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Factors Causing Absenteeism Among The Students Of Secondary Level Schools

Abstract

The review of the relevant literature revealed that the issue of absenteeism among secondary school students was not related to the present age and to some particular area but since ages ago and wide in limits. The researchers intended to explore the factors of absenteeism and to find some way out to the path of improvement. For this purpose, a mixed methods research was designed. To deeply and comprehensively view the problem both quantitative and qualitative research methods were adopted. The sample comprised of all the immediate stakeholders of the problem: Students, Teachers, Heads, and Parents. In quantitative a close ended questionnaire was developed to collect data from students. Data thus collected was entered and analyzed in the SPSS version 20.0. Descriptive and inferential statistical techniques were used to analyze the data. Interviews from parents, teachers, and head teachers were transcribed after recording with the prior permission. Transcriptions were analyzed through Thematic Description Approach under qualitative methods. The results revealed significant factors of the phenomenon. It was delimited to the public sector secondary schools of Lahore city only, but the findings can be generalized all over the province, because of the many similarities in our educational system (examination, large scale assessment and resources).

Keywords: Absenteesim, secondary school students, Lahore.

Introduction

The study of absenteeism is very important for every institution and every teacher to improve the results and the studies. It is useful to make the students disciplined, punctual and regular. The present study was aimed at finding different factors of absenteeism at secondary level, particularly in Lahore city. The researchers' effort was to sort out varied significant factors involved in the students' absenteeism at secondary level. It has always been a burning issue and especially nowadays as government is very much concerned with it. For the improvements and bringing

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about positive changes in educational field, monitoring teams, secretary's visits, other departmental visits are purely meant to check students' as well as teachers' attendance.

Punishments or explanations are assigned on this cause. The researchers' engaged in this research problem with the assumption that we must make every possible effort to bring the students to school, their presence will make them aware of their lessons and so they will start taking interest in their studies which is the first but very important step to climb up the ladder of progress in education.

Though school absenteeism is a global concern but in Pakistan it gets more significant because of the interest and efforts the government is endeavoring to cater the problem. On 15th of August, 2016 when schools were re-opened, every T.V. channel was making hue and cry about the absenteeism of the students. Almost 80-90% students did not bother to go to their institutions even after enjoying eighty week summer vacation. It may be due to terrorism, child abduction, poverty or any other reason but one thing is clear that majority of the students is away from school for one reason or the other. One of the researchers, being associated with a higher secondary school, visited the school, on the day after summer vacation and was astonished to come to know that only 121 out of 1189 students were present and same is the case all over the secondary schools of Lahore. It is obvious through research that the students with low attendance are low achievers and those with high attendance are high achievers so the matter of absenteeism cannot be ignored. Poor attendance has far reaching effect on the students' performance in particular and on the school, area and the society in general.

In this paper the researchers have defined the term absenteeism as, to be away from school for one reason or the other. Certain number of days are fixed e.g. 75% attendance for a certain session, if a student remains absent for more than this ratio, s/he will fall in this category. This standard can vary from time to time, teacher to teacher or institution to institution. Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education (BISE) Lahore, Pakistan had fixed the attendance of students 75% to appear in the secondary exams. During routine school days Government asked to achieve the target up to the limit of 93% which was later reduced to 83%. Therefore, for the purpose of this research the absenteeism affected students were those having attendance below 93%, and only those were taken as part of this study sample.

Reviewing the literature, it has been observed that families' participation in social activities e.g. attending marriages, deaths, social calls, and recreational trips are the major causes of the matriculation students' absence from schools. In the case of female students, parents cannot leave the girls alone at home when going out of the city. Students help their parents in their household work sometimes; the children of the poor parents have to work for their parents at other peoples' homes to make both ends meet (Balfanz, Byrnes, Robert &Vaugan, 2012).

Too much homework and too many tests/ examinations also prevent the students to come to school. Economical problem is another important factor, some orphan or otherwise poor students have to earn their livings. Medical problems also create hindrance in students' regularity. They fall ill and due to lack of resources cannot

have treatment, so their illness prolongs and they are unable to attend the classes on regular basis.

Prominent level of absenteeism reported as missing 10% or more of the academic year has been a key indicator of students' failure. (Allen worth, Elaine & Easton, John. 2007)

The first and foremost step is to make different effective efforts to eliminate absenteeism by productive as well as interesting activities. Another approach could be creating a less adversarial set of interventions to keep youth connected to the schools. This step would attract the students to the schools in general and to the classes in particular (Gunderson & Jessica, 2010).

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act 2001 also stresses upon 94% attendance rate as a part of adequate yearly progress (AYP). It expects dropout prevention strategies at all school levels to increase students' attendance. (Dynarski & Gieason, 1998; NCLB, 2001; Popham, 2004; Reid, 2004).

Sadly, it is very difficult to achieve perfect attendance. No matter how interesting and well-prepared my lessons and teaching materials are, there are bound to be students who miss out on the day's activities—willingly or unwillingly. (Lorenmurcia, 2015)

It has been given much attention today but still it is uncontrollable. One thing is clear that the matter is not ignorable rather it needs great attention and time to look into.

They are teenagers who are experiencing new challenges physically, socially and mentally. It is very difficult to handle them. There are some other factors which contribute to students' absenteeism such as subject interest, teaching skill, students' attitude and health issues etc.

Some of the factors which have been noted during the research and teaching/learning experience were: (Hoffman, Llagas&Sydex, 2003). (Brooks, 1997). Martinko 2002, (Reid, 2005, Teasley, 2004, (Marburger, 2001),

1. Student Factors
2. Health factors
3. Psychological Factors
4. School Factors
5. Parent Factors
6. Financial Factors
7. Community Factors

All the above-mentioned and many other factors have made this problem even grave. the factors revealed in the body of knowledge may vary from region to region and context to context. Absenteeism leads to poor grades which lead to failure and/or dropouts. The same students usually do not get right employment, hence it creates a vicious circle. Keeping in view the severity of the problem, the study of the paper was aimed at exploring the factors that cause absenteeism among secondary school students in Lahore. The study was carrying an exclusive objective:

To explore the factors which cause absenteeism among secondary school students in Lahore.

Research Questions of the Study

Keeping in view the main objective of the study, following research questions were made in light of the relevant literature. (1) What are the factors that cause absenteeism among secondary school students? (2) Do the factors of absenteeism affect boys and girls students equally? (3) Are subject matter and the medium of instruction the causes of the students' absenteeism? (4) Is there any significant difference in the perspective of parents, students, teachers, and heads in the factors of absenteeism?

Students with low attendance attribute their absenteeism to the poor relationship with teachers, school administration and class fellows. We made a standard about the low attendance, we fixed a cut off line which will make decision making easy about the low attendance and the accurate attendance. Many studies have been done on this topic. The letters have been sent by the government to the public institutions to achieve the target of 93% attendance of students as well as teachers is a significant proof of being this issue of vital importance, which is why, the researcher planned to work on this issue.

Methods and Procedure

This research was conducted through mixed-methods research. The researchers intended to study the problem in-depth covering all aspects of the phenomenon. for that the best design includes both quantitative and qualitative research methods. The population of the study was covering all immediate stakeholders of the problem: the students, the parents, the teachers, and heads of the schools. Data were collected through cross-sectional research design. Since the researchers strived to explore the possible factors of absenteeism, this descriptive research was more into exploratory design.

Sampling Design

All of the Government secondary schools of Lahore were target population for the research. Lahore is divided into five towns. There were 177 girls' high school and 152 boys' high school in Lahore these are divided into five towns. The schools belonging to 1 town of Lahore, was taken as sample for this research. In the selected town, Lahore City, there were only 60 schools.

The sample of the present research had segments in it. One major segment of the sample was students. Using multi-stage stratified random sampling technique the schools were divided into two Strata: boys and girls. in the next stage, 10 schools of each stratum were selected randomly. Hence, 20 schools (10 boys and 10 girls) were selected. the purpose of this research was to explore the factors of absenteeism of secondary school students only, therefore, only 9th and 10th classes were selected. since, the researchers were studying only absenteeism, the students considered for sample were only those who remained absent for 20% days at least. Thus, our sample comprised those students both girls and boys who were absent from the schools for more than 20% of the academic days. This selection was made on purposive basis.

The criterion for selecting the students was determined the researchers in consultation with the research experts. In the randomly selected schools, 100 boys students and 100 girls students were taken. One girl however, did not participate in the research, since participation in this research was totally voluntary. The actual sample size for the research of this paper was 199, 100 boys and 99 girls. 10 students from each school were selected, out of those 10, 5 students from class 9 and 5 students from class 10 were taken purposely, to ensure equal representation of girls and boys of 9th and 10th class.

The second segment of the sample was teachers. Only class teachers of those selected classes were taken as participants. One class teacher of class 9th and 1 of class 10th from each were selected. At various schools, mostly, the class teacher of 9th and 10th classes was same. Eventually the sample size of teachers was 30 for this research.

Parents of these students were also selected as segment of the sample for this research. 10 parents of boys and 10 parents of girls were selected as sample to explore the factors of absenteeism. Along with the parents, the Head masters/ Mistress, senior head Master/ Mistress and Principals of the selected 20 schools were also part of the sample. The total heads including 2 principals, 2 senior head masters/mistresses, and 6 head masters/mistress participated in the research, making their total to be 10.

Instrumentation

For the purpose of triangulation, the basis of mixed-research design, both qualitative and quantitative data collection tools were employed. In quantitative, a self-developed questionnaire was used. Items were developed based on the factors highlighted in the recent literature. close ended items were measured at a likert type scale having 5 options, and those 5 options were given values as: 5 for strongly agree (SA), 4 for Agree (A), 3 for Neutral (N), 2 for Disagree (D), and 1 for strongly disagree (SD). The items were validated with expert opinion of the researchers and two principals of higher secondary schools. Those items were also translated into Urdu, for the understanding of secondary school students. This self-developed questionnaire was administered to sample students only.

Apart from the questionnaire, there were semi-structured interviews, based on the literature and contextual situation, the questions were formulated, validated and then interview protocols were followed to record the interviews. Ethical considerations were maintained during the data collection process. The interviews were recorder and notes were taken during the interviews. Points were made clear to both the parties (interviewer and interviewee) during the interview.

Results

Different descriptive and inferential statistical techniques for employed to analyze the data collected through close ended questionnaires. after that the analysis of interviews can be seen in detail.

Students' Data

Table 1.0

Reliability analysis of the questionnaire for students

Factors	Coefficient of Cronbach's Alpha
Academic Factor	0.82
Transport Factor	0.81
Medium of Instructions Factor	0.71
Health Factor	0.74
Social Factor	0.86
School Environment Factor	0.73
Parents Factor	0.91
Home Environment Factor	0.72

The table indicated the factor wise reliability of the factors of absenteeism. It ensured that items were internally consistent. The overall reliability of the tool was above 0.7. In factors, the highest reliability was reported for parents' factors (0.91) and the lowest was reported for medium of instruction factor (0.71).

Table 2.0

Demographic table of the respondent students

Demographic variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Boys	100	50.3
	Girls	99	49.7
Age	13-15	146	73.4
	16-18	51	25.6
	19 and above	2	1
Class	9	99	49.7
	10	100	50.3

Table 2.0 expressed the demographics of the students, as a segment of sample for this research. Out of 199 students 100 were boys and 99 were girls. In the category of age, majority (173 in number, 73.4%) of students were belonging to the age group of 13-15 years. 16-18 years age category showed 51 students (25.6%) while 19 years and above only had 2 students. Class wise breakup of the segment of sample was representing 99 students from 9th class and 100 students from 10th class.

Table 3.0

SR	Factor	M	SD
1	Academic Factor	3.71	0.89
2	Transport Factor	3.07	0.91
3	Medium of Instructions Factor	3.52	0.92
4	Health Factor	2.71	0.91
5	Social Factor	3.73	0.84
6	School Environment Factor	3.60	0.79
7	Parents Factor	3.63	0.68
8	Home Environment Factor	3.66	0.84

Factor wise Analysis for the questionnaires filled by students

The table 3.0 revealed the mean score and standard deviation of these factors. There were 8 factors explored in detailed based on the opinions of the students. Mean score above 3.0 was taken as cut score, this was inspired by the work of (Abdullah & Akhtar, 2016; Abdullah, Raza, & Akhtar, 2015) who had taken mean score of 3.0 as cut score. Mean scores above 3.0 were considered as significant. Based on that criterion, all factors except Health factors were significant contributors to the problem of absenteeism. The most significant of all these factors was social factor

with (M= 3.73, SD= 0.84). Then academic factor (M= 3.71, SD= 0.89) with home factor (M=3.66, SD= 0.84), parents Factor (M= 3.63, SD= 0.68), and School Environment Factor (M= 3.60, SD= 0.79) to follow. It expressed that according to the students who were themselves under the phenomenon of absenteeism rated 7 factors as significant contributors to the problem.

In inferential statistics independent sample t-tests were applied on the factors of absenteeism on the basis of demographic variables. Gender and class were having two categories each, so independent sample t-tests were applied taking these demographics as independent variables. Gender and class were analyzed with all 8 factors. however, only social factors with gender displayed significant results.

Table 4.0

t-test on social factors of absenteeism on the basis of gender

Gender	N	M	SD	t value	df	p
Boys	100	11.69	2.3	2.73	197	.007
Girls	99	10.70	2.6			

Table 4.0 reflected the social factors role in absenteeism. Girls were being affected by this social factor. The mean of boys was significantly more (boys, M= 11.69, SD= 2.3) as compared to the mean score of girls (M=10.70, SD= 2.6). It illustrated that boys were facing absenteeism because of the social factors.

One-Way ANOVA was used to analyze the factors with the demographic variable of age. It showed only significant differences with transport factor.

Table 5.0

One-way ANOVA on transport factor on absenteeism in terms of age category

Category		Sum of squares	df	F	p
Transport factor	Between groups	24.285	2	3.787	.024
	Within groups	628.489	196		
	Total	652.774	198		

The table 5.0 illustrated the significant difference of transport factor with age category. post hoc analysis of Tukey as applied to further explore the differences.

Table 6.0

Post hoc analysis (Tukey)

Category	Category	Mean Difference	Std. Error	<i>p</i>
13-15	16-18	.788	.291	.020

Upon further investigating the significant differences in age category, the range 13-15 years showed significant more mean score at $p < 0.05$ in comparison to the range of 16-18 years. the mean difference between the two categories was reported to be 0.788.

Parallel to the quantitative analysis, the qualitative analysis was also carried out. Interviews were transcribed questions wise. The answers, transcribed, were translated into English language. The translations were validated by 2 English language teachers. The data were analyzed using Thematic Description Approach technique for qualitative data (Abdullah & Saeed, 2016).

Teachers

Teachers were interviewed based on some common factors of absenteeism as revealed in literature. The teachers were coded as t. 1 for teacher 1, t. 2 for teacher 2, and so on (Abdullah & Saeed, 2016). When those teachers were asked about their opinion on health factor as a contributor to absenteeism, majority of them did not support this factor. Only 7 of them agreed that health can be a factor in absenteeism. One of the science teacher who was also acting as a class teacher of 10th class stated the reply in the following words, “I don’t think that health in general is a contributor in absenteeism, it can also contribute in case of sudden health challenges, like accidents, or deaths, (t. 3)”. Majority of teachers (17) reckoned the parents factor to be significant contributor in absenteeism. A senior female teacher expressed her concern as, “parents must look into the routines of their children, it is the parents who have the prime responsibility to send the children to the schools” (t. 22).

The highest rated factor by teachers (21 in number) was school environment factor. According to the teachers, the school environment including the students’ friendship, and teacher-student relationship also contributes in the absenteeism phenomenon. Three teachers blamed media for it, a teacher lamented the role of media by saying, “the school environment in comparison to the private school could be rated poor, but the media must motivate and engage he community to participate in public schools too, only then can the environment of public schools be better” (t. 27).

Parents

The data generated from the semi-structured interviews of parents were also analyzed using thematic description approach. Qualitative data analysis can be done through various ways, the one that is more systematic is to identify themes from the data. the interview transcriptions were reviewed minutely to identify the themes for each answer of each participant, individually.

It was interesting to note that only 2 parents of the purposely selected sample were illiterate. Only 2 mothers were middle pass, 7 were matric, 3 were Intermediate, 4 were Graduates, and 2 out them were Master degree holders. This was because; the researchers selected the Lahore City town to draw the sample. The situation may not be like that in rural areas or even at other cities. the whole answers were thoroughly and repeatedly reviewed and analyzed, only the significant outcome of the analyses is shared in this paper. like teachers, the parents are also coded as p. 1, for parent 1, p. 2, for parent 2, and so on. Wherever the expression of the parents is given it is followed by the code that was given to that participant.

From the interviews of the parents a new factor that emerged as significant contributor was ‘Psychological Factor’. 11 parents emphasized the role of psychological disturbance their children face because of the incidents they face or hear in the schools or in the peers. one parents narrated an incident, “news on the media related to the terrorist attacks have terrified the mind of their child, and that is she gets hesitant in getting up for school every time.” (p. 11).

Another parent expressed her concern in the following words, “the recent incidents of kidnappings and ransoms have left a lasting psychological effect on their kids and it is likely that others may feel the same, to some extent.” (p. 9). A few parents (4) rated the poor governmental steps in providing security and safety to children in schools as a factor of absenteeism. interesting to note was the admitting of 5 parents who told that yes, their lack of interest and time for family could be a factor in absenteeism. A father explained that, “I have to leave early for work and when I come back often my children are at sleep, it gets almost a week to meet and talk to my children.” (p. 14). As far as the financial factors were concerned the parents who participated in this research were not of the view that financial conditions played any role in absenteeism. Mainly because of the fact the public schools already have minimal expenses, so finance is only required on transportation and allied activities such as stationary, helping books etc.

Heads (Head masters/ Mistresses, Senior Headmasters/ Mistresses, Principals)

Data from 10 heads of the schools were data generated on the semi-structured interview questions. They were engaged in data generation process, because they have to face the government directions and they are the implementers of the plan as well. their direct interaction with parents and community makes them more knowledgeable of the consequences and adversaries of the phenomenon.

It was difficult for the researchers to generate data from the heads as they remained busy in tight routines and strict schedules. The researchers had to visit them frequently. Similarly, the data from the heads will be coded as H1, for head 1, H2, for head2, and so on. On identifying the themes it was observed that the heads viewed the phenomenon with a different lens. Though all of them viewed it as significant and reckoned other different evils as a consequence of absenteeism. Majority of them did not see absenteeism in relation to the academic success of the students. A senior headmaster explained, "There is a rare chance of a student who remains absent to get prominent position in the class, but it happened. There was a girl student whose mother was a cancer patient then she went through another leading problem. The girl was the only daughter of her parents; so had to lend the hand in household work; even then she stood first in her class. Perhaps, the reason behind her success was educated parents, her mother was a teacher and father also did some reasonable job. So, we can say that a compensatory element can cover the loss a truant faces." (H, 8). While narrating this expression of the head, the researchers do not intend to negate the consequence of absenteeism on academic success. another head shared her views in the following words, "I have to admit that there is immense pressure of the government on us to ensure 100% attendance, along with that the constant demands of quality education is making life tough for teachers at schools. I would not chalk out the chances of the behavior of teachers as a factor of absenteeism." (H, 5).

Based on the data analyses done by using quantitative and qualitative techniques, the results were expressed into findings and considerable discussions were made on the findings.

Findings and Discussion

Both the findings, from quantitative and qualitative data were combined. The purpose of the taking both types of data was to compliment the findings of one methods with the findings of other.

Research question 1

What are the factors that cause absenteeism among secondary school students? Findings bring into light many factor which can be combined as

personal, institutional, parental, psychological, financial and health factors. The different segments of the sample for this research: students, parents, teachers and heads of the schools highlighted some pertinent factors contributing in the absenteeism factor. Though, the weightage and significance of different factors was different to each segment of the sample. For example, students rated social factors as most significant contributor followed by parents' factor and school environment factors to trail. Although the finding of social factor as a cause of absenteeism is consistent with (Shahzada, Ghazi, Nawaz, & Khan, 2011) who also rated social factors high in their study, but the researchers suggest other studies to verify similar results in other settings as well.

Parents on the other hand shed light on the psychological factors. According to them it was on top of the list as a contributor.

Research question 2

Do the factors of absenteeism affect boys and girls students equally? Findings show that there was a significant difference between boys and girls about the factors of absenteeism. The only factor that was found to be significantly affecting the absenteeism was social factor. The social factors were making boys to be more affected with absenteeism as compared to the girls. This could be because the boys are supposed to be attending the functions or rituals. Social factors included items relating to marriages, deaths, and other social gatherings. These findings relate with city schools only. However, it is assumed by the researcher that in village schools the situation may be different (see, e.g., Lloyd, Mete, & Zeba, 2002).

No any other factor was found to be significantly contributing or affecting the absenteeism of boys and girls. The researchers suggested a comparative study of city and rural area schools at this point to ascertain the claim that social factors are a contributing factor toward absenteeism.

Research question 3

Are subject matter and the medium of instruction the causes of the students' absenteeism?

Although medium of Instruction factor was not significant factor in the absenteeism. However students still preferred to be studying the regional languages. Since most of the students practice this (regional) language at their homes. Kingdon (1996) while studying the quality and efficiency of public and private schools rated the importance of medium of instruction to be high in order to achieve quality excellence in schools. Therefore, the researchers felt to separately study the role of medium of instruction and the subject matter difficulties in playing a role in absenteeism, in a separate study.

Research question 4

Is there any significant difference in the perspectives of parents, students, teachers, and heads in the factors causing absenteeism? to answer to that question, different data collection methods were used and various quantitative and qualitative data analysis techniques were used. for instance, students' data were analyzed using SPSS version 20.0 and for other data (parents, teachers, and heads) qualitative data analysis techniques were used. Students reckoned social factors to be most significant, while teachers rated school environment factors as most contributing factor.

According to teachers, media had a key role to play in absenteeism, therefore, they rated media factor as significant, too. In comparison to this, parents were of the view that psychological factors are the main contributors of the phenomenon. Whereas, in the perceptions of heads, the governmental pressures, deadlines, and tight schedule of teachers may keep them so stern that their behavior with students may cause in absenteeism of students. In fact, the data were so diversified hence the researchers have made the analysis of parents, teachers, heads, and students, as separate entities. as long as absenteeism is prevalent in schools, the truancy and other academic achievement failures will continue to haunt our educational system. According to views of Behrman, Khan, Ross, & Sabot, (1997) the absenteeism has to be controlled in order to achieve quality and good performance in schools.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The researchers studied the phenomenon of absenteeism in detail for the purpose of this research. The target population was specifically only those students who were the victims of absenteeism. Only making them a part of the study was done purposely, along with them, their parents also participated in the research. the researchers intended to view the problem at hand with the microscopic lens, that is why they engaged every immediate stakeholder in the research. Teachers and heads of the schools were also a part of the sample. The researchers developed a tool for absenteeism especially for this research. the tool was validated and was found reliable. The first contribution of this research was the development of the tool. later, in the process, the data were so sophisticated and researchers analyzed the data separately for each segment of the sample. Different factors were explored by each segment from their perspectives. most rated factors were: Social factors, school environment factors, psychological factors, media factor and teachers' behaviour factor. These factors may not be entirely new for the body of knowledge and the researchers did not claim that they have added to what was already known to them. But still, the researchers believe that the findings of this study were validated

because of its design and inclusion of every immediate stakeholder. Not finding the solutions to the problem of absenteeism was a limitation of this research and researchers suggested to conduct an exclusive research on finding solutions of the problem.

Following recommendations were given in light of the findings and discussion of this research:

- 1) Teachers must be taught/trained to deal the students according to their psyche, in order to meet individual differences.
- 2) The behavior of teachers shall be given due consideration in the training session.
- 3) Additional costs of schools, like stationery, geometry etc. shall be borne by the government in order to reduce financial factors from absenteeism and drop outs.
- 4) For transportation the school authorities shall also look into the matter and give recommendations to District Education Officers (DEOs) to implement.
- 5) Parents and teacher must have good relationship with one another in the benefit of the child and his future.
- 6) Extra pain and attention should be given to these students to mend their ways and make them regular in their classes.
- 7) Activities like debates, funfair and educational/recreational tours should be arranged to attract the students to school.
- 8) role of media has to be controlled and positive image of school education shall be maintained in order to ascertain that absenteeism gets under control.
- 9) Safety measures should be taken to make the students feel safe at school. In this way, their parents will also not be reluctant to send their children to school.

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Factors Causing Absenteeism Among The Students Of Secondary Level Schools

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