

Determinants Of Truancy Among Secondary School Students In Ibadan North Local Government Area Of Oyo State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Evidence is far-reaching in the literature indicating truancy as a shared deviant behavior among secondary school students. Thus, a number of researchers have empirically considered the drivers of students' exposure to truancy in the school setting. However, the disparate influences of characteristics of the school, students and teachers on truancy are not sufficiently explored in the literature. Thus, this study was intended to fill this knowledge gap. However, the focus of this study was on the perceptions of teachers on truancy. Using a simple random sampling technique, one hundred and fifty teachers were selected from 10 public secondary schools in Ibadan North Local Government Area of Oyo State. A self-designed questionnaire was administered among the respondents and a retrieval rate of 100% was achieved. Prior to the instrument administration, the validity and reliability properties were ascertained (the Cronbach alpha coefficient: 78.56%). Data analysis was anchored by frequency counts, percentages and Pearson Product Moment Correlation. Findings revealed that, while the attitudes of students and teachers are significant correlates of students' truancy, the truanting behavior is majorly related to the dimension of organizational culture in the school setting. In particular, on the one hand, students keep off from truancy if there are existing codes specifying acceptable behaviors in the school. On the other hand, truancy is rife among students if the school is indifferent on the codes and disciplinary guidelines on students' truancy. It is therefore recommended that schools should invest in design and implementation of school codes with appropriate disciplinary guidelines to control truanting behaviors among the students.

Keywords: truancy, students, secondary school, descriptive survey, correlation analysis

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I. Introduction

A common determinant of students' learning outcomes is class attendance (Kwak et al., 2019; Lukkarinen et al., 2016). It goes that students' absenteeism from learning activities is a building block of academic deficiencies and nonattainment of educational goals. Nevertheless, it is not uncommon for students to take unapproved absence from school and class altogether, constituting truancy in the school setting (Keppens, 2023). This study was motivated by the possibility of this academic heresy in order to explore the factors influencing truancy among secondary school students. These factors are noted as threefold (concerning students, teachers and the school), given the empirical evidence linking the behaviors of each of the stakeholders to students' exposure to truancy. Pertaining to the students, their academic attitude is exemplified by their career aspirations and the need to link the school activities to those aspirations (Sowa et al., 2022; Winga, 2021). For example, a student who aspires to get university education and become skilled worker has higher odds of shunning truancy relative to a student who does not consider university education worthwhile (Sowa et al., 2022). Related to this, students' peer culture may affect the students' career goals and academic conduct (Winga, 2021).

The parental involvement and attitude can also be structured to motivate or demotivate students' academic attitude and then their truanting behaviors (Ezeani et al., 2023). This tells that students raised by parents who are indifferent to truancy are likely to be involved in regular absence from school (Ezeani et al., 2023). However, truancy does not emanate strictly from the students' attitude alone. The attitude of teachers in particular (Ampofo et al., 2022) and leadership style of the school in general (Abdulhakeem et al., 2021) are also useful

indicators of prevalence of truancy. If most teachers in a school are truants themselves, truancy becomes a culture even among the students (Ampofo et al., 2022). More importantly, in the absence of extant policy and guidelines on truancy from the school administration, truancy becomes an order championed by all the school stakeholders (Abdulhakeem et al., 2021). It therefore follows that efforts to address students' truancy should start from characterizing the factors making truancy a popular behavior among the students. Therefore, the present study shall investigate these factors conceptually and empirically towards suggesting policy implications that may be helpful to control truancy among secondary school students in Nigeria.

II. A Review Of Relevant Literature

Mbagwu (2021) considered school type and student class size as the correlates of unapproved absenteeism among secondary school students in Aba, Nigeria. Applying the multistage sampling technique, a total of 582 female students were randomly selected from public and private secondary schools in the study area. Inferences from the data were ascertained using the two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) technique. The author obtained that truancy as a deviant behavior was more prevalent among public and senior school students than in private and junior school students. More importantly, it was found that while school type and level of academic class do not significantly determine the students' truanting behaviors, the school has allowed truancy to be popular if there are weak school rules and regulations guiding the students' conduct within the school setting. That is, without extant school policy on truancy, there is a likelihood that the students will not voluntarily shun the academic-repressing behavior.

Saka (2021) explored the impact of joint psycho-social factors as explaining the dimension of truancy among secondary school students of Taraba State, Nigeria. Guided by a descriptive design, the researcher considered all 6,969 secondary school students of Wukari Local Government of the state as population of the study – among whom a sample of 357 students were selected using the purposive sampling technique. The data analyzed in the study involved the students' attendance register and their qualitative responses collected via a questionnaire. Multiple regression was applied as the method of data analysis. Findings revealed that students' personal interest in learning activity and teachers' skills to boost students' self-efficacy are the primary factors influencing the degree of truancy among the students. In particular, a frequent administration of achievement tests by teachers would increase, rather than decrease, students' interest in truancy. Saka (2021) explained that, when most students are unprepared for an achievement test, they are likely to absent themselves from the test and the teaching-learning process altogether. This argument is theoretically underpinned by Bandura (1997) who argued that students' self-efficacy or self-esteem can be elevated or deflated by their scores in an achievement test. If students achieve only low scores consistently, such students may be avoiding learning activity altogether as a result of the development of low self-esteem in them (Saka, 2021).

Edobor and Kate (2017) examined the environmental and psychological determinants of truancy among adolescent students in Okpe Local Government Area of Delta State Nigeria. The researchers applied the proportional stratified procedure to sample a total of 450 students from 5 secondary schools in the study area. The data collection process entailed the design and administration of three measurement scales for each of psychological variables, environmental variables and truancy variables. Before the field administration of these scales, the researchers obtained their reliability coefficients as 76.8%, 82.1% and 87.8%, respectively. The data were analyzed with mixed use of regression and ANOVA. Findings indicated that self-concept and motivation (psychological factors) and peer group and social media (environmental factors) are individually and jointly significant to influence the students' truanting behaviors. More informatively, students with low motivation for learning instructions and at the same time keep friends of liked minds are disposed to absenting themselves from schools without permission. These findings were later re-established by Otoo et al. (2018) in their inquiry on the role of personal motivation to determine commitment of students to teaching and learning process.

Bajon (2022) aimed at characterizing truancy among secondary school students in Jalingo, Taraba State, Nigeria. To achieve this aim, the researcher administered a self-designed questionnaire among the select 250 students (in senior secondary class 2) across all 34 schools in Jalingo. Before the administration, a pilot test was conducted among the students in order to ascertain the validity and reliability properties of the instrument – which were obtained as satisfactory. Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) were used to generate inferences from the data. Findings showed that the students' use/misuse of substances and lack of strict parental control are the common factors inducing students towards truancy. In essence, family instability allows the students to learn about alcohol and substances, which generally depletes the students' drive to excel in their academic pursuits (Bajon, 2022). Similarly, Musa (2014) associated the persistent fall in students' academic performance to their involvement in drug and alcohol use which are strong correlates of truancy.

Suleman et al. (2017) investigated factors contributing to the truancy rate among secondary school students in Karak District of Pakistan. The authors selected 150 secondary school teachers to participate in the completion of a questionnaire and data analysis was anchored by descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation. Findings revealed that characteristics of the students' family and peers are the core factors influencing

the students' exposures to truancy. In short, as dysfunctional family setting is unable to checkmate the students' truancy behaviors, unfiltered association with peers tends to encourage the students' interest in truancy. Therefore, the school administration has the responsibility to call the students' family to the right order while ensuring functional relationship among the students. This can be achieved by periodic parental counselling through a functional parent-teacher association and strict implementation of code of conduct for the erring students (Suleman et al., 2017).

Okwakpam and Okwakpam (2012) specifically analyzed the relationship between family background and students' tendency to involve in truancy. The researchers purposively selected 105 teachers from secondary schools in Rivers State, Nigeria. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data from the respondents, which were analyzed with the aid of mean, standard deviation and t-test. Okwakpam and Okwakpam (2012) found that students' family background has a significant relationship with their truancy behaviors. In other words, students raised in a separated or low-education family are more predisposed to truancy than those with united, high-education family. This connotes that the origin of students' truancy is traceable to the structure of family they are raised in. Although the studies of Suleman et al. (2017) and Okwakpam and Okwakpam (2012) were carried out in different environmental domains and periods of time, it is noteworthy that their findings bear a lot semblance. This suggests that family structure is a universal determinant of truancy in students. In another perspective, Audu et al. (2017) regarded parental income as determining the parents' drive and skills to demotivate their children from truancy.

III. Methods

This study analyses the factors which may determine variation in truancy among the students. These factors are qualitatively measured through the perceptions of the teachers. Although students-based truancy is the subject matter of this study, students' opinions were not included because there is no standard approach of determining accuracy of such opinions – students cannot be reliably asked to judge their own stance on truancy. As a result, the teachers who can identify truancy in students via casual recollection and official records were directly asked to give an account of truancy they have witnessed in the students and the perceived factors underlying the students' disposition to truancy. To do this, 150 teachers were randomly selected from 10 schools (15 teachers per school) in Ibadan North Local Government Area of Oyo State, Nigeria. To facilitate the selection of the sample, the researcher paid a prior visit to these schools, engaging their principals and vice principals on the purpose and merits of the present research. There was immediate embrace of the research proposal as the school heads called for the participation of the teachers in the study. This approach was both time and cost effective as the instrument administration among the respondents was smooth with 100% retrieval rate.

The instrument used for the data collection was a semi-structured questionnaire which was divided into three sections as self-designed by the researcher. Section A asks for the demographic characteristics of the respondents; Section B explores the teachers' take on the degree of truancy among their students; Section C investigates the teachers' opinions on the factors contributing to truancy among the students. The collected data on the questionnaire were coded and presented in an SPSS spreadsheet. The respondents' demographic data and perceptions on students' truancy were analyzed using frequency counts and percentages. The data on factors determining truancy were analyzed using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation. This inferential procedure allowed the research to capture the nature of relationship between each of the investigated factors and students' truancy. The correlation coefficients were interpreted and discussed relative to existing evidence in the literature. In addition, the significance properties of the coefficients were interpreted by comparing the computed probability values with the levels of significance.

IV. Findings And Discussion

The demographic characteristics of the sampled teachers (the respondents) indicated that 60% are female while 40% are male. The mean age of the respondents was 38 years, suggesting that the teachers are relatively youthful. With each teacher having spent at least 5 years on the teaching profession, the selected teachers can be said to be experienced on their career - about 70% of them have been posted to their present school for at least two years. The fact that teachers have spent at least two academic sessions in a school is important so that they would be familiar with the students' behaviors, making them to have reliable information about students' truancy. All teachers that participated in this study have at least a first degree. In addition, those whose first degree was not on education field of study have acquired professional qualification in teaching. This tells that only qualified teachers were recruited to supply the qualitative data that were analyzed in this study. Most of the teachers (58%) also revealed that their places of residence were close to those of the students', implying that they could easily relay information about the students' frequency of presence in or absence from the school. About the subjects that the respondents taught, 26% were teaching mathematics, 30% were in charge of English Language while the rest handled other subjects. The disproportionate attention for teachers of Mathematics and English was due to the

fact that these are the core subjects at secondary schools in Nigeria - regular absence from their classes may imply regular absence in other subjects.

Table 1: Correlation analysis of the factors

S/N	Factor	Correlation with truancy	p-value
1.	Students' career aspiration	0.52	0.0545**
2.	Parental attitude	0.76	0.0105*
3.	Peer influence	0.65	0.0192*
4.	Teachers' attitude	0.81	0.0055*
5.	School culture	0.83	0.0002*

* implies the correlation coefficient is significant at 5%

** implies the correlation coefficient is significant at 10%

Table 1 summarizes the correlation coefficient between each of the investigated factors and students' truancy. It is noted that school culture is the factor with highest correlation with truancy (0.83). This is closely followed by teachers' attitude (0.81) and parental attitude (0.76) and then peer influence (0.65). Only the students' career aspiration is moderately correlated with truancy (0.52). These correlation coefficients indicate that the bulk of blame for students' truancy rest on the school and the teachers. Intuitively, in the absence of stringent school codes guiding the students' behaviors, students are likely to regard truancy as an acceptable behavior in the school setting. This implies that students would perceive the school culture as inclusive of truancy, making them to have high propensities to absent from school without approval. This finding further confirms the earlier submission of Abdulhakeem et al. (2021) that students' truancy reflects the structure of leadership style of the school administration. In another perspective, school culture is represented by the students' awareness of disciplinary terms for every deviant behaviour exhibited in the school, including truancy. However, the extant absence of such guidelines implies negative culture for the students. In order words, students' truancy mimic the acceptable behaviors in their schools. That is, on the one hand, if the school disallows truancy, students have the tendency to shun it as well. On the other hand, if other school stakeholders serially shirk their duties, students may not consider truancy as dragging their learning outcomes.

Nevertheless, the attitude of teachers to truancy is also significant in influencing the students' disposition to truancy. The rationale for this was previously argued by Ampofo et al. (2022). According to Ampofo et al. (2022), students imbibe the attitude of their teachers. Therefore, if the teachers are known to the students as taking unapproved absence from or lateness to school, the odds are high that the students behave accordingly. Another mechanism by which the teacher attitude influences students' truancy is with respect to implementation of disciplinary guidelines. Given that teachers are the executors of school codes (where they exist), the execution cannot be effectively achieved if there is truancy among the teachers themselves. And if there is execution regardless of truanting culture among the teachers, the students have a sense of injustice, predisposing them to amplified truancy. It follows that teachers hold the center stage in imbibing the culture of truancy intolerance in the students. Furthermore, the data analysis showed that parental attitude is also an important driver of students' truancy. Where the parents shrug off the students' academic behaviors, students are prone to selecting wrong choices. This explains why students with improper monitoring from their parents are more susceptible to running away from school. Ezeani et al. (2023) offered the perspective that truancy originally emanates from the home. A student with strict parental stance on truancy is more likely to see it as bad behavior compared to the one raised by carefree parents who may not see truancy as all bad.

It is also noteworthy that peer influence affects the students' truanting behaviors. However, as given by the p-values of the variables, peer influence is less significant than school culture or teacher attitude or parental attitude as a correlate of students' truancy. This outcome can be explained using the conclusions of Bajon (2022) who asserted that peers have little influence on a student's propensity to truancy if there are stringent school codes coupled with skilled parenting. It follows that students are unlikely to be labelled with truancy if their school and teachers demonstrate good examples for them. To offer further perspective to this, since the peers are all influenced simultaneously by the positive school culture and teacher attitude on truancy, rate of truancy will be expectedly low among all the students as well. Relatedly, students of first-generation secondary schools in Nigeria with strong government support and zero tolerance for deviant behaviors are not known for truancy (Mbagwu, 2021). However, students of less-recognized secondary schools are those with incessant truancy among students and their teachers (Mbagwu, 2021). Nevertheless, this explains why career aspiration of the students is not a strong determinant of truancy. Given that most students in Nigeria do not set career goals until they are out of secondary school, their truanting behaviors cannot be adequately explained by whether they aspire to continue their education beyond secondary school – absence of career goal does not necessarily predispose students to truancy. Nonetheless, this particular finding is in variance with Sowa et al. (2022) who found positive relationship between students' career prospects and their disposition to reject truancy.

V. Conclusions And Recommendations

This study investigated factors which may be responsible for truanting behaviors in students of selected secondary schools. The data collection followed a descriptive approach so that the perspectives of teachers are collated, as they may affect the students' propensities to truancy. It was gathered that, while truancy may be attractive to secondary school students whose career aspirations are less linked with university education, the students' truanting behavior is mainly influenced by the existing school culture. That is, the school's disposition on truancy is the main precursor to the degree of truancy obtainable in the school setting. If there are school codes which categorize truancy as a deviant behavior with appropriate penalties and sanctions for offenders, students are likely to shun truancy. On the other hand, if the school is indifferent on the consequences of truancy, students may misguidedly see some gains in truancy. Nevertheless, the school is not to blame outright for students' involvement in truancy. Other determining factors of truancy include parental attitude, students' career aspiration, teacher attitude and peer influence. It is therefore recommended that schools should be clear of code of conduct specifying acceptable behaviors from students. While a student found wanting on truancy should be punished accordingly, there should not be bias or discrimination in implementing the disciplinary guidelines for unacceptable behaviors such as truancy. In addition, the school codes should indicate acceptable behaviors from parents and teachers who are also important stakeholders in the school setting.

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