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Teacher Absenteeism in Indonesia: Policy Brief

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Policy Brief

November 2014

Teacher Absenteeism in Indonesia

- › What is the Teacher Absenteeism Rate in Indonesia?
- › What are the Reasons for Teacher Absence from School?
- › What are Teachers' Activities When not Teaching?
- › What are the Effects of Teacher Absence?.
- › What are the Policy Implications?

This project is one of the most comprehensive and large-scale studies of teacher absenteeism undertaken anywhere in the world. Specially trained teams made two unannounced visits to each of the sampled schools during their regular teaching and learning time.

The teams collected information on teacher absence, observed classes, conducted interviews with principals and teachers, and administered short tests to samples of students.

Visit 1 was in late 2013 and Visit 2 in early 2014. Interviews were also held with district-level officials. The research examined not only teachers' absence from school, but also any absence from class of teachers who, although present at school, were not teaching as scheduled.

The final sample comprised 880 primary and junior secondary schools across six regions – Sumatra, Java, Bali and Nusa Tenggara, Sulawesi, Kalimantan, and Papua and Maluku – and included 119 of the 147 primary schools involved in a similar study conducted in 2003.

In all, data were collected from over 8,300 teachers and 8,200 students. The cooperation of all those who contributed to the research is gratefully acknowledged.



Photo: PIH Kemendikbud

» What is the Teacher Absenteeism Rate in Indonesia?

Overall, around one in ten teachers were found to be absent from school. During Visit 1, 10% of teachers were found to be absent and 11% were absent at the time of Visit 2. In the primary schools from the 2003 sample that were revisited for this study, the absence rate had dropped from 19% in 2003 to 10% in 2013.

These are generally encouraging results for Indonesia. There appears to have been a substantial decline in teacher absence rates over the past decade.

Furthermore, the estimate of teacher absence from school for Indonesia in 2013 is generally lower than estimates of absence rates in a range of other developing countries.

Nevertheless, the findings are not grounds for complacency. A 10% rate of teacher absence from school is still high, and in many schools the rate of teacher absence from class is even higher than this.

Teacher Absence by Region, School Level and Status		
	Absence Rate from School (%)	Absence Rate from Class (%)
National estimates		
Visit 1	10	14
Visit 2	11	12
Region		
Sumatra	8	17
Java	9	13
Bali & Nusa Tenggara	14	13
Kalimantan	14	11
Sulawesi	10	4
Papua & Maluku	12	11
School Level		
Primary	9	13
Junior Secondary	10	16
School Type		
General	9	13
Madrasah	13	16
School Status		
Public	9	15
Private	13	10
Note: Figures are rounded, and are based on Visit 1 data.		

Among teachers who were scheduled to teach, **14%** were found in school but not in the classroom in Visit 1, and **12%** in Visit 2.

Teacher absence rates were found to vary widely among different types of teachers, and among regions and different types of schools. The fact that absence rates differed among schools with different types of characteristics suggests that policies which seek to change the conditions of schools can be effective in reducing absenteeism.

Teacher absenteeism rates were generally higher:

- » Among male teachers than female teachers
- » Among teachers who worked at more than one school
- » In remote schools than in urban schools
- » In schools with poor physical facilities
- » In schools that had not achieved the particular Minimum Service Standards (MSS) analysed through the study
- » In schools where the principal was not present or did not provide a positive role model for teachers
- » In schools where there had not been a recent visit from the district education office
- » In schools where the school committee had little engagement in monitoring the school budget or in connecting parents with the school

» What are the Reasons for Teacher Absence from School?

The most common reason for absence nationally was to attend official teaching-related duties (**26%**), which were largely related to attending meetings and training.

There were significant regional differences, with **35%** of teacher absences in Java being attributed to this reason, and only **9%** of absences in the Papua and Maluku region. Meanwhile, the most common reason for absence in Sumatra and Kalimantan was late arrival, where around one in four teachers were absent for this reason.

In Sulawesi and in the Bali and Nusa Tenggara regions, on the other hand, one in four teachers were absent for reasons unknown to the principal or school staff interviewed.

» What are Teachers' Activities When not Teaching?

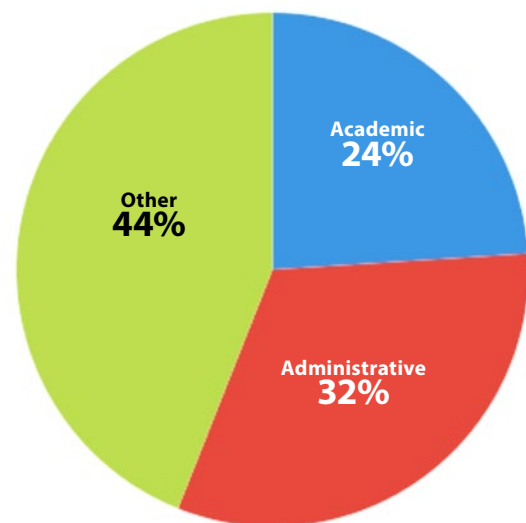
Most frequently, regardless of whether or not they were scheduled to teach, teachers who were at school but not teaching were found doing activities that could neither be categorised as academic nor administrative.

The most common description used was 'waiting', either for their next class to start or for the end of the school day if they had no more classes to teach that day.

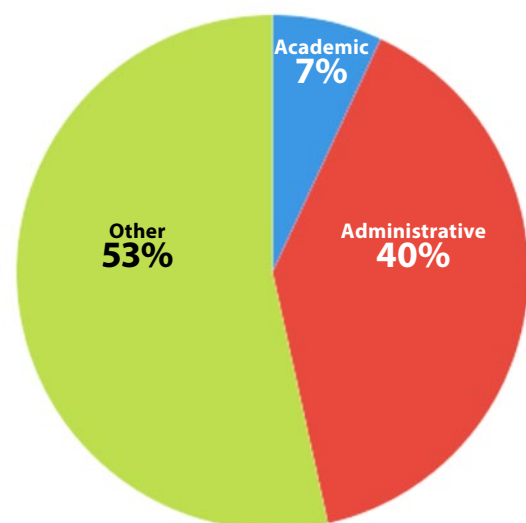
Sometimes they were chatting with other teachers in the teacher room, reading, preparing food or eating. The next most frequent type of activity was administrative work, including assisting in the principal's or administration office, keeping guard of the sick room, entering information into a database, and being responsible for unattended classes.

One in four teachers who were absent from class were found engaged in another academic activity such as designing teaching materials or marking student work.

Teacher Activity When In School But Not Teaching Schedule to Teach



Not Schedule to Teach



» What are the Effects of Teacher Absence?

High rates of teacher absence adversely affect the operations of schools, other teachers, and students.

Some key findings were:

- » Of classes that were in session during the unannounced visits, 9% were unattended for the duration of the class and a further 5% of classes were temporarily unattended, with the teacher later returning to class.
- » When unattended classes are taken into account, primary schools are estimated to provide an average of only 19 hours teaching per week and secondary schools only 23 hours per week. These are significantly below the Minimum Service Standards requirements.
- » Around two-thirds of classes without their regularly scheduled teacher had a substitute. Most substitutes were assigned to more than one class during one lesson period.
- » In secondary schools, only about 40% of substitutes were teachers of the same subject matter as the regularly scheduled teacher.
- » In unattended classes students were considerably more likely to be left without a prescribed activity.
- » The student absence rate was higher in schools with a high teacher absence rate.
- » There was some evidence that higher rates of teacher absence in primary schools were associated with lower student achievement in mathematics.

Student performance reflects a range of home background and school contextual factors, and identifying the particular impact of teacher absence within the context of the teaching-and learning practices in schools is a complex issue.

Future studies would benefit from a longitudinal design to investigate these important relationships, particularly through measuring the extent and impact of long-term or repeated teacher absences on student learning and motivation.

» What are the Policy Implications?

Indonesia's progress in reducing the rate of teacher absenteeism over the past decade needs to be sustained in the interest of lifting student achievement and reducing disparities among schools.

Tackling absenteeism requires coordinated action on a wide variety of fronts at different levels of the education system.

At the national level priorities include:

- » Reconsidering the current national policies on teachers' working hours, so as to reduce the incentive for teachers to work at more than one school.
- » Expanding the current standards concerning the expectations of teachers to include their non-teaching time and responsibilities. There is a need for the non-class teaching role of teachers to be clarified and for the environment of schools to better encourage and support teachers to use their time outside of class in ways that are more rewarding for students.
- » Continuing to address the broader issues of the distribution of teachers in the system. Teacher absence from school was not found to be caused by teacher shortages. Instead, as this and other studies have concluded, it is one of the symptoms of a broader challenge of the inequitable distribution of teachers in the Indonesian education system.

At the district level priorities include:

- » Strengthening support and supervision of the teaching and learning process. Regular and focused visits by district-level officials help reinforce the importance of teachers' work, and indicate an efficiently operating district in which a range of actions that directly and indirectly encourage teacher attendance are underway.
- » Increasing the focus on supporting schools in recording and tracking absence levels. A fingerprinting machine is only one way to do this, and the introduction of such machines without broader changes at the district level is unlikely to achieve the desired result.

Photo: PIH Kemendikbud



More of the variation in teacher absence rates can be explained by differences between schools rather than between provinces or between districts. Accordingly, there are a number of factors that have implications for [the school level](#).

These implications, which will require complementary actions at national, regional and district levels include:

- » Strengthening principal selection and competency development as a key to promoting a “presence and engagement culture” among teachers.
- » Providing schools with clear policies and support for managing teacher absences and substitute teachers in ways that minimise the impact on students.
- » Providing schools with more support to improve the management of school schedules and teachers’ roles to make the most of teachers’ time.
- » Building more constructive engagement by schools with their local communities.
- » Wherever possible holding meetings and training days outside of regular school teaching hours.

It is important to carefully consider the relative benefits and costs of different policy options.

For example, while introducing higher salaries for teachers, may reduce the pressure to take on more than one job, may not be as cost-effective a strategy as say, the strengthening of school principal selection procedures and building principals’ competencies.

In a country as large and diverse as Indonesia, there is much to be gained from carefully designed pilot studies before widespread implementation.

There is also much to be gained by ensuring that principals and teachers support the policy directions that are being undertaken.

After all, they are the main ones who have to ensure that the policies are effectively implemented, and they – along with their students – have the most to gain from ensuring that teacher absenteeism rates are as low as possible.

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