

# **STUDENTS ABSEENTISM IN THE FET SECTOR, PARTICULARLY NCV.**

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## **1. ABSTRACT**

Absenteeism in the FET sector is a serious concern especially students who registered for NCV and is one of the challenges that we face as a College. The problem may be that students are expected to walk to the Campus and also for the poverty level of parents that would qualify for the child assistance. The main reason of absenteeism that is cited is socio economic factors that inhibit full learner attendance.

Students who are frequently absent are said to be at risk of not achieving their educational, social and psychological potential and their future seems to be dim because they may place themselves at risk of harm during periods of absence, and they are more likely to be involved in socially unacceptable activities or behaviours, and be the victims of sexual harassment.

The main purpose of this presentation is to investigate the incidence of student absenteeism in the FET sector, the reasons why learners absent themselves from classes and examine the systems that exist to monitor and reduce student absenteeism.

A distinction will be made between authorised and unauthorised absenteeism as well as partial and full absenteeism.

Thereafter, a discussion will be made on the approaches that Colleges are using in managing absenteeism taking into account broader problems that contribute to absenteeism. Attendance policies will also be considered as a first step to improved management and monitoring of learner absenteeism. The policy needs to encompass the expectations of learners as well as educators. The emphasis will be made on monitoring which needs to be clarified and reinforced at all levels of Management. Efforts will also be made to involve parents/guardians of students in promoting attendance and monitoring as well as reducing absenteeism. Expanding free access to bursaries will also contribute to reducing the levels of absenteeism and the provision of transport and accommodation assistance to students.

## **2. INTRODUCTION.**

This was an initiation from the Top Management to investigate reasons why learners absent themselves from class and examine thoroughly systems the college is using to monitor and reduce student's absenteeism.

The investigation was based on telephonic interviews by Student support officers communicating with parents and with students. Lecturers were also questioned verbally in order to supply reasons why students are always absent from class. The following information was used to gather information from Lecturers:-

- What is done to students who absent himself/herself from class consecutively?

- What do students think is “poor attendance”? Is there a need for a change of mind.
- Are you satisfied with the College absence record and the processes used to implement the collection, analysis, follow up and benefits gained from the process involved.
- Do the characteristics of those students who are always absent provide any understanding that will influence those who are attending.

The Campus Managers and Lecturers should apply strategies to reduce non attendance in their Campuses. Such strategies should be viewed as pull strategies were everyone is involved. This may be strategies that could be used to strengthen engagement with our education system. Lecturers must make sure that that classrooms are dynamic, and classroom must respond flexibly to students rather than a rigid, qualification driven process. Cultural inclusiveness and diversity also plays a major role, where Lecturers are supposed to be sensitive to learning styles, language and traditions amongst minority ethnic group. The school climate must also change to emphasize cooperation and to encourage active learning to take place in and out of the classroom. The whole school commitment and effort in reducing absenteeism and suspensions, involving not only Campus management but parents as well must also be considered.

### **3. DEFINITION OF TERMS**

The term absenteeism is substantial and varied. A distinction could be made between authorised and unauthorised absenteeism and between partial and full absenteeism. Unauthorised absenteeism refers to the frequent absence from class without any good reason. Partial refers to absence for a part of the class i.e attending half of the subjects.

### **4. EXTENT OF STUDENTS ABSENTEEISM IN OUR COLLEGE,**

Interviews which was conducted last year, 2008 in Campuses revealed 40 to 50 % cases of absenteeism among NCV students. This includes partial absenteeism because students has a tendency of attending other subjects and bunking those subjects that they feel boring. There is considerable variation in the absenteeism rates among campuses. Some campuses revealed that absenteeism ranges from 10-20% while other revealed that it stands up to 50%.

### **5. REASONS FOR STUDENT ABSENTEEISM.**

Reasons for student absenteeism reported are varied, stemming from personal factors such as illness, gender and learning difficulties, lack of motivation, where students feel that Lectures are doing nothing to motivate students and some claim they are working. Class environment may also be a contributing factor where students may be absent because the class environment is not conducive enough for learning, or may be because of poor ventilation. Psychological factors like peer pressure (colleges enrol students as young as 17), or it may be that the student is undisciplined or has no interest in education. Lack of responsibility of students may be another reason where a student does not have a proper guidance regarding the course and this leads to students lacking accountability. The number of subjects enrolled also may be a challenge to students because of the changes in the curriculum (what is done at FET colleges is different from what is done in FET schools). Absenteeism may be caused by socio economic factors such as food insecurity e.g.(students coming from Taung), problems with transport to school, the impact of HIV/AIDS on children and teenage pregnancy. In our situation, colleges requires, financial outcry, fewer students and their families are unable to offer education because of direct loss of family income from Aids related illnesses and death. The expansion of extended families where more students require money for schooling, which cannot be provided by the less productive remaining adults. Finally there may be other reasons related to

absenteeism such as inability to pay their tuition fee, poor student-Lecturer relationships and poor college facilities.

The reasons for absenteeism reported by Student support officers at different campuses are varied but the most common are poverty, transport, working and lack of parental involvement. All these reasons point back to the socio economic factors. Campuses do have measures in place to curb absenteeism and these include sporting and extra-curricular activities, improved communication between Lecturers and parents (organising parents meeting), and honouring good attendance.

Adolescents in its natural way make students long for a care free life in an atmosphere totally different and far away from the care and control of parents. NCV courses and new college environment at an early age may sometimes make it difficult for the students to get acclimatised in the new curriculum. Absenteeism can be one convenient way out to escape from the curriculum. Neither the students have an interest to fit into the system nor the parents check whether their children are attending classes or not. Many parents thrust their children to register with the college without assessing or allowing them to choose between available courses, suitable to their interests and ability.

## **6. SYSTEMS FOR MONITORING STUDENT ABSENTEEISM.**

The policy of our College regarding absenteeism reflects that students who absent him/herself 20 consecutive days will be suspended from class. Provision of options for any suspended student allowing the student to proceed is also made after consultation with parents. The findings in this regard show that all Campuses do keep their daily attendance register that records attendance by subjects. This information is taken to administration section for capturing every Fridays. Statistics are collected and sent to the student support for intervention. The college also developed a document called referral for additional support which is used by Lecturers if a student has patterns of absence. The form is taken by Lecturers to the student support office for intervention.

A policy was developed so as to guide the recording and monitoring of absenteeism and this was equated, as already mentioned, the capturing of information by admin on Fridays. Unfortunately there was no systematic attempt to analyse, report and use the information on student absenteeism and to make a follow up with where this problem is recurring.

Parents are also informed telephonically about their children's absenteeism weaknesses and be asked to play a role in rectifying them

## **7. INTERNATIONAL GOOD PRACTICE IN MANAGING AND MONITORING ABSENTEEISM.**

According to the report presented by Community Agency for Social Enquiry( CASE) and Joint education trust (JET), 2007, in the area of management, a range of good practice is reported which focuses on learners such as having individual instruction for learners who experience difficulty at school, home visits and counselling for learners with special needs. The use of incentive rewards also plays an important role in reducing absenteeism.

In more developed countries, with well functioning education systems, considerable resources are invested in systems to record, track, monitor and manage students absenteeism. Countries like United Kingdom and the United states have attendance policies in place as the starting point to monitor absenteeism. The use of attendance registers forms a corner stone in monitoring student's attendance

and absenteeism and there are guidelines on the frequency of use, who is responsible for completing the registers and how they should be completed.

## **8. CONCLUSION.**

Any attempt made to combat absenteeism should take into consideration that it is a symptom of socio economic factors. The approach to curb absenteeism should be devised in a holistic manner taking into account broader problems that contributes to absenteeism. The attendance register should also be used as a first step to curb absenteeism not forgetting to involve parents as they need to know the day to day progress of their children. Campus Management should also give unwavering support to Lecturers by providing in service training and resources. Attendance and absence data collection should be viewed by Lecturers as a daily chore and where the average presence is over 90% attendance checks is easier, and where the average attendance drops from 40-50% the daily chore could become very demanding in terms of time, and in such a case the daily chore can become a burden, and it may lead to errors and omissions.

## References

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