

Students' attitude toward substitute teachers and their effect on performance and...

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Students' attitudes towards substitute teachers negatively affect classroom performance and behaviour in public schools. The education system is faced by a myriad of problems. Such problems range from diminishing academic performance amongst students, increased cases of indiscipline amongst students, poor or insufficient funding for schools, ineffective administration of district schools as well as diminishing standards of teacher quality especially in the public resulting for ineffective teaching as well as dwindling academic performance of students especially in literacy and accounting skills.

Substitute teaching is a concept introduced in public schools to counter shortage of teachers in the public schools. However the concept is more teacher-oriented in that it failed to anticipate and address key concerns from students and parents. Substitution teaching as a concept place a lot of emphasis on teachers and have been seen by some critics as a 'teacher's affair' (Wolcowitz, 1984). For teachers, the program offers them with the laxity of earning extra money at their comfort. In addition it allows teachers to choose their working schedules which means that this kind of teaching is teacher-centered in that, the teacher avails themselves at their own convenience and not necessarily when the students need them (Wolcowitz, 1984). The fact that teachers are not necessarily available when needed by the students has been found to contribute to a negative attitude by the students towards substitute teachers (Katz, 1995).

The students' concerns and fears are justified considering the fact that, the students do not enjoy the same laxity and flexibility of schedule and therefore they have to attend school from morning to evening. This causes a

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lot of distress to the students who may sometimes have to do without the teachers especially when the teacher's schedule is not flexible and therefore the teacher does not dedicate enough time to the students. This causes the student to develop negative attitude towards the learning process. For learning to take place effectively, (Katz, 1995) suggests that the following factors are necessary: the right classroom environment, the right attitude from both the teacher and the student, the availability of teaching and learning materials, elimination of all barriers to communication such as language barrier as well as a positive school environment. Since substitute teachers only get involved in the teaching process as a part time job, usually, the above criteria for effective learning as laid out by (Katz, 1995) are often lacking.

Therefore this leads to students developing negative attitudes towards the teachers and the learning process and therefore in turn, causes learning to be impeded. There is also growing evidence that many substitute teachers teach a wide range of grades for example some substitute teachers teach across the course, such as at the high school, at the elementary school, in the junior school and sometimes they combine several levels. This has been found to negatively influence the attitude of the learners especially at the primary school level who feel that, the teachers cannot competently handle several grades. This therefore makes the students especially at the primary school level to look down upon teachers, as they believe are only qualified to teach in high levels. The other thing, which greatly influences the students to have a negative attitude towards the substitute teacher, is the fact that the teachers end up as substitute teachers because afterall they may not love

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the teaching profession and therefore use it as a fallback position (Katz, 1995).

If substitute teachers get something better to do in terms of another better paying job they are more likely to quit the teaching and therefore the students feel that they are not getting a fair deal from the substitute teachers. The other source of conflicts between the substitute teachers and their students is the fact that the teachers are not always available to teach as they typically have about 7 hours per day for teaching (Katz, 1995). This therefore means that, they do not have the time to meet the needs of the students hence the students' source of concern and negative attitude towards the substitute teachers. The substitute teachers do not have time to assist the students in extra curricular activities, as the student-substitute teacher relationship is restricted to class. The moment the substitute teacher is through with the teaching, the student can no longer have access to the substitute teacher. This therefore implies that the students can only gain from the substitute teacher in a limited manner.

Students who may need assistance in curricular activities such as sports or in personal guidance cannot depend on the substitute teachers for assistance (Katz, 1995). This is greatly to blame for the standoff between students and substitute teachers. The students view substitute teachers as unfairly taking advantage of the teacher shortage at their expense. Therefore substitute teachers have an obligation to make sure that they win the support of their students by establishing positive relations while at the same time working within their job specifications (Kottler, & Lanning, (1992). The combination

of the above factors greatly contributes to students to show lack of respect towards their teachers.

With an environment where the students show total disregard of their teachers, they in turn fail to concentrate on the subject the substitute teachers teach. A lot of time which is supposed to be dedicated to learning, is dedicated to solving of indiscipline cases as well as to correcting behaviour. This definitely affects the learning environment in the classroom and therefore the teachers are less likely to offer their best. On the other hand, the learners are less likely to show interest in learning which further implies that they are less likely to master whatever subjects the substitute teachers are teaching. The overall effect is that, teachers end up not showing the dedication they need to show in service due to lack of respect by their students.

This state of affairs is confirmed by Kottler, and Lanning, (1992) who notes that, teacher performance can be negatively affected by the teacher-student relations. Kottler, and Lanning, (1992), adds that negative teacher-student relations greatly contributes to the shaping of the classroom environment with negative relations leading to poor academic performance on the part of the students and positive teacher-student relations leading to an improved and enabling classroom environment which greatly contributes to improved student performance. Substitute teachers have been portrayed as ' fill-in-gaps' for regular teachers and as such, may lack the confidence of a regular teacher. There are many challenges that the substitute teacher must

handle. For instance, the substitute is almost always never sure of what to expect until he/she comes into contact with the real situation.

For example, a substitute teacher would normally not even know what the topic; say in Math, he/she is going to handle until some few minutes before the beginning of the lesson. Usually this generates a lot of anxiety on most substitute teachers considering that some of the substitute teachers are new to that school and in particular, they could also be new to the class and strangers to the students for that matter. This means that in order for the right classroom environment to be present; the teacher must spend quite a considerable amount of time doing familiarization and introduction in terms of knowing the class better. The above can also contribute to increased anxiety amongst the students who may have negative perception of the substitute teachers and also end up getting the perception that the substitute teacher is interrupting their learning. This can especially result in cases whereby the absent teacher is a 'darling' of the students and has good reputation and relations with the students which the substitute teacher cannot match.

This can negatively affect students' attitude in that they end up feeling as if the substitute teacher is wasting their time. Sometimes the substitute teacher could be someone who has no prior teaching experience and is using the substitute teaching as a platform to gain experience. The above therefore implies that, the teacher may not be as competent as the regular teacher in terms of pedagogy or mastery of subject content. This could in

turn lead to low quality of teaching something which highly contributes to students' discontentment. All this can lead to poor academic performance.

Substitute teachers do not have a clear knowledge of the class, as it is the case with regular teachers. Therefore, the substitute teacher is not able to control the discipline in the class, as it is the case with regular teachers.

What therefore happens is the fact that, the indiscipline incidences results into poor academic performance as substitute teacher classes are interrupted more oftenly to deal with indiscipline cases. The other major cause of concern in as far as substitute teachers and academic performance is concerned is the fact that, classroom control for a substitute teacher is always a major challenge. This is because the students usually have a prejudice for substitute teachers and therefore almost always, the students look for opportunities or weaknesses in the substitute teacher's system to make the learning process difficult.

For instance, substitute teachers may cause unrests in the class just because of their dressing style, or poor mastery of subject or topic. Poor scoring on the above factors is enough to negatively affect the learning environment and therefore make matters very difficult for the substitute teacher. A substitute teacher must learn to be well rounded and to be a good manager. A substitute teacher must also master very well all the subjects the teacher is expected to substitute for. The other major requirement for the substitute teacher is the good understanding of the school policies, rules, regulations and procedures (Davis, 1993).

Failure to follow school procedures in any respect may lead to problems with the students, something which is not healthy for the learning environment. The substitute teacher must also be capable of practicing good public relations even with other staff. This is very necessary as the staff can be of great assistance to the substitute teachers especially in terms of identifying difficult students and classes and giving the substitute teachers a great deal of advice on how to handle each case. Good relations with the gatekeeper who usually links the substitute teacher to the administration is an added advantage to a substitute teacher and something which the substitute teacher should always maintain (Katz, 1995). Conclusion Indeed, students' attitudes toward substitute teachers affect their academic performance but certainly they are not the only factors responsible for the poor student performance.

The substitute teacher's attitudes and conduct can also contribute to poor academic performance of the students.;