

Deal with real causes of absenteeism in schools

According to a Uwezo Uganda report, a total of 270 teachers, representing 18 percent of the workforce in Namutumba District, are absent from duty daily. The report titled "Are our children learning?" states that this trend leaves learners without the expected competencies and contributes to the district's poor performance in national examinations.

Teacher absenteeism in our schools is an age-old problem that can only be solved, or at least reduced, when the real causes are dealt with.

Sadly, it persists, and this has in turn greatly affected the performance of pupils not only in Namutumba but in many other parts of the country.

According to the report, some of the reasons that the problem persists is partly because some school administrators and teachers deliberately disengaged from the automated attendance system. Again, we ask, why do they take the trouble of disengaging from the system? This is one of the questions that must be answered.

The issue:

Teacher
absenteeism

Our view:

Without dealing with issues such as low pay, poor working conditions, lack of accommodation, high pupil-teacher ratio increasing workload and stress levels, which are some of the real drivers of teacher absenteeism, efficient schools inspection will not achieve much. Automated attendance systems are a great idea if the basic survival and motivational needs of the teachers are taken care of.

In our story in the *Daily Monitor* of Thursday, November 27, (270 teachers absent daily in Namutumba schools-report), the District Internal Security Officer, Mr Gilbert Ninsiima, attributed the absenteeism to failure by inspectors of schools and head teachers to conduct their duties.

He says this only goes to show that inspectors are not reaching schools. But will inspection alone solve the problem?

Without dealing with issues such as low pay, poor working conditions, lack of accommodation, high pupil-teacher ratio increasing workload and stress levels, which are some of the real drivers of teacher absenteeism, efficient schools inspection will not achieve much.

It is also common knowledge and quite understandable that, because of poor pay, many of the teachers spend a considerable amount of time doing part-time work to supplement their meagre income.

No amount of inspection will change anything if the real causes of teachers not showing up to work are not addressed conclusively.

Of course, it goes without saying that we don't condone absconding from work, but we can't run away from the realities on the ground.

This is a symptom of compounded challenges which we can no longer continue to gloss over. Automated attendance systems are a great idea if the basic survival and motivational needs of the teachers are taken care of.