

Truancy Among Public Secondary School Students. Implications For Counselling

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Abstract

The study assessed the prevalence of truancy among secondary school students. It also determined the predisposing factors to truancy. These were with a view to understanding the phenomenon of truancy and devising means of curbing it. The study adopted survey design. The population for the study comprised secondary school students in Osun State. The sample consisted of one hundred and seventy-five (175) students. From the 3 senatorial districts in the state, one senatorial district was randomly selected. Five Local Government Areas (LGAs) were randomly selected from the senatorial district. Ten secondary schools were selected from the five LGAs, two secondary schools from each LGA. The research instrument titled Questionnaire on Truancy was used to collect data for the study. Data collected were analyzed using percentage and chi-square. It was found from the study that more male students 77(44.0%) have been absent from school without permission from the school authority than female students 40(22.9%). Therefore, truancy is prevalent but more among male students than female students. Also, prevalent among students of age range 13-15 years (62.9%). It was also found that student related factor 48.6%, peer related factor 31.4% and school/teacher related factor 14.3% were factors predisposing students to truancy. It was therefore concluded that truancy is prevalent in schools and it is pertinent to understanding truancy and improving school facilities and qualities of guidance and counselling services rendered to curb truancy among school students.

Keywords: Truancy, At-risk, Poverty prone, Prevalence, Learning

INTRODUCTION

Education is a combination of deliberate and purposeful acts and activities with formative and intervention effects on the behaviour and character of an individual. In its technical sense, education is the process by which a society consciously transmits its accumulated stock of knowledge, skills and values from one generation to another. Such conscious and intentional efforts usually focus in part on character development, behaviour modification and values orientation especially among the youths of the nation. However, in recent times these are unintentional, visible and not so visible distortions and aberrations in the character and behaviour of the youths are being reflected in the pattern of students' classroom behaviour. If unchecked, such behaviour may constitute impediments to meaningful classroom learning, school growth and development. Prominent among such undesirable behaviours is truancy among secondary school students. Truancy is not a new problem, but a historically present problem that has over the last decade received newfound attention as the lack of school attendance and its link with student delinquency has become more clearly identified. Truancy is a product of a combination of social, economic and attitudinal factors which invariably reflect in students' academic performance and challenges the competence and resources of school counsellors (Animasahun, 2003). It is noted that students who stay away from school without permission will not only be left out in the learning process but they may also probably end up engaging in antisocial behaviour such as in drug abuse ,

gangsterism, bullying, alcohol consumption, free and unregulated sex, gambling and loitering with their negative consequences and experience. Further, playing truant is a discipline problem with strong challenge to the resources, facilities and expertise of the school counselling services and its curricular structure (Nawaz, 2005).

In the secondary schools, truants can be labelled as poverty prone and at-risk students who are faced with a number of educational challenges which require the building of counsellors' professional capacity to prevent its negative consequences to students and learning. Usually students have high rates of absenteeism, poor academic performance, adjustment problems, lack of interest in schools and poor attitude to school work and learning. Such students need the assistance of professional counsellors so as to cope with the academic and social problems and challenges associated with schooling. The persistence and growing phenomenon of truancy among secondary school students suggest the need to build the professional capacity of school counsellors so as to mitigate the negative effects of truancy among secondary school students. The magnitude or prevalence of truancy remains a factor yet to be thoroughly examined among secondary school students. Related to the prevalence of truancy are factors suspected to predispose students to truancy. Previous studies (Gesinde, 2005; Okwakpam, 2012; Igwe, 2013) have investigated the causes of truancy vis-a-vis student academic performance. Such studies left unanswered the vital questions about the

prevalence of truancy and factors which predispose students to truancy. Answers to these questions are pertinent to understanding truancy and improving school facilities and guidance and counselling services to eliminate truancy among school students. Truancy predisposes students to dropping out of school as students often demonstrate a pattern of increase absence from school over a period of time (Epstein & Scheldon, 2002). Nwana (2004) explained that truancy is an act of intentionally absenting of oneself from school without permission, leaving without authorization and dodging of specific classes. It has been reported that many factors are suspected to facilitate truancy among students. Among such factors are; lack of qualified teachers, lack of teaching and learning materials, lack of dedication on the part of teachers home factor (marital adjustment and broken homes, lack of affection, disability of parents). It was established that to understand the problem of truancy it is essential to understand the causes, these causes were grouped into four categories such as student demographics, family characteristics, student's personal and psychological factors and school climate.

Williams (2000) observed that truancy has interfered adversely with students' academic performance as well as their moral standard. Inadequate guidance and counselling services in schools has been identified as one of the major factors responsible for an increasing rate of truancy among students in secondary schools (Ehinder, 1999), and because of the many potentials of truancy to derail set educational objective of the students and the school and in view of the short and long-term impact of truancy on students learning and personal development, the following objectives were identified for the study, (i) to assess the prevalence of truancy among secondary school students (ii) to examine predisposing factors to truancy among secondary school students.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What is the prevalence of truancy among secondary school students?
2. What are the predisposing factors to truancy among secondary school students?

RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

1. There is no significant influence of demographic variables of students' sex, age, religion and parental qualification on truancy.

METHODOLOGY

A survey research design was adopted for this study. The population for the study comprised all secondary school adolescents in Osun State. One hundred and seventy-five students from public secondary schools were randomly selected. From the three senatorial districts in Osun State, one senatorial district was randomly selected and five local government areas (LGAs) were randomly selected from the senatorial district for the study. The research instrument titled 'Questionnaire on Truancy' was used to collect data for this study. The questionnaire consisted of three sections. Section A, B & C, section A consisted of demographic characteristics of the respondents. Section B contained items on the possible reasons why students are absent from school without permission from the school authority. Section C consisted of items on how often students absent themselves from school without permission. The pilot study of the instrument was carried out and Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to analyse the data and reliability coefficient of 0.78 was obtained and this was significant at 0.05 level of significance. Permission was given to the researcher by school authority to administer questionnaire on the students in the classroom during school hours. Though, 200 students were originally selected but during administration of the instrument, out of 200 copies of the questionnaire given to the students, the researcher was able to retrieve one hundred and seventy-five copies. This limited the number of students to one hundred and seventy-five. Data collected were collated and analyzed using percentages and chi-square.

RESULTS

Research Question One: What is the prevalence of truancy among secondary school adolescents? To answer this question, items in section C of the questionnaire were scored and the result is then subjected to descriptive analysis. The result is presented.

Table 1 shows the magnitude (prevalence) of truancy among the subjects. The results not only showed that truancy is wide spread among respondents but also that a wide range of reasons are given for truancy among the students. With respect to the prevalence of truancy among students all the respondents had experienced truancy in one time or the other in varying degrees and with a wide range of reasons. As indicated in the above table, "I like hanging out with my friends to play computer games was the most prevalent and identified as the foremost reason while students absent from school without permission.

Table 1: Reasons for prevalence of Truancy among Secondary School Adolescents

S/N	STATEMENT	Often		Barely often		Not often	
		f	%	f	%	f	%
1	I prefer staying around my friends rather than coming to school	82	46.9	65	37.1	28	16.0
2	Going to playing centres during school hours	90	51.4	64	36.6	21	12.0
3	I like hanging out with my friends to play computer games.	100	57.1	50	28.6	25	14.3
4	I prefer entertainment to study	30	17.1	25	14.3	120	68.6
5	Having no money for transport fare to school.	80	45.7	65	37.1	30	17.1
6	No food to bring to school for lunch	28	16.0	45	25.7	102	58.3
7	My parents pay my school fees late	30	17.1	65	37.1	80	45.7
8	My class teacher doesn't like seeing me in class.	45	25.7	50	28.6	80	45.7
9	Being faced with harassment from my senior	65	37.1	40	22.9	70	40
10	Uninterested in teacher's method of teaching.	90	51.4	70	40	15	8.6
11	My teacher gives too much of homework	85	48.6	60	34.3	30	17.1
12	My classmates make jest of me for not answering questions	75	41.0	70	40.0	30	17.1
13	I feel ashamed of my poor performance in the test/exam.	95	54.3	60	34.3	20	11.4

In addition, 57.1% of the students were often absent from school without permission, 28.6% of them barely often while 14.3% of them not often absent from school without permission. Next to it are "Going to playing centres during school hours and I feel ashamed of my poor performance in test/examination". Their responses showed that 54.3% of the students often, 34.3% barely often while 11.4% of the students not often absent from the school without permission as a result their poor performance in the test/examination and 51.4% of the students often, 36.6% barely often while 12% of the students not often absent from the school without permission as a result of going to playing centres during school hours. Having no money for transport fare to school, truancy was also prevalent because of this 45.7% of the respondents absent themselves from school without permission, 37.1% of the respondents barely often absent themselves from school while 17.1% of the respondents not often absent themselves from school due to having no money for transport fare to school. Similarly, uninterested in teachers method of teaching was another reason for being absent from school without permission, 51.4% and 40% of the students respectively often and barely often act upon this given reason, 8.6% of them not often acted upon the given reason. Further, my teacher gives too much of homework ,48.6% and 34.3% of the respondents respectively often and barely often commit truancy for this reason,17.1% of them not often commit truancy for the reason. Also, 46.9% and 37.1% of the students respectively indicated that they often and barely often absent from school without permission as a result of staying around their friends rather than coming to school and 16% not often done that. Then, 42.9% and 40.0% of the respondents often and barely often absent from school because their mates make jest of them for not answering questions in the class while 17.1% not often absent from school.

Consequently, other factors while students absent from school without permission are: I prefer entertainment to school, 17.1% and 14.3% of the respondents often and barely often absent themselves from school without permission and 68.6% of the respondents not often absent from school due of this, truancy was not prevalent because of this reason. My

parents pay my school fees late 17.1% and 37.1% often and barely often absent from school due to this while 45.7% not often absent from school, truancy was not prevalent due to this reason. Being faced with harassment from my senior 37.1% and 22.9% of the respondents often and barely often absent from school without permission while 40.0% of the respondents not often absent themselves from school due to the same reason. No food to bring to school for lunch, 16.0% and 25.7% of the respondents often and barely often absent from themselves from school while 58.3% of the respondents not often absent themselves from school due to this reason, therefore truancy was not prevalent. My class teacher doesn't like seeing me in class 25.7% and 28.6% of the respondents often and barely often absent themselves from school while 45.7% of the respondents not often absent from school.

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Table 2. Prevalence of Truancy among secondary school students

Variables		Have you been absent yourself from school without taking permission from the authority?		Total
		Yes	No	
Sex	Male	77 (44.0)	40(14.3)	102 (58.3)
	Female	40 (22.9)	33(18.6)	73 (41.7)
Age	10-12yrs	49(28.0)	2(1.1)	51(29.1)
	13-15yrs	110 (62.9)	3(2.7)	113(65.6)
	16-20yrs	10 (5.7)	0 (0.0)	10(5.7)
	Above 20yrs	1(0.6)	0(0.0)	1(0.6)
Class	JSS I	77(44.0)	4(2.3)	81(46.3)
	JSS II	38(21.7)	1	39(22.3)
	JSSIII	15(8.6)	1	16(9.2)
	SSS I	38(21.7)	1	39(22.3)

Table 3 shows that more male students 77(44.0%) have been absent themselves from school without taking permission from the school authority than female students 40 (22.9%). It could be observed that only 25(14.3%) and 33(18.6%) have been absent themselves from school with permission, therefore prevalence of truancy is high among male students than female students. Also considering the rate of truancy across student's age, it is revealed that and (6.3%) of students within age bracket of 16-20 and above 20years have not been absent from school without taking permission from the school authority.

Students who are younger that is those that have their age range between 10-12(28.3%) and 13-15years (62.9%) absent from school without taking permission from the authority. While considering the prevalence of truancy across student's class, the table revealed that 77(44.0%) of JSS I students absent from school without taking permission from the authority. Therefore, the result showed that the prevalence of truancy among public secondary school students is high.

Research Question Two: What are the predisposing factors to truancy among the secondary school adolescents?

To answer this research question, items in section B of the questionnaire were scored. Also, five components of predisposing factors to truancy were identified such that items, b1, b4, b7, b8, and b22 constituted "Teachers/school related factors"; items b3, b6, b8, b10, b19, and b24 constituted "Peer related factor"; items b5, b11, b12, b13, b15, and b20 constituted "Parents/home related factor"; while items b2, b9, b14, b16, b17, b18, b21, b23 and b25 constituted "Student related factor. The respective constituted items were then summed up and subjected to descriptive analysis. The result is presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3 shows the predisposing factors to truancy among school going adolescents. It can be observed that 80 (48.6%) of the adolescents attributed the reason for truancy to factors residing in the students/learners themselves. The implication of this is that student that could not answer teacher's questions correctly most times would feel ashamed in the presence of other students and try to isolate him/herself and this will affect his/her performance in school.

Table 3: Predisposing Factors to Truancy among the Secondary Schools Adolescents

Predisposing Factors	Frequency (f)	Percent (%)	Valid Percent
Teacher/School R elated	25	14.3	14.3
Peer Related	55	31.4	31.4
Parent/Home Related	10	5.7	5.7
Students Related	85	48.6	48.6
Total	175	100.0	100.0

Also, 25 (14.3%) of the adolescents identified teachers/school related factors as their reasons for truancy, it could be deduced from the result that teachers/ school factor do not have much to do with the student being a truant , some students may decide to be absent from school because of their poor academic performance and the way they are being treated by their teachers in the class, maybe they are being made jest of by their classmate and school also is not helping them to staying back in school by threatening to punish them for their performance , 55(31.4%) of them identified peer related factor, this is a strong factor that can make students exhibit truancy. It is possible for the students to adhere to the advice of their peers by following them to play games or other things as we know that peers have great influence on other peers. while 10(5.7%) of the students identified parent/home related factors as predisposing factors to truancy among school going

adolescents. This result shows that parent/home should also be discussed based on the truancy behaviour of the adolescents. It is possible for some students to leave their home in the morning on the pretext of going to school but they roam the street and return home without getting to school and without their parents knowledge.

Hypothesis One: There is no significant influence of the demographic variables of students’ sex, age, religion and parental educational qualification on the predisposing factors to truancy.

In order to answer this research objective, demographic variables such as students’ sex, age, religion and parental educational qualification were cross tabulated with the predisposing factors to truancy while Chi-square and p-values were also obtained. The result is presented in Table 3.

Table 4: Chi-square Analysis of Influence of the demographic variables on Predisposing Factors to Truancy

	Socio-demographic Variables	χ^2	df	P-value	Decision
Predisposing Factors	Sex	5.380	3	.146	Not Sig
	Age	9.567	6	.144	Not Sig
	Religion	11.938	6	.063	Not Sig
	Parental Educational Qualification	30.012	18	.037	Sig

Table 3 presents the summary of the influence of demographic variables on the predisposing factors to truancy. It can be observed from the table that while parental educational qualification had significant influence on predisposing factor to truancy, demographic variables such as sex, age and religion of the students were found not significantly influence their identified predisposing factors to truancy. For instance, the influence of sex as a predisposing factors to truancy yielded a $\chi^2 (n = 175) = 5.380$, $df = 3$, $p = .146$; age as a predisposing factor to truancy, $\chi^2 (n = 175) = 9.567$, $df = 6$, $p = .144$.; religion as a predisposing factor to truancy, $\chi^2 (n = 175) = 11.938$, $df = 6$, $p = .063$; while parental educational qualification as a predisposing factor to truancy yielded $\chi^2 (n = 175) = 30.012$, $df = 18$, $p = .037$. It can be concluded from the result that parental educational qualification had a significant influence as a predisposing factor to truancy while demographic variables such as sex, age and religion of the students were found not to significantly influence their identified predisposing factors to truancy at 0.05 level of significance.

DISCUSSION

The findings of the study showed that truancy was prevalent among public school students and reasons facilitating the magnitude were pointed out. These reasons were corroborated by previous studies. For instance students that could not answer teacher’s questions correctly most often would feel ashamed in the presence of other students and “feeling ashamed of poor academic performance” could make truancy to be prevalent in schools. Students that are not academically sound might also feel depressed, tend to have lower self-esteem, fewer social skills or alienated by their mates such that they are predisposed to truancy. Gray and Jessen (1990) and Reids (2002) reported that academic failure, learning disability and learning style can make student susceptible to truancy. Also, lack of fund for transport to school. This is another reason that made truancy to be prevalent among public school students. Poor students who do not have sponsors or assistance are at-risk to truancy. These at-risk students need the assistance of a professional that will put them through on what they can do to cope and adjust to their academic work. This agrees with Siziya, Muula

and Rudatsikira (2007) that it is possible for adolescents from poor homes to miss school as they are being compelled to fend for themselves meet family needs, such as caring for a younger siblings or working to support the family income. Coping and adjusting can take the forms of begging and related activities like odd jobs to get money for their upkeep. This is supported by Gary (2001) and Osarenren (1996) that financial inadequacy and related financial problems within the family can predispose students to truancy. Further, students who are disinterested in their teachers' method of teaching can become truants. It has earlier been reported by Heilbrunn and Seeley (2000) that students who were not interested in methods of teaching of their teachers in the class are not likely to concentrate in class. Such students are more likely to get behind in the school work which is cited as a primary reason for truancy and less likely to attend classes where they have missed several lessons and do not follow what was going on in the classroom. Gabb (1997), Adana(1987) and Igborgbor (1984) reported that poor learning environment, lack of orientation, scolding, lack of parental control from home, ridicule, poor teaching and lack of interest in a subject, fear of punishment make truancy more prevalent among students.

The finding of this study also showed that teachers/school factor is not significantly related to truancy however students may decide to be absent from school probably because of their poor academic performance and the way they are being treated by their teachers (fear of teachers) poor teacher-student relationship. The study also reported that peer-related factors are strong enough to predispose students to truancy. It is possible for the students to adhere to the advice of their peers especially student whose parents lack value for education (Reids, 1999) or students from hostile environment (Omogun,1995; Osarenren,1996 and Owodunni, 2008) would prefer to spend most of his/her time with his/her peers. This finding concurs with Igwe (2013) who reported that most students may have the abilities and opportunities to perform well in school and achieve their ambitions in life but due to peer influence they may become truants.

It was shown from the study that the rate of truancy is high among the students and the rate at which these students absent from school without permission from the school authority is educationally worrisome as it suggests the existence of a serious problem that is likely to have short and long term effects on the academic growth and performance of the students. Building the professional capacity of school counsellors to cope with challenges of high rate of truancy among students is therefore a complex problem as it is a multidimensional process with different interacting factors. These factors are teacher and school, students and peer related and they will require special emphasis in the process of building

capacity of counsellors. While some as the result of the study are corroborated by previous studies, this study went further by relating truancy to counsellors professional need for capacity building with specific areas of truancy among students.

CONCLUSION

The study concluded that there were reasons for prevalence of truancy among public school students and this suggests the need for building the professional capacity of school counsellors mainly because of the high prevalence of truancy among subjects of the study. The predisposing factors to truancy were identified and found to be student, peer, teacher and school related. The combined effects which predispose at-risk and poverty prone students to truancy. The situation is compounded by the lack of quality counselling support services in most secondary schools. Demographic factors like age, sex and religion were found not to predispose students to truancy.

CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE

The study identified some predisposing and thus raises the awareness of counsellors, teachers, parents and other stakeholders on the implications of truancy and the role of stakeholders in curbing the high rate of truancy. High rate of truancy also suggests need to build the professional capacity of school counsellors and also specific areas where such capacity are required are also highlighted. The need for cooperation among stakeholders in curbing truancy in schools was also established.

IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNSELLING

The results of this study suggest the need for great improvement in the services rendered by school counselling units. Though few of these units are equipped to function effectively, there seems to be the need for those that function to focus their attention on militating the possible impacts and influences on core factors which predispose secondary school students to truancy by focusing on building the capacity of counsellors to use the limited resources and facilities. Infact, the development of programmes to positively intervene in preventing the manifestation of such predisposing factors should be one of the major functions of school counselling units in the secondary schools. There is need for qualified counsellors and sufficient funds to establish and equip counselling units in secondary schools and provide counselling facilities to render effective counselling services. The acute shortage of such qualified counsellors in the secondary schools and non provision of needed facilities and materials in secondary schools compound the problem of the at-risk students the more deepening their antisocial problems. The prevalence of truancy in schools seems to be the logical consequence of both the shortage of personnel lack of capacity by counsellors and the scarcity of counselling services. In addition,

the shortage of funds and lack of encouragement from the school authority seem to compound the problems of providing quality counselling in the secondary schools. In order to intervene positively and curb truancy in secondary school, state governments, should be encouraged to implement the provision of the National Policy on Education(2004) section ii (j) by establishing /restoring counselling services and employing qualified counsellors and building the professional capacity of the few counsellors in schools to provide quality counselling services. In addition, School counsellors should collaborate with both the school authority and the heads of department of different subjects to ensure that teachers employ appropriate methods of teaching and use of multimedia technologies to make their teaching enjoyable and interesting to their students. In this way both teacher-related and student-related factors cited by students and found to be significant as predisposing students to truancy in this study will be minimized. In other words, counselling is essentially an individualization and domestication of the education process through interactive engagements/dialogue between the counsellor and counsellee based on the distinctiveness and unique needs of the counsellor.

It is therefore the responsibility of a counsellor to help individuals to plan, obtain and derive maximum benefit from educational, social, vocational and other kinds of experience which will enable at-risk students to discover and develop themselves, acquire relevant knowledge, skills, attitude, values and interest that would enable them become subject of development.

Further, counsellors should undertake detailed study of the socio-demographic factors of students and use their understanding of such to improve their counselling of students to prevent their vulnerability to truancy. A series of intervention programmes and activities can be arranged to re-orientate and rehabilitate potential truants among students. Such programmes and activities should focus on possible and potential predisposing variables as identified in this study and used to build and strengthen the professional capacity of school counsellors. School counsellors should also embark on intensive awareness and value –orientation, enlightments of students, teachers and parents on those predisposing factors that can make students vulnerable to truancy including an emphasis on the negative implications of truancy in students’ academic learning and character development.

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