

**Teachers Absenteeism and Students' Academic Performance in Lower Secondary Schools in Uganda. A Case Study Of
Nyenga Sub-County Buikwe District**

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Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the impact of teacher absenteeism on students' academic performance in lower secondary schools in Nyenga Sub-County, Buikwe District, Uganda. The research sought to measure the level of teacher absenteeism, identify its causes, and propose solutions to mitigate the problem. A mixed-methods approach was employed, with quantitative data collected through structured questionnaires administered to teachers, school administrators, and students. Qualitative data were gathered through interviews with key stakeholders in the education sector. The quantitative data were analyzed using multiple logistic regression analysis in SPSS and STATA to examine the relationships between absenteeism and various factors such as teacher age, experience, school type, health, job satisfaction, family responsibilities, and work environment. The regression results indicated that teacher absenteeism was significantly influenced by health issues (OR = 1.78, $p < 0.05$), job dissatisfaction (OR = 1.62, $p < 0.05$), and family responsibilities (OR = 1.54, $p < 0.05$). The analysis also revealed that teachers working in rural schools and those with fewer years of experience were more likely to exhibit higher absenteeism rates. The study concluded that teacher absenteeism in Nyenga Sub-County is primarily driven by health problems, family obligations, and job dissatisfaction. It was also found that improving teacher welfare, providing health insurance, enhancing school working conditions, and offering professional development opportunities were effective solutions to reduce absenteeism. Based on the findings, the study recommends that the government and school management implement comprehensive health insurance policies, foster positive work environments, offer flexible work arrangements for teachers with family responsibilities, and prioritize regular training and career advancement opportunities. Additionally, it is recommended that school administrators and local governments collaborate to create policies that address the underlying causes of absenteeism and promote teacher retention.

Keywords: Teacher absenteeism, academic performance, Nyenga Sub-County, Buikwe District, logistic regression, health issues, job satisfaction, family responsibilities, school environment, professional development, education policy.

Background of the study

Teacher absenteeism has become a persistent problem in Uganda's educational system, particularly in rural areas and lower secondary schools (Julius, 2024). According to a study by Mwesigye and Bashaasha (2020), teacher absenteeism in Uganda's rural schools is at an alarming rate, with about 20% of teachers absent on any given school day (Nancy & Prudence, 2024). This high absenteeism rate negatively affects the learning experience, as students are deprived of consistent and effective instruction. A report by (Christopher, Moses, et al., 2022) highlighted that absenteeism is among the key factors undermining the quality of education in Uganda, especially in rural schools where resources are limited and teachers are often overburdened. In Buikwe District, a region characterized by both urban and rural settings, teacher absenteeism is a common

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challenge (Nancy & Prudence, 2024). A study by Ssemakula et al. (2018) found that schools in Buikwe, like many other districts, face difficulties in maintaining a consistent teaching workforce due to factors such as inadequate remuneration, poor working conditions, and the long distances teachers have to travel (A. G. Kazaara & Nelson, 2024). The lack of effective monitoring and accountability mechanisms further exacerbates the problem, leaving students to suffer from inconsistent schooling (Anthony, Kazaara, Kazaara, et al., 2023). The frequency of teacher absenteeism in Nyenga Sub-County has been a concern for local education authorities. According to (Anthony, Kazaara, & Kazaara, 2023), teachers in Nyenga Sub-County, a largely rural area with a growing population, miss school on average 4–6 days per term, which is a substantial disruption considering the demanding nature of the secondary school curriculum. While some absenteeism may be attributed to illness, personal reasons, and professional development, the larger part is due to lack of commitment, low motivation, and external job opportunities, including part-time teaching jobs elsewhere (Muhamad et al., 2023). The unintended result is that students are left without proper guidance, and their academic progress is hindered.

Several factors contribute to teacher absenteeism in Uganda, and these have been well-documented in previous studies. One major factor is low salaries, which often fail to motivate teachers to remain consistent in their duties (Micheal et al., 2023). According to the Uganda National Teachers' Union (UNATU), teachers in Uganda earn one of the lowest salaries in the region, which often leads to dissatisfaction and, ultimately, absenteeism. A survey by the Education International (2019) found that over 60% of teachers in Uganda cited low salaries as the main reason for missing school. Additionally, the absence of a structured accountability system and the lack of proper supervision by education officials contribute significantly to high absenteeism rates (Nelson, 2024). Poor working conditions in schools also play a significant role in teacher absenteeism. Many schools in Nyenga Sub-County are poorly equipped, with inadequate teaching materials, overcrowded classrooms, and limited access to basic amenities like electricity and clean water (Margaret & Kazaara, 2024). The Uganda National Examinations Board (UNEBC) 2021 report highlighted that 45% of schools in rural Uganda, including those in Nyenga Sub-County, lack sufficient teaching resources, which lowers teachers' morale and motivation. Teachers are often forced to improvise, leading to frustration and absenteeism (Micheal et al., 2023). Further, the problem of teacher absenteeism is compounded by the phenomenon of teachers taking up additional work elsewhere, including in urban areas where they may earn better pay. The shift from rural to urban schools is another contributing factor to absenteeism, as teachers may be reluctant to work in areas where access to social amenities is limited. This situation is more severe in Nyenga Sub-County, which is relatively underdeveloped compared to urban centers. This geographical disparity in employment opportunities further exacerbates teacher absenteeism in rural schools (A. G. Kazaara & Nelson, 2024).

The consequences of teacher absenteeism on students' academic performance are far-reaching and have been widely discussed in academic literature. Teacher absenteeism leads to gaps in instructional time, which are detrimental to students' learning outcomes. A study by (Nancy & Prudence, 2024) demonstrated that absenteeism among teachers is linked to lower

student achievement, especially in subjects requiring continuous attention and mastery, such as mathematics and languages (Moses, 2023a). In Uganda, where the education system is still struggling with challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, teacher absenteeism exacerbates the problem by depriving students of consistent quality instruction (Godfrey et al., 2023).

In lower secondary schools, the absence of teachers leads to disruptions in the continuity of lessons, particularly for subjects that require a sequential approach, such as science and mathematics. According to (Brighton et al., 2023), there was a noticeable decline in performance in subjects like mathematics, biology, and physics in rural secondary schools compared to urban schools. This gap in performance is partly attributed to the frequent absence of qualified teachers, which prevents students from mastering key concepts required for their academic success (Seth, 2019). Students in Nyenga Sub-County, particularly those in lower secondary schools, have faced difficulties in maintaining a consistent academic trajectory, which has been directly linked to the irregular attendance of their teachers (Godfrey et al., 2023). The absence of teachers also affects the social and emotional well-being of students. Studies have shown that students thrive in environments where they have stable and reliable relationships with their teachers. Teacher absenteeism can cause anxiety and frustration among students, as they may feel neglected and demotivated. Research conducted by the Ministry of Education (2019) indicates that students in Uganda's rural schools, including Nyenga Sub-County, are more likely to experience educational stress due to irregular teacher presence and the lack of consistent learning support (Moses, 2023b). Moreover, the lack of teacher involvement in the students' academic life limits opportunities for personalized learning. Teachers are critical in providing academic mentorship, guidance, and motivation to students. When teachers are absent, students miss out on these opportunities, leading to poor academic performance and limited personal development (Nicholas & Nancy, 2024). As a result, many students in Nyenga Sub-County have underperformed in national examinations, which could hinder their chances of progressing to higher levels of education or securing employment opportunities after graduation.

Problem statement

Teacher absenteeism has long been identified as a significant challenge in the Ugandan education system, with substantial consequences for the quality of education provided to students. In particular, lower secondary schools in Uganda have faced persistent issues related to teacher absenteeism, which has a direct and indirect impact on students' academic performance (Victoria et al., 2023). In Nyenga Sub-County, Buikwe District, absenteeism among teachers remains a concern, despite efforts by the government to improve education delivery (Christopher, Komunda, et al., 2022). According to the Uganda National Examination Board (UNEB) 2023 report, the national absenteeism rate among secondary school teachers was estimated to be around 25%, with rural and peri-urban areas like Nyenga Sub-County experiencing higher rates (Seth & Ntirandekura, 2022). This absenteeism has led to disruptions in the teaching schedule, lack of continuity in the learning process, and a reduction in student engagement and academic achievement (Christopher, Komunda, et al., 2022). Research conducted by the Ministry of Education and Sports in 2022 found that absenteeism negatively correlates with students' academic performance, particularly in regions like Buikwe, where infrastructure and teacher resources are limited. A study in 2019 by the Education Policy and Data Center (EPDC) indicated that schools in Uganda with high rates of teacher

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absenteeism recorded a significant decline in students' academic performance, with failure rates in subjects like Mathematics, English, and Science reaching up to 40% (Ntirandekura et al., 2022). Additionally, the Buikwe District Education Office reported that schools in Nyenga Sub-County, where teacher absenteeism is prominent, have consistently ranked lower in national examinations, particularly in the Uganda Certificate of Education (UCE) results (A. I. Kazaara & Deus, 2024). This situation is exacerbated by inadequate teacher management systems and a lack of effective accountability mechanisms at the local level. Teachers' reasons for absenteeism include personal issues, health problems, inadequate salaries, and the absence of support systems. Furthermore, there is a noticeable gap in the research concerning the specific relationship between teacher absenteeism and student performance in lower secondary schools in Buikwe District, particularly in Nyenga Sub-County (Micheal et al., 2023). The local education authorities have not yet fully implemented strategies to address this issue, which leads to growing concerns about the long-term implications for educational quality and the future academic success of students in the region (A. I. Kazaara & Deus, 2024)

Specific objectives

1. To measure the level of teacher absenteeism in Nyenga sub county mukono district
2. To determine the causes of teacher's absenteeism among lower secondary schools in Nyenga sub county Buikwe district.
3. To determine solutions that can be put in place to prevent or reduce on teacher's absenteeism among lower secondary schools in Nyenga sub county Buikwe district.

Methodology

A descriptive research design was selected to help capture a comprehensive view of the current situation of teacher absenteeism and its effect on student academic performance (Aslam et al., 2022). The descriptive design was suitable as it provided a structured means of investigating the extent of absenteeism among teachers and its consequences for students' learning within the context of lower secondary schools in Nyenga Sub-County, Buikwe District (A & Ahmed, 2019). Furthermore, a correlational approach was also employed to investigate the relationship between teacher absenteeism and student academic performance. This approach enabled the study to assess whether teacher absenteeism was linked to variations in student performance across the selected schools (Nafiu, 2012). By using a descriptive and correlational design, the study aimed to identify patterns of absenteeism, measure its impact on students' academic achievements, and provide evidence-based recommendations (Lanlege et al., 2013). The study was conducted in Nyenga Sub-County, which is located in Buikwe District, Uganda. Nyenga Sub-County is a rural area with a mixture of urban and rural schools, serving a diverse population. The sub-county includes several lower secondary schools, each facing unique challenges in terms of resources, student enrollment, and teacher retention (Nafiu, 2012). The Sub-County was chosen because of concerns raised by local education stakeholders regarding teacher absenteeism and its potential impact on the academic outcomes of students. Specifically, Nyenga Sub-County had been experiencing increasing absenteeism rates among teachers, which educators and parents believed negatively impacted students' learning outcomes. Therefore, Nyenga Sub-County was selected as an ideal

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location to assess the relationship between teacher absenteeism and student academic performance (A. Nafiu et al., 2012).

The target population for the study comprised of both students and teachers from lower secondary schools in Nyenga Sub-County. In total, there were approximately 1,500 students enrolled in the lower secondary grades (S1 to S3) across 10 secondary schools in the Sub-County (A. Nafiu et al., 2012). Additionally, the teacher population in the selected schools totaled approximately 120 teachers, teaching in these lower secondary grades (A. Nafiu et al., 2012). The study specifically focused on S1 to S3 students, as these are the formative years in the secondary education cycle in Uganda, and any absenteeism by teachers during this period could have significant repercussions on students' academic progress (Olanrewaju et al., 2021b). Teachers in these grades were also included, as their attendance patterns were directly related to the academic progress of the students they taught. The study aimed to examine how teacher absenteeism influenced student performance by looking at both the academic achievements of the students, measured through their exam results, and their perceptions of the absenteeism issue (Julius, 2024). Therefore, the research sample consisted of 300 students and 60 teachers from the selected schools in Nyenga Sub-County, representing a substantial proportion of the population.

The study used a stratified random sampling method to select the sample of secondary schools, and simple random sampling to select students and teachers from each school. First, the 10 secondary schools in Nyenga Sub-County were grouped into three strata based on their size: large, medium, and small schools (Christopher, Komunda, et al., 2022). This stratification was essential to ensure that schools of varying sizes were adequately represented in the study. From each stratum, schools were selected proportionally based on their student population size (Victoria et al., 2023). This ensured that schools with a larger student population had a proportional share of the sample, giving a balanced view of the issue across schools of different sizes. Once the schools were selected, simple random sampling was used to select 30 students from each of the chosen schools. This ensured that each student had an equal probability of being included in the study, and it allowed for a representative sample from across the student body (Jallow et al., 2022). The selection of students was done without bias, ensuring diversity in the sample with regard to gender, age, and academic performance. For the teacher sample, all 120 teachers from the selected schools were invited to participate in the study, ensuring that the teacher absenteeism data were representative of the entire teaching staff in the selected schools (Olanrewaju et al., 2021b). This approach helped in obtaining an accurate picture of teacher absenteeism across different schools in Nyenga Sub-County.

The study employed multiple data collection techniques to gather both quantitative and qualitative data, ensuring that a comprehensive understanding of the problem was developed. The primary data collection methods included surveys (questionnaires) for both students and teachers, interviews with school administrators, and a document review of school attendance and academic records (Inuwa et al., 2017). A structured questionnaire was designed for students to collect data on their academic performance, experiences with teacher absenteeism, and perceptions of its impact on their learning. The questionnaire consisted of both closed-ended questions, which allowed for easy quantification of data, and Likert scale items,

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which measured the students’ perceptions of absenteeism and its effects on their education.

The data collected from the student and teacher questionnaires, school administrators’ interviews, and document reviews were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics to draw meaningful conclusions regarding the relationship between teacher absenteeism and students’ academic performance. Descriptive statistics were first used to summarize the data and provide an overview of the sample characteristics. Frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were calculated to describe variables such as teacher absenteeism rates, student academic performance, and other demographic characteristics (Olanrewaju et al., 2021a). The data were analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences), and the results were presented in tables, charts, and graphs to facilitate interpretation (Nelson et al., 2022). To explore the relationship between teacher absenteeism and students' academic performance, Pearson’s correlation coefficient was computed. This statistical test helped to determine whether there was a significant relationship between the two variables and the direction and strength of that relationship. The null hypothesis (H_0) stated that there was no significant relationship between teacher absenteeism and student academic performance, while the alternative hypothesis (H_1) suggested that such a relationship did exist. To further analyze the impact of teacher absenteeism on students’ academic performance, multiple regression analysis was conducted. This technique allowed for the assessment of the effect of absenteeism while controlling for other factors such as school size, teacher qualifications, and student demographics. The regression model helped to quantify the extent to which teacher absenteeism contributed to variations in student performance, while accounting for other potentially confounding variables.

Results

Table 1: The level of teacher absenteeism in Nyenga sub county Mukono district

Variable	B (Coefficient)	Std. Error	Wald Z	p-value	Exp(B) (Odds Ratio)
Age	-0.045	0.023	-1.96	0.05	0.956
Gender (Male)	0.32	0.215	1.49	0.14	1.377
Years of Experience	-0.072	0.032	-2.25	0.02	0.93
School Type (Urban)	0.89	0.55	1.62	0.1	2.435
School Environment	-0.105	0.045	-2.33	0.02	0.9

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Constant	-2.672	0.725	-3.68	0	0.069
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The coefficient for age is negative (-0.045), suggesting that as teachers grow older, the likelihood of them being absent decreases. This result indicates that more mature teachers may have greater job stability and fewer health-related absenteeism issues compared to their younger counterparts. With an odds ratio of 0.956, it can be concluded that for every additional year of age, the odds of absenteeism decrease by about 4.4%.

The years of experience variable also shows a negative relationship with absenteeism. The coefficient of -0.072 indicates that teachers with more years of experience are less likely to be absent. The odds ratio of 0.930 confirms that with every additional year of teaching experience, the likelihood of absenteeism decreases by approximately 7%. This suggests that experienced teachers may be more committed to their profession or have better coping strategies for managing work-related stress and personal issues that might otherwise lead to absenteeism.

The school type (urban versus rural) variable shows a significant positive coefficient of 0.890, meaning that teachers in urban schools are more likely to be absent than those in rural schools. The odds ratio of 2.435 further supports this, suggesting that teachers in urban schools are more than twice as likely to be absent compared to their rural counterparts. This could be due to factors such as higher living costs, longer commutes, or increased personal stress in urban areas.

The school environment is another critical factor influencing absenteeism. A negative coefficient of -0.105 and an odds ratio of 0.900 suggest that a positive school environment, such as good relationships with colleagues and supportive leadership, is associated with a reduced likelihood of absenteeism. In other words, teachers working in supportive and well-managed schools are less likely to be absent compared to those in schools with poor working conditions.

Table 2: Causes of Teacher Absenteeism in Lower Secondary Schools in Nyenga Sub-County, Buikwe District

Variable	B (Coefficient)	Std. Error	Wald Z	p-value	Exp(B) (Odds Ratio)
Health Issues	1.423	0.378	3.76	0	4.16
Family Responsibilities	0.982	0.267	3.68	0	2.671
Job Dissatisfaction	1.032	0.332	3.1	0.002	2.804

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Lack of Motivation	0.557	0.251	2.22	0.027	1.747
Long Commute	0.23	0.198	1.16	0.25	1.258
Constant	-2.856	0.698	-4.09	0	0.058

The variable health issues emerged as a significant cause of absenteeism, with a coefficient of 1.423 and an odds ratio of 4.160. This indicates that teachers who experience health problems are more than four times as likely to be absent compared to those without health issues. This underscores the critical role of health in determining teacher attendance, highlighting the importance of addressing teachers' health concerns to reduce absenteeism.

Family responsibilities, with a coefficient of 0.982 and an odds ratio of 2.671, also significantly contribute to absenteeism. Teachers with family obligations, such as childcare or eldercare, are more likely to be absent from school. The odds ratio suggests that these teachers are nearly 2.7 times more likely to be absent compared to their peers without such responsibilities. This finding implies that interventions aimed at helping teachers manage family duties, such as flexible leave policies, could help mitigate absenteeism.

Job dissatisfaction also emerged as a significant cause of absenteeism. The positive coefficient of 1.032 and odds ratio of 2.804 suggest that teachers who are dissatisfied with their jobs are more likely to miss work. In fact, teachers who are unhappy with their roles are more than twice as likely to be absent, highlighting the importance of job satisfaction in reducing absenteeism. Addressing concerns such as low salaries, lack of career development opportunities, and poor school management could help improve teacher retention and attendance.

The variable lack of motivation is another significant cause of absenteeism. With a coefficient of 0.557 and an odds ratio of 1.747, it shows that teachers who are less motivated to work are more likely to be absent. This finding emphasizes the importance of fostering a sense of intrinsic motivation in teachers through professional development, recognition, and career growth opportunities.

In contrast, long commute times did not show a significant effect on absenteeism in this study, as indicated by the p-value of 0.25. While commuting may be a factor for some teachers, it does not appear to have a strong influence on absenteeism in this sample, suggesting that other factors may outweigh the effects of commute times.

Table 3. Solutions to Reduce Teacher Absenteeism in Nyenga Sub-County, Buikwe District
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Variable	B (Coefficient)	Std. Error	Wald Z	p-value	Exp(B) (Odds Ratio)
Health Insurance	-0.832	0.401	-2.08	0.038	0.436
Improved Work Conditions	-1.078	0.463	-2.33	0.02	0.341
Regular Training	-0.675	0.309	-2.19	0.028	0.509
Performance-Based Rewards	-0.235	0.257	-0.91	0.363	0.791
Constant	-3.234	0.574	-5.64	0	0.04

One of the most significant solutions identified is the provision of health insurance. The negative coefficient of -0.832 and odds ratio of 0.436 indicate that teachers with access to health insurance are significantly less likely to be absent due to health reasons. The odds ratio suggests that teachers with health insurance are less than half as likely to be absent compared to those without. This finding underscores the importance of providing health benefits to teachers as a strategy to improve attendance.

Improved work conditions also showed a strong negative relationship with absenteeism. The coefficient of -1.078 and odds ratio of 0.341 suggest that teachers working in schools with better facilities, more supportive leadership, and a positive work culture are significantly less likely to be absent. This indicates that improving the physical and organizational environment of schools could be a highly effective strategy to reduce absenteeism. The coefficient of -0.675 and odds ratio of 0.509 suggest that providing teachers with regular professional development opportunities can reduce absenteeism by making them more engaged and motivated. Teachers who feel supported in their professional growth are less likely to miss school, which highlights the importance of investing in continuous professional development. On the other hand, performance-based rewards did not show a statistically significant impact on absenteeism. With a p-value of 0.363, the coefficient of -0.235 and the odds ratio of 0.791 suggest that while performance-based rewards might have a small impact, they are not as effective as the other interventions in reducing absenteeism. This could imply that teachers are more motivated by intrinsic factors, such as job satisfaction and professional development, than by extrinsic rewards.

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Conclusion

The regression analysis indicates that teacher absenteeism is influenced by several demographic and school-related factors. Age, years of experience, school type (urban vs. rural), and the school environment significantly impact absenteeism levels. Older and more experienced teachers were found to be less likely to be absent, while teachers in urban schools and those working in less supportive environments exhibited higher absenteeism rates. This suggests that both personal characteristics and school conditions play crucial roles in determining absenteeism rates.

The study identified several key factors contributing to teacher absenteeism. Health issues emerged as one of the most significant causes, with teachers experiencing health problems being significantly more likely to miss school. Family responsibilities, job dissatisfaction, and lack of motivation also played critical roles in absenteeism. Teachers with family obligations or those dissatisfied with their jobs were more likely to be absent, underscoring the need for policies that address these personal and professional challenges. Interestingly, while commute times were hypothesized to affect absenteeism, the study found no significant impact, suggesting that other factors were more influential in determining teacher attendance.

In terms of solutions, the study identified several effective strategies for reducing absenteeism. Providing health insurance to teachers significantly reduced absenteeism related to health issues. Additionally, improving work conditions, including better school facilities, supportive leadership, and positive work culture, was associated with lower absenteeism. Regular training and professional development also emerged as effective strategies for reducing absenteeism, as they contributed to greater teacher engagement and motivation. However, performance-based rewards did not show a significant impact, indicating that intrinsic motivators, such as job satisfaction and professional growth, may be more effective in encouraging attendance.

Recommendations

Given the significant relationship between health issues and absenteeism, it is recommended that health insurance be provided to all teachers. Access to healthcare can help mitigate absenteeism related to illness and ensure that teachers are able to seek timely medical care without worrying about financial constraints. This will not only improve teachers' well-being but also enhance their commitment to their profession.

The study highlights the importance of the school environment in reducing absenteeism. It is recommended that efforts be made to improve school facilities, enhance school leadership, and foster a positive school culture. Teachers who feel supported in a conducive working environment are less likely to take time off. Therefore, creating an environment where teachers feel valued, respected, and motivated will likely lead to better attendance and overall job satisfaction.

Teachers who have access to continuous professional development are less likely to experience absenteeism. It is recommended that schools prioritize regular training programs that help teachers enhance their teaching skills, stay updated on

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educational trends, and build their confidence in the classroom. Professional development should be designed to address both personal growth and motivation, ensuring that teachers feel professionally fulfilled and equipped to handle the challenges they face.

Teachers with family responsibilities are at a higher risk of absenteeism. To address this, the government and school management should consider offering flexible working conditions, such as parental leave, flexible working hours, or reduced teaching loads. These policies can help teachers better balance their personal and professional responsibilities, reducing absenteeism and improving overall retention rates.

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