

The Illusion of Learning: Attendance vs Achievement in Government Schools

Meghna Verma*

Lecturer in Economics, Directorate of Education, NCT of Delhi, India.

*Corresponding Author: megverms@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines a critical contradiction in public education systems: the assumption that regular school attendance automatically leads to meaningful academic achievement. In many government schools, improved enrolment and attendance figures are often celebrated as indicators of educational progress; however, these visible measures may conceal deeper concerns related to poor learning outcomes, weak foundational skills, and limited classroom engagement. This paper argues that physical presence in school does not necessarily translate into cognitive participation, conceptual understanding, or measurable scholastic improvement. By adopting a conceptual and analytical approach, the study explores the distinction between schooling and learning, and highlights how factors such as inadequate pedagogy, teacher absenteeism, overcrowded classrooms, socio-economic disadvantage, language barriers, and assessment limitations weaken the relationship between attendance and achievement. The paper further emphasizes that attendance should be treated as only one input in the educational process, while achievement reflects the true output of effective learning. Through a critical review of the attendance–achievement gap in government schools, the study reveals how an excessive policy focus on numerical indicators may create an illusion of educational success. The paper concludes by recommending a shift from attendance-based monitoring to competency-based evaluation, stronger foundational learning interventions, improved teacher effectiveness, and student-centered classroom practices. The study contributes to contemporary discourse on educational quality by arguing that the real success of schooling lies not in how many children are present in classrooms, but in how many actually learn.

Keywords: Government schools, school attendance, academic achievement, learning outcomes, educational quality, foundational learning, public education.

Introduction

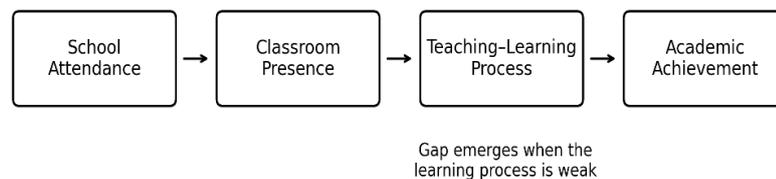
Education is widely regarded as one of the most powerful instruments of social transformation, economic mobility, and human development. In developing societies especially, schooling is often seen not merely as a means of literacy, but as a pathway to equality, empowerment, and national progress. Within this framework, government schools occupy a highly significant place, as they serve a large proportion of children from economically weaker, socially marginalized, and educationally vulnerable backgrounds. Over the years, major educational reforms and public policies have focused strongly on expanding access to schooling through enrolment drives, retention initiatives, midday meal schemes, free textbooks, uniforms, scholarships, and attendance monitoring mechanisms. These efforts have undoubtedly increased the physical presence of children in schools. However, an important question remains insufficiently addressed: does attendance in school necessarily lead to actual learning?

The assumption that regular attendance results in academic achievement has shaped much of the administrative and policy discourse surrounding school education. Attendance is easy to record, monitor, and report. It offers a visible and measurable sign of participation in the education system. Higher attendance rates are often interpreted as indicators of improved educational access, successful

policy implementation, and institutional effectiveness. Yet, this assumption can be deeply misleading when attendance is treated as a substitute for learning itself. A child may be physically present in the classroom and still remain academically disengaged, conceptually confused, or functionally unable to perform at grade level. In such cases, the school system produces the appearance of educational progress without ensuring meaningful academic growth. It is this contradiction that gives rise to what may be called the illusion of learning.

The distinction between schooling and learning is central to understanding this issue. Schooling refers to formal participation in the institutional structure of education, being enrolled, attending classes, and progressing through grades. Learning, by contrast, refers to the acquisition of knowledge, skills, critical thinking, comprehension, numeracy, literacy, and the ability to apply concepts meaningfully. While schooling creates the opportunity for learning, it does not guarantee it. In many government schools, children continue to attend regularly, yet struggle with foundational reading, writing, and arithmetic skills. The problem, therefore, is not merely of absenteeism, but of a deeper educational disconnect in which presence does not always translate into performance.

Figure 1. From Attendance to Achievement: Where the Gap Emerges



This conceptual figure shows that attendance is only the starting point; meaningful achievement depends on the quality of classroom engagement and instruction.

Figure 1: The Gap in attendance

Source: Curated by the author

This issue is particularly significant in the context of government schools because they often operate under multiple structural, pedagogical, and social constraints. Overcrowded classrooms, inadequate infrastructure, insufficient teaching-learning materials, multi-grade settings, teacher shortages, weak accountability mechanisms, and uneven instructional quality can all reduce the effectiveness of classroom learning. At the same time, many students enrolled in government schools come from first-generation learner households, low-income families, and disadvantaged social groups where home-based academic support may be limited. Language barriers, irregular parental engagement, nutritional deficits, and socio-economic stress further shape the learning environment. As a result, even when attendance improves, educational achievement may remain unsatisfactory.

The concern becomes more serious when attendance is overemphasized as a policy success indicator. When educational administration focuses mainly on enrolment, retention, and daily presence, it risks celebrating participation without evaluating comprehension. Such an approach may generate impressive numerical records while masking poor learning outcomes.

The present paper seeks to critically examine this gap between attendance and achievement in government schools. It argues that while attendance is undoubtedly necessary, it is not sufficient to ensure educational success. The real measure of schooling must extend beyond physical presence to include cognitive engagement, conceptual clarity, skill acquisition, and measurable academic growth. By exploring the tension between visible participation and actual learning, the paper highlights the need to rethink how educational success is defined and assessed in public schooling systems.

The study is based on the premise that educational quality cannot be judged merely by how many children enter and remain in classrooms; it must also be evaluated by what and how well they learn. In this regard, the paper analyzes the factors that weaken the relationship between attendance and achievement, including classroom processes, teaching quality, socio-economic realities, and systemic pressures within government schools. It also emphasizes the need for a policy shift from attendance-based monitoring to learning-centered evaluation.

Thus, the paper addresses a fundamental concern in contemporary education: the danger of mistaking access for attainment and presence for progress. Unless attendance is supported by effective pedagogy, foundational learning, and meaningful academic engagement, it may create only the illusion of educational success rather than its reality. The true purpose of schooling is not simply to bring children into classrooms, but to ensure that their time results in genuine intellectual and developmental growth.

Review of Literature

The relationship between school attendance and academic achievement has been widely discussed in educational research, and much of the literature agrees on one basic point: attendance is an important precondition for learning. Students who miss school lose instructional time, fall behind in classroom participation, and often show weaker academic outcomes. A recent study by **Markus Klein and Edward M. Sosu** found that school absences were consistently associated with poorer performance in high-stakes examinations. Using data from the Scottish Longitudinal Study, they showed that overall absences, truancy, and sickness-related absences were all linked to reduced achievement, reinforcing the long-established view that absenteeism harms academic performance.

At the same time, **Klein and Sosu's** work is important because it also highlights a more nuanced reality: the negative effect of absence may vary by context and type of absence, and the attendance–achievement relationship is shaped by broader socio-economic conditions rather than attendance alone. Their review references a wider body of scholarship including studies by Aucejo and Romano, Gershenson et al., Ready, Smerillo et al., and Hancock et al., all of which collectively show that the link between attendance and achievement is well established, but not mechanically simple. In other words, attendance matters, but it is not the only determinant of learning outcomes.

A broader global perspective on this issue comes from the World Bank's learning poverty framework, which shifts attention from school participation to actual learning. This literature argues that children may be enrolled in school and regularly attending, yet still remain unable to read and understand a basic text by the expected age. The World Bank's formulation is especially relevant because it directly challenges the tendency to treat schooling indicators such as enrolment and attendance as adequate proof of educational success. It reframes the debate by insisting that the true test of education is whether schooling results in foundational literacy and numeracy.

In the Indian context, the most influential body of evidence on this question comes from the ASER (Annual Status of Education Report), associated with scholars and practitioners such as **Rukmini Banerji and Wilima Wadhwa**. ASER has been especially valuable because it does not stop at measuring access to schooling; it also assesses basic reading and arithmetic abilities of children in rural India. ASER 2024 continued this approach, covering more than 650,000 children across over 600 districts and evaluating both schooling status and foundational learning. This makes ASER highly relevant for any discussion of whether attendance translates into achievement. ([ASER: Annual Status of Education Report](#))

Writing on ASER 2024, Wilima Wadhwa notes that India has made notable progress in enrolment and that out-of-school numbers remain low, but she places equal emphasis on foundational learning trends. Her analysis shows that while access has broadly stabilized, the more meaningful story lies in the recovery and improvement of reading and arithmetic outcomes after the pandemic, especially in government schools.

The Indian literature also pays close attention to teacher-related factors, especially teacher absenteeism, which has long been viewed as one reason why student attendance may fail to produce achievement. A landmark contribution here is the study by **Michael Kremer, et al** titled *Teacher Absence in India: A Snapshot*. Based on unannounced visits to a nationally representative sample of government primary schools, they found that 25% of teachers were absent, and only about half were actually teaching during school visits. They also showed that teacher absence was lower where inspection was more frequent and where school infrastructure was better. This study is important because it demonstrates that student presence in school does not automatically ensure learning if instructional delivery itself is weak or inconsistent.

This line of research was extended by **Karthik Muralidharan, Jishnu Das, Alaka Holla, and Aakash Mohpal**, who examined the fiscal and governance implications of teacher absence in Indian public schools. Using a nationally representative panel dataset, they found that 23.6% of teachers were absent during unannounced visits, and they argued that the cost of unauthorized teacher absence was substantial. More importantly, their analysis showed that large investments in educational inputs had improved input-based indicators, but had only modestly reduced inefficiency as measured by teacher

absence. Their work is directly relevant to the present paper because it distinguishes between visible educational inputs and effective educational functioning, suggesting that numerical expansion in the system does not automatically yield better classroom outcomes.

Earlier Indian educational reporting also hinted at this deeper quality problem. The **PROBE Report (Public Report on Basic Education)** is frequently cited in later scholarship on public schooling and teacher accountability. It helped establish that access to schooling must be evaluated alongside classroom functioning, teacher engagement, and the lived reality of children in government schools. Subsequent studies repeatedly cite PROBE as an early and influential intervention in the debate on educational quality and accountability in India.

Thus, the literature overall presents a balanced but clear picture. Scholars such as **Klein and Sosu** confirm that absenteeism is generally detrimental to achievement. Institutional evidence from **ASER**, interpreted by **Wilima Wadhwa** and associated with **Rukmini Banerji's** long-standing work on foundational learning, shows that learning outcomes must be measured directly and cannot be inferred from attendance alone. Studies by **Kremer, Muralidharan, Chaudhury, Hammer, and Rogers**, and later by **Muralidharan, Das, Holla, and Mohpal**, reveal that weak instructional processes and governance failures can break the link between school participation and learning. Together, these studies make one thing clear: attendance is necessary, but it is not sufficient to ensure achievement.

Research Gap

Although the literature strongly supports the idea that absenteeism harms academic performance, much of it still approaches attendance as a broad predictor of achievement rather than interrogating a more subtle contradiction: children may be regularly attending school and still not learning meaningfully. Existing studies focus heavily on absenteeism, teacher absence, enrolment expansion, or learning levels as separate issues. There is comparatively less direct conceptual attention to the specific illusion created when attendance is treated as evidence of educational success, even in contexts where achievement remains weak. This gap is particularly important in the case of government schools, where policy systems often emphasize attendance, enrolment, and retention as visible indicators of progress. The present paper addresses this gap by critically examining how attendance can function as a misleading metric when detached from actual learning outcomes, and by arguing for a shift from presence-based evaluation to achievement-based educational assessment.

Objectives of the Study

The present paper is guided by the following objectives:

- To examine the relationship between school attendance and academic achievement in government schools.
- To analyze whether regular attendance can be treated as a reliable indicator of meaningful learning.
- To identify the major structural, pedagogical, and socio-economic factors that weaken the link between attendance and achievement in government schools.
- To critically explore the idea that attendance-based educational indicators may create an illusion of learning when actual achievement remains low.
- To suggest measures for shifting educational evaluation from attendance-centered monitoring to learning-centered assessment.

Research Questions

In line with the above objectives, the paper seeks to answer the following research questions:

- What is the relationship between student attendance and academic achievement in government schools?
- Does regular attendance necessarily lead to meaningful learning outcomes?
- What factors prevent school attendance from translating into academic achievement in government schools?
- How does an excessive focus on attendance create an illusion of educational progress?
- What changes are needed in policy and school-level practice to prioritize actual learning over mere physical presence?

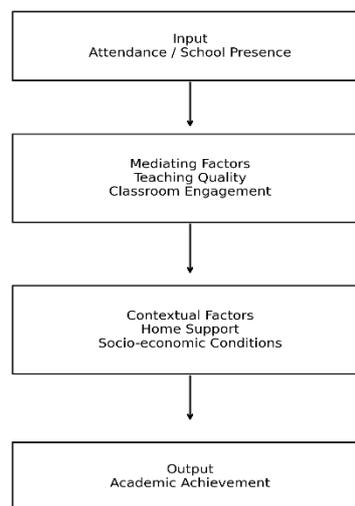
Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

The present paper is based on the central argument that attendance is only a preliminary condition for learning, not a guarantee of academic achievement. To understand the difference between

visible school participation and actual educational outcomes, the study adopts a conceptual framework that views attendance as an *input*, learning processes as *mediating variables*, and achievement as the *output*. This framework helps explain why government schools may report satisfactory attendance while students continue to perform poorly in terms of reading ability, comprehension, writing skills, and basic numeracy.

A common assumption in educational administration is that if children are attending school regularly, learning must be taking place. However, this assumption overlooks the fact that between attendance and achievement lies a complex teaching–learning process. Students may be physically present in class, yet remain disengaged, unable to follow lessons, or unsupported in their learning. In such cases, the school system records attendance, but actual cognitive development remains weak. Therefore, attendance should not be seen as a direct measure of educational success; rather, it should be viewed as only the starting point in a larger chain.

Figure 2. Conceptual Framework: Attendance as Input, Achievement as Output



Attendance begins the process; achievement depends on learning conditions.

Figure 2. Conceptual Framework: Attendance as Input, Achievement as Output

Source: Curated by the author

Input–Process–Output Framework

The paper primarily uses the Input–Process–Output (IPO) model as its analytical base.

Under this model:

- **Input** refers to the conditions that enable schooling to begin, such as enrolment, attendance, infrastructure, teachers, and access to classrooms.
- **Process** refers to what happens inside the educational environment as teaching quality, classroom interaction, pedagogy, feedback, student engagement, and assessment practices.
- **Output** refers to the actual result of schooling, such as academic achievement, conceptual understanding, skill acquisition, and measurable learning outcomes.

In the context of this paper, attendance is treated as an input, not as an output. This distinction is critical. A child attending school regularly may benefit only if the learning process is effective. If the process is weak, even strong attendance figures may fail to produce meaningful achievement. Thus, the illusion of learning emerges when systems confuse an input indicator with an outcome indicator.

Attendance as a Necessary but Insufficient Condition

The framework further rests on the idea that **attendance is necessary, but not sufficient**. Students cannot learn if they are never present in school. In that sense, attendance remains important. However, mere presence does not ensure understanding, retention, or academic success. The transformation of attendance into achievement depends on several mediating conditions:

- the quality of teaching,
- the pace and clarity of instruction,
- classroom discipline and engagement,
- the student's foundational readiness,
- and the overall school environment.

If these conditions are weak, attendance becomes only a statistic rather than a meaningful educational reality.

Mediating Factors between Attendance and Achievement

The study identifies two broad sets of mediating factors that shape the attendance–achievement relationship:

- **School and Classroom Factors**

These include:

- teacher effectiveness,
- teacher regularity,
- pedagogical methods,
- overcrowded or multigrade classrooms,
- availability of learning materials,
- remedial support,
- classroom engagement.

These factors determine whether a child who is present in class is actually able to participate in the learning process.

- **Contextual and Socio-economic Factors**

These include:

- parental education,
- household income,
- nutritional condition,
- language barriers,
- home learning environment,
- first-generation learner status,
- emotional and social stress.

These conditions affect how well students are able to absorb, revise, and apply what is taught in school. Therefore, two students with similar attendance may show very different achievement levels because their contexts differ.

The Illusion of Learning

The title of the paper is conceptually rooted in the idea that educational systems may create an illusion of learning by relying too heavily on visible indicators such as enrolment, attendance, and grade progression. These indicators show participation, but they do not necessarily show comprehension. A child may move from one grade to the next, attend most school days, and still remain unable to read a simple text fluently or solve basic arithmetic problems. In this situation, the system appears functional in administrative records, but fails in educational substance.

This illusion becomes especially relevant in government schools, where policy monitoring often emphasizes quantifiable indicators. Attendance registers are easy to maintain and inspect; learning is

harder to assess because it requires direct measurement of competency. As a result, the system may celebrate attendance gains while overlooking stagnant or weak achievement.

Capability-Oriented Interpretation

The framework may also be understood through a broader capability-oriented lens, inspired by the idea that access alone is not enough unless it leads to real development of human ability. In education, this means that simply placing children in schools does not fulfill the purpose of schooling unless they gain actual knowledge, skills, and confidence. Thus, education must be judged not by formal inclusion alone, but by the extent to which it expands children's real learning capabilities.

This perspective strengthens the argument of the paper: attendance represents access, while achievement reflects capability. If access does not translate into capability, then the educational process remains incomplete.

Methodology

The present study adopts a conceptual and analytical research design to examine the gap between school attendance and academic achievement in government schools. Since the paper aims to critically interpret an educational phenomenon rather than test a single statistical hypothesis through primary field data, the methodology is based on the review, synthesis, and interpretation of existing literature, educational reports, and policy-oriented evidence. This approach is appropriate because the issue under study is not only empirical but also conceptual: the paper seeks to understand how attendance can become a misleading indicator of educational success when detached from actual learning outcomes.

Research Design

This paper follows a descriptive and analytical design.

- It is **descriptive** because it explains the existing condition of government school education, especially the visible emphasis on attendance, enrolment, and retention.
- It is analytical because it critically examines whether these indicators genuinely reflect achievement, and explores the factors that weaken the connection between attendance and learning.

Thus, the methodology is not experimental; rather, it is interpretive and policy-oriented, aimed at understanding the contradiction between classroom presence and academic performance.

Nature of the Study

The study is qualitative in orientation, though it draws upon quantitative evidence available in published reports and prior studies. Numerical findings from reports such as ASER and related educational studies are used only as supportive evidence to strengthen conceptual analysis. The main emphasis remains on critical interpretation, not on independent statistical testing.

The paper therefore belongs to the category of a conceptual research paper supported by secondary evidence.

Sources of Data

The study relies primarily on **secondary data** collected from:

- published research articles on attendance and achievement,
- national and international education reports,
- government and institutional education surveys,
- policy documents on learning outcomes,
- and scholarly discussions on public schooling and foundational learning.

Particular attention is given to literature dealing with:

- student attendance and absenteeism,
- learning outcomes in government schools,
- teacher absenteeism and classroom processes,
- foundational literacy and numeracy,
- and educational quality in the public school system.

These sources are used to compare what educational systems often measure (attendance) with what they ought to measure more seriously (achievement).

Method of Analysis

The paper uses a thematic method of analysis. The collected literature and evidence are studied and organized into major themes, such as:

- attendance as an indicator of access,
- achievement as an indicator of learning,
- factors disrupting the attendance–achievement relationship,
- teacher and classroom effectiveness,
- socio-economic barriers to learning,
- and policy dependence on visible educational indicators.

After organizing the literature into these themes, the paper draws a comparative interpretation to show that attendance and achievement are related, but not identical. In this way, the methodology supports the central argument that rising attendance may still coexist with weak learning outcomes.

Analytical Framework Used

The analysis is guided by the Input–Process–Output (IPO) framework, which provides a structured lens for interpreting educational outcomes.

- Input: attendance, enrolment, teachers, infrastructure
- Process: pedagogy, classroom interaction, teaching quality, engagement
- Output: achievement, competency, learning outcomes

This framework is especially useful because it helps separate administrative participation indicators from actual educational results. It allows the study to argue that attendance is only an input, while achievement is the true output of effective schooling.

Scope of the Study

The scope of the paper is limited to the context of government schools, particularly in relation to the quality concerns often observed in public education systems. The paper does not attempt a state-wise or school-wise empirical comparison; instead, it develops a broader conceptual understanding of how the attendance–achievement gap operates in government schooling.

The focus remains on:

- the educational meaning of attendance,
- the quality of learning produced through schooling,
- and the risk of overvaluing numerical participation indicators.

Limitations of the Study

As the paper is based on secondary sources and conceptual analysis, it has certain limitations:

- It does not include primary field data collected directly from students, teachers, or schools.
- It does not statistically measure causation between attendance and achievement.
- The analysis depends on available published literature and reports, which may vary in scope and context.

However, these limitations do not weaken the purpose of the study, because the aim is to develop a critical academic argument rather than conduct a narrow statistical survey. In fact, the conceptual approach is useful in highlighting a broader systemic issue that may not always be visible through isolated datasets.

Relevance of the Methodology to the Present Study

The chosen methodology is suitable because the paper is fundamentally concerned with a misleading educational assumption that regular attendance automatically signifies successful learning. Such an issue requires more than data collection; it requires conceptual clarity, comparison of indicators, and critical interpretation of how educational success is defined.

By using secondary evidence, thematic analysis, and the Input–Process–Output framework, the methodology enables the paper to move beyond surface-level educational statistics and examine the deeper reality of learning in government schools. It thus supports the main argument of the study: the true success of schooling lies not merely in children being present, but in children actually learning.

Discussion and Analysis of the Attendance–Achievement Gap

The central argument of this paper is that **attendance and achievement, although related**, are not equivalent. In many government schools, the educational system often records attendance as a sign of success, but the actual level of learning may remain significantly lower. This creates a gap between what is *visible* in administrative records and what is *real* in academic performance. The discussion in this section examines how and why this gap emerges, and why attendance, when treated in isolation, can create the illusion of learning.

Attendance as a Visible but Incomplete Indicator

Attendance is one of the most commonly used indicators in school administration because it is easy to monitor, quantify, and report. Governments and school authorities often highlight attendance rates to demonstrate improved access to education, better retention, and stronger student participation. In policy terms, rising attendance is often seen as evidence that school systems are functioning more effectively.

However, attendance mainly reflects physical presence, not cognitive engagement. A child may be marked present and still fail to understand classroom instruction, remain passive during lessons, or be unable to perform basic academic tasks. Thus, while attendance is useful as an indicator of access, it is an incomplete indicator of educational quality. When it is treated as a direct sign of learning, it can produce a misleading picture of progress.

The Core Gap: Presence Does Not Ensure Learning

The attendance–achievement gap emerges because there is an important difference between *being in* school and benefiting from schooling. A student may attend classes regularly but still not show significant academic improvement if learning processes are weak. In this sense, attendance creates the opportunity to learn, but it does not guarantee that learning will actually take place.

This gap is especially visible in situations where students move through grades without mastering foundational literacy or numeracy. In such cases, the school appears successful from the outside, children are enrolled, classrooms are occupied, attendance registers are maintained but the core objective of education, namely meaningful learning, remains only partially fulfilled. This is the essence of the “illusion of learning” identified in the paper.

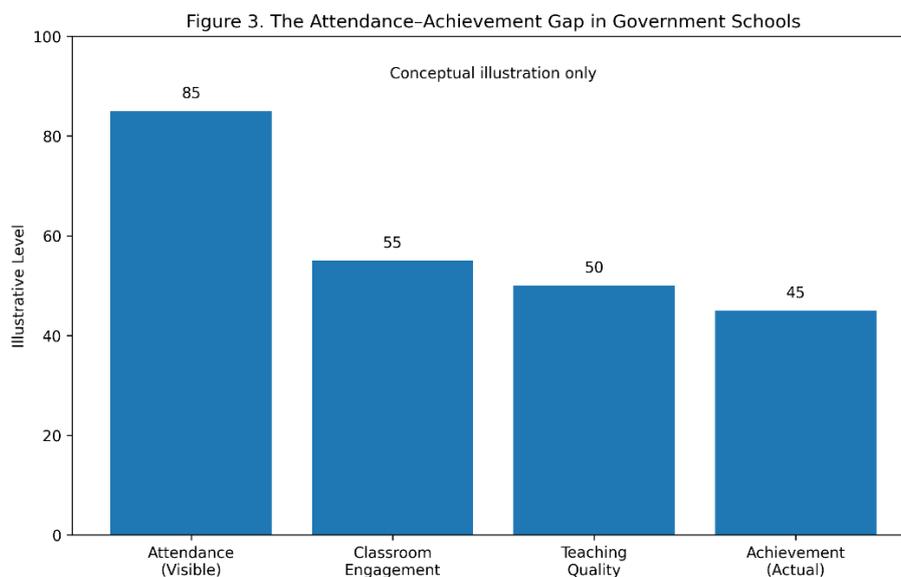


Figure 3: Attendance-Achievement Gap in Government Schools

Source: Curated by the author

Weak Classroom Processes as a Key Cause

One of the strongest reasons attendance may fail to convert into achievement is the weakness of the teaching–learning process. Even when students are present, several classroom-level issues can prevent real academic progress:

- teaching may rely excessively on rote memorization,
- lessons may not match the learning level of students,
- teachers may be overburdened or unable to provide individual attention,
- classrooms may be overcrowded or multigrade,
- and assessment may focus more on completion than understanding.

In such circumstances, classroom time is not always transformed into meaningful learning. The child is present, but the educational transaction remains shallow. Therefore, the real determinant of achievement is not attendance alone but the quality of instruction and engagement that occurs during attendance.

The Role of Foundational Learning Deficits

A major reason for the attendance–achievement gap is the lack of strong foundational learning. If a child has not developed basic reading, writing, and arithmetic skills in the early years, later classroom participation becomes less effective. The student may sit through lessons regularly but struggle to follow instructions, understand textbooks, or solve simple tasks. In such cases, attendance no longer leads automatically to achievement because the learner lacks the basic tools required to benefit from classroom teaching.

This problem is especially serious in government schools serving children from disadvantaged backgrounds. When foundational gaps remain unaddressed, attendance becomes an indicator of persistence, but not necessarily of progress. The child continues to attend, yet learning outcomes remain weak across subjects.

Socio-economic Conditions and Unequal Returns to Attendance

Attendance does not produce the same academic benefit for all students because children come to school with different social and economic realities. Some students may receive parental guidance, quiet study space, and educational encouragement at home, while others may face poverty, low parental literacy, domestic responsibilities, nutritional challenges, or language barriers. As a result, two students with similar attendance records may display very different academic outcomes.

This means that the effect of attendance is shaped by the larger environment in which learning takes place. In government schools, where many learners are first-generation students or come from economically weaker households, regular attendance alone may not be enough to overcome wider barriers to achievement. The educational system must therefore address both in-school and out-of-school factors if attendance is to lead to meaningful learning.

Administrative Success vs Academic Success

Another important issue is the difference between administrative success and academic success. Administrative success is often measured through indicators such as enrolment, attendance, retention, and compliance with school procedures. Academic success, however, must be measured through learning levels, conceptual clarity, skill development, and actual performance.

The problem arises when administrative indicators begin to substitute for academic indicators. Since attendance is more visible and easier to report, it may receive more institutional attention than learning outcomes. This can encourage a culture in which schools are judged by how well they maintain records rather than how effectively they educate children. In this setting, a school may appear successful on paper while students continue to struggle academically. The result is a policy environment that rewards visibility more than educational substance.

Why the Gap Is Especially Relevant in Government Schools

The attendance–achievement gap is particularly relevant in government schools because these schools often function under resource constraints and systemic pressures. Issues such as limited infrastructure, shortage of teachers, multigrade teaching, administrative burdens, and inadequate learning support can reduce the educational value of classroom attendance. Further, many government

schools are under pressure to show compliance with targets related to enrolment and attendance, which may unintentionally shift focus away from deeper learning indicators.

This does not mean that government schools are inherently ineffective. Rather, it means that their success cannot be judged fairly or meaningfully through attendance alone. In fact, an overemphasis on attendance may hide the very support these schools need as better pedagogy, stronger foundational teaching, remedial systems, and learning-centered assessment.

Analytical Interpretation

From the perspective of the Input–Process–Output framework, the discussion becomes clearer:

- Attendance is an input
- Teaching-learning is the process
- Achievement is the output

If the process is weak, the output will remain weak even when the input appears satisfactory. Therefore, the real educational challenge is not simply improving attendance, but ensuring that attendance is supported by effective teaching and learning conditions. This section thus reinforces the main argument of the paper: the illusion of learning is created when educational systems mistake the input of attendance for the output of achievement.

Findings and Interpretation

The study finds that attendance is a necessary but insufficient condition for academic achievement in government schools. Regular school presence improves access to instruction, but it does not automatically ensure comprehension, skill development, or strong learning outcomes. The analysis shows that the real gap lies between physical participation and cognitive learning.

A key finding is that attendance often functions as a visible administrative indicator, while achievement reflects the actual quality of education. When classroom processes are weak, foundational skills are poor, and socio-economic barriers remain strong, students may attend school regularly yet continue to perform below expected learning levels. Thus, the paper supports the view that the real educational concern is not only absenteeism, but the condition of being “present but not truly learning.”

The interpretation of the study is that the illusion of learning emerges when educational success is judged mainly through attendance records rather than actual competencies. Therefore, educational evaluation in government schools must move beyond presence-based measures and focus more directly on meaningful learning outcomes.

Recommendations

Government schools should not rely on attendance alone as a marker of success. Instead, school monitoring should combine attendance data with learning-based indicators such as reading ability, numeracy, classroom participation, and periodic diagnostic assessment. Greater attention should be given to foundational literacy and numeracy, especially in early grades, so that regular attendance can translate into real academic growth.

Teacher support and classroom pedagogy also need strengthening. More activity-based, child-centered, and level-appropriate teaching methods should be encouraged so that students who are present in class remain actively engaged. In addition, remedial teaching, parental involvement, and context-sensitive support for disadvantaged learners can help reduce the gap between attendance and achievement.

Conclusion

The paper concludes that the true success of schooling cannot be measured only by how many children attend class, but by how many actually learn. In government schools, attendance is important because it reflects access and participation, but it becomes misleading when treated as proof of achievement. The central argument of the study is that attendance represents opportunity, not outcome.

Unless attendance is supported by effective teaching, foundational learning, and meaningful engagement, it may create only the illusion of educational progress. Therefore, the future of educational reform must shift from counting presence to measuring learning, so that government schools are assessed not only by participation statistics, but by the real educational growth they produce.

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