

Assessing Effectiveness of Current Redress Measures To Part-Time Lecturer Absenteeism at a Selected University In Hargeisa, Somaliland

Abdishakur Ahmed Ali¹, Gerald Ainebyona²

¹(Human Resource Manager/ Gollis University, Somaliland)

²(School of Graduate Studies Research Coordinator/ Gollis University, Somaliland)

*Corresponding author:

ABSTRACT:- The study was conducted at a selected University in Hargeisa city where 10 part-time lecturers were conveniently studied in a period of more than two months using qualitative research design. Unstructured interviews together with participant observation were the major data collection methods. Its general objective was to assess the current redress measures to part-time lecturer absenteeism. Specifically, it was intended to; identify the causes of absenteeism among part-time lecturers and assess the reliability of the current administrative action taken to prevent lecturer absenteeism. While the university's administration is currently implementing strategic measures such as; finger print reporting and physical monitoring of lecturers' presence in the classrooms to curb down their absenteeism, such redress measures are less reliable and may not guarantee improved students' academic performance. They may reduce physical absenteeism of lecturers but do not address their mental presence at the university. Effectiveness of the measures in place could be made realized if both the physical and mental presence of lecturers exist at the same time at the workplace

Keywords- Effectiveness, redress, part-time lecturers, absenteeism, university and Somaliland

I. INTRODUCTION

The issue of lecturer absenteeism and its effects on student performance should be points of concern in a knowledge economy. Absenteeism is referred to as "a habit of failure to present himself or herself frequently in program or event without a reasonable excuse and an absentee is used to describe somebody who is not there to do a particular task in person" (Ahmad et al., 2018). There are currently very limited studies directed to fill this gap. This is the first study that has been conducted in the republic of Somaliland. Lecturer absenteeism is partly a global challenge. According to research, United States' public schools were marked to be five to six percent absent in session ... and three times those of managerial and professional employees (Ballou, 1996; Podgursky, 2003 cited in Miller et al., 2007). Part-time and permanent lecturers are fond of missing out from duty at certain times.

Most of the studies address students' absences and how they affect their performance but rarely point out lecturer absenteeism. For example, studies on University student lectures' attendance in Ireland were said to be correlating highly with examination performance (Cohn and Johnson 2006; Gatherer and Manning 1998; Kirby and McElroy 2003; Marburger 2001 cited in Kelly, 2012). Lecture attendance or absenteeism of students could determine their success or failure respectively as is the case in Pretoria, South Africa (Schmulian and Coetzee, 2011). It is also realistic to note that an absence of a lecturer at the university could determine students' academic failure because most students require supervision of lecturers to be able to read or study something as in the case of most Somaliland Universities. How can students' supervision take place in the absence of respective lecturers whether they are part-time or permanent?

One study of School personnel directors in the United States of America revealed that "71% of the schools reported teacher absenteeism as one of the leading problems" (Norton, 1994 cited in Porres, 2016). If absenteeism of teachers/ lecturers can be marked alarming in a developed country that is moved by

technological advancement, it might be worse in developing countries. Kenya is one of the countries in East Africa where absence of a teacher/ lecturer posits unpromising consequences such as; “doubling up of classes, idle time for students and even student dropout if absence becomes frequent enough” (Obiero et al., 2017). Much as absenteeism of lecturers may be caused by the availability of leave holidays in some countries; Kenyan absences of teachers correlate with lower remuneration rates (ibid). To be clear in this paper when lecturers miss out of campus, the recommended or required attendance days, they are called absent.

In Somaliland, universities have explicit policies regarding mandatory class attendance to all lecturers. But, lack of policy implementation by some lecturers could be linked to increasing absenteeism of some students and thus affecting their academic performance. Some students may see no reason of attending class in the absence of their lecturer. While it was stated that absenteeism of teachers could be triggered by occurrence of low level motivation for learning on the side learners in Ethiopian case (Wadesango and Machingambi 2011 cited in Desalegn et al., 2014); lecturers/ teachers’ absence could be attributed to poor remuneration as well as unfavourable time schedules in which they are supposed to deliver lectures. In the studied University’s case, such cases where some lecturers do not regularly attend to student lectures exist. The Human Resource Management is highly concerned about the systemic nature of absenteeism where some part-time lecturers and permanent lecturers may physically attend to their task when their mental realities are somewhere else. When a researcher underscores that class attendance correlates with improved academic performance, it is very vital to note that the physical presence of lecturers has the power to determine student success and failure respectively.

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

According to the available evidence, “teacher absenteeism is a costly problem not in terms of monetary terms alone, but also contributes to lowering students' achievement” (Obiero et al., 2017). In Ugandan study, it was stated that “absenteeism cannot be denied because every now and then, students may miss some school activities and lessons and it becomes a problem if the student is away from school for many days” (Komakech and Osuu, 2014). However, the absence of lecturers could worsen possible failure of students they are assigned to teach. This situation is common mostly among the part-time lecturers. It does not exclude some permanent lecturers too. A sudden absence of any lecturer means that students are not taught. Besides, there is always no prepared permanent lecturer to cover up the gap left by the part-time absent lecturer and this retards the performance of students.

At the studied University, the existing physical presence of the lecturer in front of the students is not enough to determine improved student academic achievement. The latter could be realized if lecturers’ mental and physical presence are actively involved in the delivering of lectures in the various lecture wholes. Low remuneration is largely the major cause of mental breakdown of most lecturers. For lecturers to be both physically and mentally present in the delivery of lessons/ lectures, the top management could consider prioritizing and implementing their salary increment by a realistic percentage of their basic salaries or consider adding them some basic financial incentives as a motivating factor towards great student academic performance. In this way, part-time as well as permanent lecturers would get obsessed with teaching aimed at positive impact creation on undergraduate students.

III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

General Objective

The general objective was to investigate the current redress measures to part-time Lecturer Absenteeism of Undergraduate Lecturers.

Specific Objective

- i. To identify the causes of absenteeism among part-time lecturers.
- ii. To analyze the reliability of current administrative action to reduce absenteeism of lecturers.

IV. METHODS AND MATERIALS

Study Area and Target Population

The study was conducted at a selected University in Hargeisa, Somaliland. This university is located in the heart of Hargeisa City and bordered by over five other universities in the nearest proximity of less than two kilometres in all directions. Part-time lecturers operate in these universities including the studied university. Permanent lecturers also work at the same University in minimal numbers. For the interest of safety of both the researchers and the respondents, the studied university and the respondents have been kept anonymous.

Research Design

Qualitative research design was used to gather and analyse primary data. Unstructured interviews composed this design.

Research Context

Like other neighbouring universities, some lecturers at the study area operate on part-time basis. To get into serious business of giving their time to the students, deans of departments negotiate what they call the gentlemen agreements before they begin to do the actual work of delivering lectures. Gentlemen agreements are not officially contracted by the university. For part-time lecturers, the more lessons they teach determines the more money they would be paid as is the case in all universities in Somaliland. A part-time lecturer may be assigned one class or two which he handles alongside other universities' teaching assignments. This implies that they work in various universities in order to earn more money. While lecturers are supposed to be at work as required by the university time table, they are always on a hurry as they teach and go away to other places immediately. Therefore, interacting with them for an important study like this one takes a lot of patience to acquire information from them.

Sampling

Convenient sampling method was used to gather information on only 10 of the busiest Part-time lecturers who were accessible. This is a non-probability sampling technique which recommends that a research concentrates on "researching subjects of the population that are easily accessible" (cited in Etikan et al., 2016). The probable busy schedules of part-time lecturers always made them unavailable on various hours or days which was the major reason why researchers opted for this sampling technique.

Data Collection Methods

Unstructured Interviews

Unstructured interviews were applied to gather information from the lecturers. According to scholarly evidence, unstructured interviews are believed to have their "roots in the open-ended ethnographic interview ... interviewers are empathetic listeners exploring the inner life world of the interviewees ..." (Berg, 1998 cited in Qu and Dumay, 2011). The accessible lecturers were made to feel relaxed at any time they were free to share their experiences with working with the University. Their availability to interact with researchers was always limited with break time or after prayer time on returning from the Mosques. This was the reason why much of the information was gathered by participant observation as explained in the next section.

Participant observation

Intended observation of part-time lecturers was made for a period of more than two months which gave the researchers ample time to understand why they were sometimes absent from work. The Human Resource Office kept a record of monitored lecturer attendance as well as absenteeism and discovered that most part-time lecturers were specifically caught up. There were however some days when some permanent lectures were absent from work with or without genuine excuse. This means that learners/ students often become victims of lecturer absences as they miss timely knowledge sharing.

V. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The findings of this study have been mainly analysed thematically thus predominantly qualitative. However, some tables in here represent the quantified respondent views.

Demographic Information

Table 1: Age of Respondents

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
20-29	4	40.0	40.0	40.0
30-39	4	40.0	40.0	80.0
40-49	1	10.0	10.0	90.0
50-59	1	10.0	10.0	100.0
Total	10	100.0	100.0	

Table 2: Gender

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Male	9	70.0	70.0	70.0
Female	1	30.0	30.0	100.0
Total	10	100.0	100.0	

The researchers interacted with 9 men and 1 woman of various ages as indicated in tables 1 and 2. At the time of data collection, there was only one woman working as lecturer on part-time basis.

The causes of Lecturer absenteeism

High Costs of Transport

High transportation costs incurred by staff were cited to be part of the causes why University Lecturers become absent and not attend to students' lectures on various occasions. Some of the respondents said that they do not own private cars, and part of the journey is made on foot and were tired of this tiresome situation. This makes them being absent for minutes or for the whole period. Working conditions or environment is responsible for the absence of the workers, either they complained about failure to meet their transport fares and in the end they miss classes because most universities do not provide transport for the lecturer.

Remuneration Issues

Low salaries have the capacity to reduce the morale of any institutional staff. Lecturers usually seek for salary increment in order to be able to meet their personal and institutional needs concurrently. However, the limited financial capacity of the host institution does not lead them to their dream. Some see no reason of attending to the students but choose to miss out on some days as they carry on private businesses at their homes or elsewhere. Absence resulting from low remuneration could be minimized by institutional willingness to offer competitive salaries to its valuable employees. To gain financial capacity, the top management could use its high skilled professionals to winning proposals in critical areas such as; food security, renewable energy, gender-specific project development among other projects to attract external funding. They could also use or extend the publications of graduate and undergraduate students which address sustainable development challenges of society to apply for funding to implement them. As it is an experience in various other institutions, researchers who are mainly lecturers of the host institution could be extra financial benefits alongside basic salary to increase their motivation to minimize if not prevent lecturer absences and perform their tasks and responsibilities mentally and physically.

Working in Different Places as Part-time

Lecturers at the studied University are paid depending on the number of classes they teach. When part-time lecturers were asked why they were always absent at work, three of them said, "we work in three-to-four universities where we teach one class in each at a very unfriendly time." They could have been referring to the common problem that some of the classes they teach in other places collide with their tasks and responsibilities assigned by the employer at this university, which may be the reason why they have no alternatives to go for the most convenient schedule. If one was teaching more than one classes in each institution, that would mean his or her earnings could exceed those of the permanently stationed lecturers in a host university. This could explain why most part-time lecturers vow never to work as permanent lecturers.

Relationship between Lecturer Absenteeism and Students' Performance

Performance is either understood in work hours or appearance to meet learners' needs. Where teachers and other workers miss their classes the performance of students is limited to only what the lecturers have provided, and for that day the units which do not have assistant will be out of service so lagging in taking decision or paralysis in the units. Researchers found a close relationship between low performance and absenteeism of lecturers. Many staff who own small side businesses tend to be absent. This study revealed that most fulltime staff are partly committed to their job and could engage in extra jobs if they obtained them. According to (Yahaya et al., 2010), "absenteeism is detrimental to students' achievement, promotion, graduation, self-esteem, and employment potential." Lecturers who are serial absentees do not always cover the content designed and thus, criticised by students for causing their poor performance which come to rest on the whole university.

Gender-Specific Absence Blames

Some people used to associate staff absenteeism with women. That could have been a stereotype aimed at weakening women by male staff. Some male respondents blamed female absence to natural and social factors like natural factors like sickness, birth or marriage ceremonies than economic or employment factors. They may be unaware that gender roles have changed these days. Women were originally supposed to stay at home and take care of the children and other domestic issues. On the other hand, men were supposed to work and bring money home. Today, the reverse may be true. Sometimes, some women have to work together with men in order to earn more money to support the family although this may not be true with all female staff at the study area. Despite the shift in the gender roles, male staff maintain the belief that women staff in any department are weak and may not be able to manoeuvre with competitive employment opportunities which correlates with their absenteeism at work.

Mental Absence Visa-vis Physical Presence of Lecturers

The biggest challenge the University faces unaware is the inability to identify mental presence of staff. A lecturer may be physically present at the workplace but his/her mental presence not with them. There could be numerous factors influencing mental absence of institutional staff although they are not all explored in this

paper. Low remuneration may be the highest driver to mental absence of lecturers. On various occasions, some lecturers were observed absent-minded in the classrooms and when one of them was asked what was going in his mind, he said, "I am wondering how I am going to acquire extra money to top-up my salary and be able to pay the school fees of my children." Lecturers of this type of financial vulnerability are not likely to be performing their tasks and responsibilities as required by the employer. The reality could be that the low morale and performance level of lecturers has power to colonize their minds and use them to halt any form of student-centred teaching. Therefore, the physical presence of lecturers and other staff may not guarantee the work performance. Mental presence together with physical presence of any lecturer in the classroom could largely determine better performance of students.

Effectiveness of Current Managerial Action on Absenteeism of Lecturers

There is no challenge that is without a solution. Addressing institutional problem begins with taking certain tiny steps to improvement and good performance in favour of our immediate customers, the students. The Administration initiated some strategies to minimize lecture absenteeism which include the following:

a) Finger Print Reporting – is one strategic way that Human Resource Office uses to capture the attendance and presence or absence of lecturers at work. Alonso-Fernandez et al. (2012) identified numerous studies and benchmarks showing that the accuracy of biometric systems heavily depends on the quality of the acquired input samples. In accordance with this idea, an administrative belief that finger print reporting ensures accuracy of staff or lecturers' presence may not be realistic. There has been some reports where some staff/lecturer (anonymous) working with the studied university, did the finger printing on reporting at work, parked his car in the university parking-yard, opened his office and dressed his office chair with his beautiful coat, left his office open and secretly sneaked out to attend his private business in town. This cunning lecturer returns at exactly mid-day to finger-print again as a sign that he has been on duty during the official schedule set by the institution. There are also numerous cases within the university involving some part-time and some full-time lecturers who finger print every single day but then spend much of their time on social media entrainment than concentrating on academic tasks. While the finger print machine reported that the lecturer had full time attendance at the university, he was actually mentally absent at work. In the view of these researchers, finger print reporting is partly an effective way of capturing staff performance because lecturers can improve time management. However, time management without efficient and effective performance in favour of the immediate customers (students' learning) could be a grave academic as well as institutional disaster. Much better results could be achieved if lecturers are tasked to provide a daily or weekly report of all the tangible activities and achievements they have made. Besides, most lecturers if not all largely respond to monetary incentives especially if they are contented that their salaries cater for most of their families' immediate needs. In addition, their payments could be determined by their visibility in scholarly architecture but not because of their gathered finger print database report.

b) Monitoring/Supervising Daily Activities -- Apart from finger print reporting, the Human Resource Office together with other academic managers such as Deans of Faculties have been taking on the role of supervising staff presence in the classrooms. They move around throughout the university corridors checking if the lecturer is standing in front of the students and that is all. They have registered some success in this supervision strategy. When lecturers and other staff discover that they are being supervised, they try to improve their presence and attendance. However, their mental absence is not likely to be corrected during classroom teaching unless comprehensive interventions in terms of improved remuneration and as benefits such as; transportation, leave policies and other welfare arrangements of lecturers and other staff are taken into consideration. That is why these researchers concur with scholarly recommendation which posits that "Employers should show that they care about their employees by providing them with services that will reduce the stresses experience not only at work but outside of work as well" (Obeng-Denteh et al., 2011).

VI. CONCLUSION

An interaction with scholarly evidence has underscored that absenteeism is common in both developed and developing countries. Low level motivation and inadequate remuneration have been sited to be linked to absenteeism of most lectures and most especially part-time lecturers. While some strategic measures are going on such as; finger print reporting as well as physical supervision of staff presence in the university to ensure various absences are prevented, little success is realized. The physical presence of lecturers or any other staff could be largely easier to control than their mental presence in front of classrooms. One old man once said that "you do not have to be great to start but you have to start to be great." He was right because the trouble is that if an academic institution does not risk anything and most especially salary increment, they are risking more in which case the immediate customers (students) will end up victims.

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