachers’ achievement echoed pupils’ one; thus teachers were motivated by their progress, on the one hand. Their absence or failure seemed to decrease teachers’ motivation, on the other. One teacher mentioned:

  *I feel satisfaction when I hear my students get a job, for example lawyer or journalist. But when I see some students in the town without a job, I feel sad and depressed. I became a teacher because I can see pupils’ progress for myself. Their scores are my motivation. So if they are absent, I think why they are absent and feel upset (Teacher A in Public School B in Mukono).*

2.5 **Discussion**

In this section, the findings of the field research shown in the previous sections will be interpreted with some data as well as relevant previous studies.

- **Working Environment**

  Many of the teachers mentioned working environment as the key factor affecting teachers’ motivation. It suggests working environment leads to teacher absenteeism, which has been pointed out by several studies.
Regarding salary, Duflo et al. (2012) did a randomized experiment to test whether extra salary for teacher’s regular attendance could reduce teacher absenteeism and increase learning in India. They statistically demonstrate that the financial incentive had an effect of reducing teachers’ absence. As World Bank (2012) indicates, the amount of Ugandan teachers’ salary is relatively low. This fact can affect their motivation and absenteeism.

In the field research, teachers mentioned school feeding and good quality of school facilities as incentives to work. Regarding school feeding, Mooij (2008) studies the reasons behind motivation and demotivation of government school teachers in South India, reporting that problems with mid-day meals were mentioned by them many times in the group discussions. The Uganda National Examination Board (UNEB, 2010) also recommends that the government and parents should ensure that all teachers had mid-day meals to improve the quality of education. In terms of school facility, Chaudhury et al. (2006) and Alcazar et al. (2006) prove that poor quality of school facilities is statistically associated with teacher absenteeism. In addition, Okutut (2012) studies twenty sample schools in Uganda, suggesting that inadequate school infrastructure, including a classroom, separate toilet for male and female, and teacher’s houses, causes teacher absenteeism.

Since the government of Uganda abolished school fee, they have given UPE grants to public primary schools for maintaining school facilities, but the amount of the budget is not enough to cover all. As a result, a lot of schools collect extra tuition fees from parents (Zuze and Leibbrandt, 2008). They are mainly used to build and maintain classrooms, to provide meals for teachers, and to conduct extra lessons. Therefore, it is fair to say that teachers and schools are affected by the amount of extra fees from parents. Good performing public schools can attract more parents and get more extra fees, but some of the public schools suffer from the decreasing number of pupils, and they are sometimes even closed. Parents prefer private schools if they do not trust the quality of public schools despite their free-of-charge schooling. It is an irony that UPE policy, which has aimed to provide free primary education, resulted in extra fees and closing some schools.

● **Supervision**

In Ugandan public primary schools, MoES, DEO, and SMC supervise schools and teachers, which had an influence on teachers’ motivation, resulting in reducing absenteeism. This finding goes along with previous studies of supervision over teacher absenteeism. For example, Duflo et al. (2012) did a randomized experiment to reduce absenteeism, using direct supervision by cameras, combined with credible financial incentives. This scheme improved teacher attendance, and they demonstrate that teachers responded to financial incentives which directly related to attendance.

In addition, there are a lot of studies on the effect of parents or SMC. Jimenez and Sawada (1999) study the role of school based management, called EDUCO, in students’ outcome in El-Salvador. Controlling school and household variables, they discuss that the system diminished teachers’ absenteeism and resulted in reduction of students’ absenteeism. Torres (2012) also studies the effect of School Management Committee (SMC) on teacher absenteeism and motivation in Uganda. This study shows that SMC and school staffs shared the responsibilities to promote teacher attendance, which resulted in reducing teacher absenteeism.

● **Pupils**

I heard directly from teachers that they were motivated by pupils. Recently pupil absenteeism has been said to be a new way of explaining teacher absenteeism. Banerjee et al. (2012) study teacher’s absenteeism in
Pakistan, suggesting that pupil’s absenteeism has correlation; teacher and student attendance are mutually reinforcing. In the classroom context, examples of a shared good are the satisfaction from the learning that takes place, or a productive mentor–mentee relationship between teachers and pupils. As they argue, a teacher is a unique profession, because teaching is a product of joint work by teachers and pupils, but other professions offer returns in pride of accomplishment.

2.6 Conclusion

This study examined determinants of teacher absenteeism in Ugandan public primary schools. The field research especially investigated what had an influence on teachers’ motivation. As a result, mainly three factors were found, namely: teachers’ working environment; supervision over teachers; and pupils as such. Working environment was especially represented by salary, school feeding and the quality of school facility. Supervision over teachers was done by MoES, DEO and the School Management Committee (SMC), and it seemed to have the impact on teachers’ motivation. Pupils as such were significant factors affecting teachers’ motivation. These three factors are likely to determine whether teacher would be absent or not.

Though the access to education has been improved in developing countries in the last fifteen years, the quality of education has been stagnated at a low level. In September 2015, Sustainable Development Goals were adopted, which included “Quality Education – Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life-long learning opportunities for all” as Goal 4 (UNDP, 2015). New EFA goals advocated in Muscat Agreement in 2014 went along with SDGs, and the role of teachers was recognized as one of the key elements in providing high quality education to all. For this target, EFA goals and SDGs aim 2030, this study would contribute to discussing the quality of education through the examination of teacher absenteeism.

The limitation of this field research is that it did not gather enough samples to examine all over Uganda. In the further analysis, this study will be developed with a quantitative methodology in order to make the findings applicable enough to achieve SDGs.

● Acknowledgement

My deepest gratitude goes to Dr. Osamu Saito, Dr. Natsuko Imai, and all staffs who organized this excellent Global Leadership Training Program. I would also like to express my sincere appreciation to my academic advisor at Makerere University, Dr. James Wokadala, for his continuous support and invaluable advice throughout the whole period of the program. In addition, I really appreciate the cooperation of teachers and officers in Uganda with my research.
References


Appendix

Interview Protocol

1. About pupils
   a. How is the relationship between you and pupils?
   b. Do teachers think pupil’s happiness important?
   c. Do teachers have interest in pupil’s voice?
   d. Do school support pupils when they need special support?
   e. In order to help pupils understand, what are you doing?

2. About Job Satisfaction
   a. As a teacher, do you have more merits than de-merits?
   b. If you can choose a job again, do you want to be a teacher again?
   c. If possible, do you want to move to another school?
   d. Do you regret being a teacher?
   e. Do you enjoy your job at the current school?
   f. Do you think it was better to have chosen other jobs?
   g. Can you recommend your school to others?
   h. Do you think teacher profession is highly evaluated by the society?
   i. Do you feel satisfied with your achievement in the current school?
   j. In total, do you feel satisfied with this job?
3 Reflection to the GLTP in Africa

3.1 My motivation to participate in the GLTP

My motivation to participate in the GLTP was that I felt the necessity to conduct research at the field. There were two reasons to think so. One is the importance of understanding the reality of Uganda, and another is the necessity of academic perspective of Uganda. First, it is quite important to know the reality of the country when we write a dissertation about a specific country. If research finding doesn’t reflect it, its significance and validity will be totally lost. Second, I needed academic advice from Ugandan researcher to improve the quality of the paper. In order to deepen the analysis, both academic perspective and country based knowledge was necessary. These two points can be solved if I could participate in GLTP, because it provided the opportunity to conduct field research under the supervision of an academic advisor in African countries.

3.2 Field experiences

Throughout this program, I had two main experiences: field work in schools and discussion with my academic advisor at Makerere University. First, field work in schools gave me a lot of ideas about teacher absenteeism. In addition, I could see the gap between public and private schools, and the gap among public schools. As I explained in the previous chapter, it is an ironic result of UPE policy. Second, I discussed what I found and thought with my advisor, which was such a great experience. The cycle of field and laboratory was a valuable opportunity for me to learn and improve the research.

3.3 Challenges

Though I got a lot of experience in the field, they included not only happy things but also challenges. For example, it was always difficult to let it go as planned. Planned schedule was cancelled many times, and I could not prepare too much before I went to the field. In addition, it was difficult to extract true things from teachers through interview. In order to solve this problem, I took three options: asking only facts, not ideas; securing triangulation; and asking Japanese volunteers who worked at school.

3.4 How to make use of this experience to your future career development

I strongly believe that I can surely make use of this field experience to my future work everywhere. For example, I improved the skills to conduct interview and collect information. Even if I cannot get enough information from one person, I already know other ways to supplement it. This research skill can be utilized for any work. Furthermore, I acquired the ability to live for myself in tougher place than Japan.

3.5 Encouragement to other students

If you participate in the GLTP, it must be a precious opportunity for you to conduct field research in African countries with support from your new academic advisor! Field gives you a lot of ideas, and a researcher of the country will provide more valuable advice than anyone. Hope your success in your research!