



Contract Type and Teacher Absenteeism in Benin: The Role of Teacher's Supplemental Income

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Abstract

Absenteeism is a phenomenon that has been noted in professional circles with consequences on the income of the wage earner as well as the profits of the firm, consequences that led, according to statistics from 2005, to losses in public finance amounting to close to 70 billion francs for the Government of Benin. Despite such losses, very few studies in economics have focused on the subject to try and give an understanding of the real causes of absenteeism and its consequences. The objective of this study is to explore the relationship between the status of the teacher, supplemental income of the teacher, and the absenteeism of the teacher. Using data from PASEC-CONFEMEN 2005, that

will be applied to a theoretical model that we are developing, and through the use of a Tobit empirical method, after having taken the endogeneity bias on the practice of supplemental income generating activities by the teacher into account, this study demonstrates that the practice of income generating activities by teachers positively influences their absenteeism, with contract teachers being more frequently absent than those who are on permanent and pensionable employment contracts. Through linking the level of prices in a locality with absenteeism behaviours, we make it clear that the reasons for absenteeism are mostly related to low purchasing power in the context of earning relatively meagre salaries. These results elicit a set of recommendations that essentially suggest that there should be an improvement in the salaries and working conditions of teachers.

Background and statement of the problem

A good number of firms and public service agencies are experiencing absenteeism among their workers who for various reasons are not present at their workplaces, leading to manifold costs to the structures that use them. These costs include notably the costs related to recourse to replacements, additional training, selection of replacement of the absent workers, and the administrative management of absenteeism. In developing, as well as developed countries, the phenomenon has been snowballing over several decades. Losses in working hours which arise from it have consequences that triggered, according to the statistics from 2005¹, the loss of close to 70 billion francs of public funds for the Benin Government, and to a loss of 72 billion francs in 2016 according to UNDP (2016).

In the education sector, the phenomenon is particularly concerning; indeed, given the role that education plays in economic growth, and in view of the role of education in the education system, teacher absenteeism is a troubling problem, because its consequences on the quality of education are tremendous due to the reduction in learning periods and the incomplete syllabi that such actions entail. According to Tao (2013) in Kenya, Mozambique, Nigeria, Senegal, Togo, Uganda and Tanzania, teachers were, on average, absent from classroom more than 40% of the time. According to Mulkeen (2010), teachers do not always cover the official number of hours required for effective teaching. The evaluation by PASEC (2014) placed Benin in the fifth position in terms of primary school teacher absenteeism out of the ten countries evaluated, and in second position just after Burkina Faso among the West African Economic Monetary Union (WAEMU) countries. Even though Benin has the longest official class teaching periods (28 hours per week), the rate of non-completion of training programmes in primary school are higher (65%) among the evaluated countries (PASEC, 2014).

1 Statistics from the Ministry of Administrative and Institutional Reform, 2005.

Considering the statistics that highlight the extent of absenteeism of workers in general, and that of teachers, it becomes very important to focus on teacher absenteeism. The question is even more significant because teaching is an essential production factor in education and the fact that it cannot be substituted cannot be gainsaid, given the high costs that come with replacing a teacher. The question becomes even more significant when one considers the myriad categories of teachers that are today employed in developing countries. Indeed, in the 1990s, and in the 2000s, many teachers were recruited to respond to the need of expanded education, in line with the objectives of Education for All (EFA). However, most countries found themselves faced with a double problem: not only a shortage of teachers, with the continent having to create 2.3 million new posts by the year 2030 (UNESCOISU, 2014), but also that of limited finances. They therefore implemented policies for lowering the wage bill thus creating new categories of teachers “contract” “community” “volunteer”, etc., often managed in a decentralized manner, and while breaching international labour laws affecting the sector (Adotévi, 2008; UNESCO-BREDA, 2009). These new teachers are said in most cases to be “contractual” since the duration of their contracts is limited in time and thus always must be renewed. A permanent job as a teacher can only be attained when one obtains additional qualifications (UNESCO-BREDA, 2009). In terms of the amount of engagement by the government, their status is precarious. For example, community teachers are under the employ of the community (parents) and are mostly paid a token salary. These new types of teachers have faced very different situations according to the country where they work, whether it is in relation to their contract, or to their career plans (Bourdon & Nkengné-Nkengné, 2007).

Despite the costs of absenteeism of labourers to the economy, very few economic studies have focused on the subject to understand the underlying reasons. At the theoretical level, the neoclassical static model of labour supply (Allen, 1981), and the efficiency wage model (Shapiro & Stiglitz, 1984) constitute the two methods most often used to examine absenteeism from work.

According to the neoclassical model of labour supply (Allen, 1984), absenteeism occurs when the employee has to work more than he/she would like to during a given period, and thus the reaction of the said employee being that of absencing himself/herself in order to adjust their optimal labour supply to that which is imposed on them by the contract. Dunn and Youngblood gave an empirical illustration of the same in 1986. According to the efficiency wage model developed by Shapiro and Stiglitz (1984), which highlights “shirking” behaviour, the employee avoids work as long as the salary is not enough to compensate the effort that they have to put in at work.

According to studies by PASEC (2014), almost 25% of primary school teachers in Benin undertake income generating activities besides their teaching jobs, and among these, almost half of them are involved in the absenteeism phenomenon. Both in

terms of the facts that demonstrate the high degree of delinquency by teachers in the education system, the variety of types of teachers in the education system whose financial benefits vary according to the type of contract, and the practice of income generating activities by a large number of primary school teachers in Benin, one could attempt to find out the role played by the practice of income generating activities of the teacher on their absenteeism from work. This study thus focuses on an analysis of the relationship between out-of-work income of primary school teachers of Benin, their status (the type of contract under which they work) and the frequency of their absenteeism from work.

Objectives

The overall objective of this study is to examine the relationship between the type of contract of the teacher and the tendency towards absenteeism at their workplace. More specifically, the study will:

- Identify the effect of the status of the teacher on the engaging by the said teacher in income generating activities besides those that are related to their job as a teacher.
- Evaluate the role played by extra-contractual income of the teacher on the frequency of their delinquency in terms of effecting their duties.

Methodology

We will develop a theoretical model that examines the absenteeism of the worker; then we will present an empirical specification, before describing the data gathered for the estimation of an empirical model.

Conclusions and policy recommendations

In formulating this study, on the basis of the tremendous costs incurred through absenteeism, not only to economies in general, but especially on the performance of the education system, our objective was to highlight the role played by the practice of income generating activities of the teacher on their absenteeism frequency. An analysis of the absenteeism of the teacher reveals to us that, in regard to teaching in primary schools of Benin, contract teachers are more prone to absenteeism than their permanently employed colleagues; an important observation noted from our results is that the status of the teacher changes through the channel of the practice of income

generating activities by the teacher, a practice which is furthermore influenced by the price levels, to impact on their absenteeism. Therefore, to compensate for the relatively low levels of their salaries, contract teachers generally engage in income generating activities on which they spend their working hours, leading to their delinquent behaviour. Furthermore, we can note from this study, the necessity, not only of improving the salary conditions of teachers, but also of putting in place better working conditions for them to reduce absenteeism among them.

The present study, however, has a certain number of limits; indeed, the question of endogeneity of the explanatory variables, even if it was handled using various variables, still needs further analysis through the inclusion of more variables, notably that of the job satisfaction of the teacher. Indeed, if one refers to studies by Hamermesh (1977), job satisfaction is dependent on a set of variables that are linked to working conditions as well as socio-economic variables. The availability of more information in the database would have allowed us to take this endogeneity into account.

Regardless of these limits, through additional analysis, we could, on the basis of the first set of results obtained, carry out simulations in order to evaluate the impact of policies of revaluating of the teaching function could have on the absenteeism of teachers, and therefore on the effectiveness of their educational expenses, notably expenses related to the payment of salaries.

Policy recommendations

The results obtained inspire several recommendations. To this effect, we recommend:

- An improvement in the salaries of teachers to strengthen their purchasing power in a context of improving their standards of living, all the while improving the aspect of improving the monitoring of their absenteeism from school. Indeed, the results obtained demonstrate that the level of salaries has a negative impact on the frequency of absenteeism by teachers, and the teachers who engage in income generating activities besides their work as teachers are more prone to absenteeism. If the practice of these activities is aimed at allowing the teacher to improve their real income, efforts engaged in by public authorities in terms of improving the salaries of teachers could be explored in order to reduce the practice of income generating activities by teachers in order to allow them to dedicate more time to engaging in their work as teachers in order to ensure better internal efficiency within the education system. This recommendation agrees with the efforts engaged in by the government to improve employment within the education system by reducing the hiring of teachers on temporary contracts. Besides, a look at the results of the PASEC 2014 performance test

shows a considerable drop in student performance in Benin over the period 2005-2014 and that one of the reasons for this decline is the way that Benin handled the contact employment of teachers in its education sector. It should, however, be noted that budgetary constraints that are experienced in the country, just like in all the other countries in the sub-region, could limit the possibility of an improvement of salaries, but it is imperative that the government makes a choice between maintaining the education system and the respect of local standards in terms of the raising of the wage bill.

- An improved monitoring of the practices in the public education sector; indeed, teachers in the public sector appear to be, according to the results, more prone to absenteeism than their colleagues in the private sector. Improved administration in the sector of public teaching could be an alternative to reduce teacher absenteeism in the public sector. In the private sector, teachers are more closely monitored and thus cannot easily absent themselves for reasons that are not valid, whereas in the public sector, the monitoring of the diligence of the teacher is not a current practice, as is the case within the larger public service sector. Teaching in public schools, therefore, needs the operationalization of a series of reforms that will target the disciplining of actors in various levels of management in the education system for ensuring more rigour in terms of monitoring in the sector.
- In addition to the salary conditions of the teachers, it is important to put in place a raft of measures aimed at improving job satisfaction of teachers in the practice of their functions. With this in mind, an improvement in working conditions notably efforts in terms of the reduction of the number of students in each class, the availability of work tools, the construction of quality infrastructure, the improvement of accessibility of schools, and a better collaboration between professional trainers and teachers in terms of classroom situations, between heads of schools and their teaching staff, are some of the measures to prioritize in order to keep teachers in their classrooms during working hours and to make students benefit from the contribution of these teachers.

These recommendations are, regarding the nature of the results obtained, important in terms of reducing the frequency of absenteeism by teachers. However, it is important to specify that the attainment of the objective of the reduction of absenteeism of teachers following the implementation of these policies is dependent upon the monitoring that the various actors that are in charge of the sector would implement. Indeed, a policy, however well thought out, only produce success to the extent of the monitoring measures followed in its implementation.

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