# The Impact of Truant Behavior on Academic Achievement of Secondary School Students in the Ukum Local Government Area

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**ABSTRACT** The study was conducted to determine the effects of truant behavior on academic achievement of secondary school students in Ukum. The study used a survey design wherein a questionnaire was used to collect data. Selection of samples involved the use of simple probability random sampling as chi-square was used to test the hypotheses. The study found that truant behavior has negative effects on a student's academic achievement due to its tendency to cause failures in terminal examinations and increase rate of dropouts. The study recommends  research for the determination of the causes of truancy for each individual truant to ensure their improved academic achievement massive rewards for students who are hardworking, and punishment for those who are truants.

## INTRODUCTION

There is no doubt that educational standards at the secondary school level in Nigeria are on steady decline. Thus, performance of students appears to be failing to meet minimum learning requirements to acquire basic skills and competence. As a result, poor academic achievement seems to be the order of the day as reflected in the students' examinations and test scores. Kuti's (1976) findings showed the extent of decreasing level of educational achievement in Nigeria. His documentation showed that in 1960, secondary school students who passed the senior certificate examination at an acceptable credit level were 32.36 percent, however, the percentage saw a steady decline to 27.63 percent in 1968 and 19.3 percent in 1974. Sam (2011) also grieved that academic excellence no longer exists in Nigerian Secondary Schools as reflected in massive failures recorded in JAMB examinations in the country. Further, the 2014 WAEC results proved that most candidates failed to meet entry requirements in the universities, as their terminal examination performance also appears to be on a decline.

In an attempt to investigate the issue of poor academic performance in secondary schools, several studies have been conducted in different parts of the country. Most of the studies tend to emphasize factors such as age, gender, family background, socio-economic status, intellectual ability and environment (Diaz 2003; Cary et al. 2008; Akanle 2007; Abdullahi et al. 2015). However, it appears that few studies have been conducted in Benue especially in the Ukum Local Government Area, where educational performance of secondary school students appears to be poor and also seem to be degrading. This study aims to fill this gap by examining the effects of truancy on educational achievement in the area with a view to providing recommendations that would help reverse the situation.

### Objectives of the Study

The objective of the study is to determine the effects of truancy on academic achievement of secondary school students in the Ukum Local Government Area.

### Hypothesis of the Study

1. $H_0$: There is no significant relationship between truant behavior and failure in terminal examinations.
$H_1$: There is a significant relationship between truant behavior and performance in terminal examinations.
2. $H_0$: There is no significant relationship between truant behavior and school dropout among secondary school students in Ukum.
$H_1$: There is a significant relationship between truant behavior and school dropout among secondary school students in Ukum.

### Review of Literature

#### The Concept of Truancy

Conceptually, the term "truancy" has been defined in various ways by different people and

agencies such as counselors, psychologists, sociologists, welfare authorities and educators, in general. According to Carter (2009), truancy is a deliberate absence from school on the part of the student without the knowledge and consent of parents, for which no reasonable or acceptable excuse is given. This definition broadens the concept considerably and makes it synonymous with unexcused absence. Collins (2010) conceptualized truancy in respect to students who have been registered with a school but identified as not attending school when the law says they should. This includes absence from lessons.

In the conception of Stoll (2002), truancy refers to a situation whereby a student is absent from school for no legitimate reason. He went further to say that many students do skip either a single lesson or even a full day of school at least once during their academic life. This is because they may want to attend a special event, prepare for a promotion night or simply take what is known in the world of work as a "mental health day". This isolated incidence (truancy) is quite typical and likely to create problems, which can lead to a varied sets of negative and even more dangerous consequences. Similarly, Adeyemo (1999) defines truancy as a delinquent act, which occurs when a child often stays away from the school without good reasons. According to Lee and Miltenberger (1996), students that are truant typically spend the time they are out of school away from their homes and tend to conceal the absences from their parents.

Having examined the definition of truancy by different scholars or researchers, the researchers view truancy as "a deliberate absence from school and non-involvement of the students from school and academic responsibilities without permission or consent of parents or school authorities"

## The Concept of Academic Achievement

Academic achievement has been conceptualized by a plethora of scholars and researchers. According to Cary et al. (2008) academic achievement refers to:

*Performance on a task with measures including comprehension, quality and accuracy of answers of tests, quality and accuracy of problem-solving, frequency and quantity of desired outcome, time or rate to solution, time on task,*

*level reasoning and critical thinking, creativity, recall and retention, and transfer of tasks.*

Dimbisso (2009) on his part defined academic performance to mean the manner in which students deal with their studies and cope with or accomplish different assignments given to them by their instructors within a period of time.

Kobaland and Musek (2001) conceptualized academic achievement objectively and subjectively. They defined the concept objectively as a student's knowledge and his degree of adaptation to academic work, expressed in numerical scores. Their subjective, they saw academic achievement as the student's attitudes towards his achievement and himself, as well as the attitudes of other people such as parents, teachers, lecturers, etcetera, towards his success and himself. To them, the first definition appears to be more or less objective due to its emphasis on numerical scores of students. It measures the degree to which students adapt to schoolwork and to the educational system. The second definition tends to be more or less subjective or psychological. It holds that what establishes academic success is dependent upon the students' attitudes towards their academic achievement and themselves as well as by the attitudes of significant others towards their studies and themselves.

## Effects of Truancy on Student's Academic Achievement

Having identified and explained some of the causes of truancy among secondary school students, the next point of focus is the review of related literature on the effects of truancy on a student's academic achievement.

Geo–opah (2003) in his research discovered that truants, due to their absence from school usually repeat classes and even when they are repeating, they do not feel better because they feel they are overqualified or too accomplished for such a class. Though, few of them (truants) manage to struggle through school, majority of them usually drop out of school if some form of interventions are not taken. Their level of achievement is generally low because of their lack of interest in learning. Most truants tend to view schooling as a form of punishment, while others attend classes just to please their parents and guardians. Students who skip schooling will most likely be unable to meet up with the curriculum set for them by the school. Thus, the

overall scoring and performance of these students tend to be low. Oluremi (2013) in his study found a positive relationship between truancy and academic performance of secondary school students in southwestern Nigeria. The study showed that indeed truancy had significant effects on the academic achievement of the students in the area. Boga (2013) found that truancy negatively affects educational achievement of secondary school students. Similarly, Wheat (1998) argued that the relationship between attendance and achievement could be grasped merely through common sense as students who do not attend classes struggle to comprehend what is taught in school. The United States Department of Education (1996) also affirms that students who miss school face learning difficulties. Thus, high truancy rates affect the general achievement in school, slowing the rate of instruction, which harms all the students, as it could also be an early warning for educational failure (White and Yerneni 2008; US Department of Justice 2009).

Students with higher truancy rates have the lowest academic achievement rates, and are more likely to drop out of school, which indicates that there is a relationship between student attendance and student achievement (U.S. Department of Justice and Delinquency Prevention 2001). Students with low attendance often end up dropping out of school and put themselves at a long-term disadvantage in becoming productive citizens. They are more likely to be welfare recipients, earn much lower salaries and lead less productive lives (U.S. Department of Education 1996).

Wehlage and Rutter (1986), according to the data they collected from their study "High School and Beyond" on student dropout predictors, concluded that low expectations and low grades combined with disciplinary issues and truancy were the most common reasons for students exiting school early. Dekalb (1999) also insisted that truancy increases the possibility of a student being expelled from school. This could be related to the fact that such a student records low grades, which may prompt him/her to leave school. Boga (2013) also found that truancy contributes to higher rates of dropout among secondary school students in Ukum.

## Anomie Theory

Anomie refers to the confusion that arises when social norms conflict. It is a state of normlessness, which arises when there is acute disjunction between cultural goals and legitimate means available for achieving them. The theory was expounded by Merton (1957). Merton used the term to describe the discrepancy between socially accepted goals and the availability of means to achieve those goals. These socially accepted goals are education and hard work, meaning people who apply themselves to study and hard work will be financially successful, and those who do not succeed are labeled as either lazy or flawed. Merton (ibid) used the dominant cultural goal in the United States to illustrate his assertion. To him attaining wealth is a major goal of Americans, but not all Americans possess the means to do this, especially members of minority and disadvantaged groups. Those who find the "road to riches" closed for them experience anomie because an obstacle has thwarted their pursuit of a socially approved goal. When this happens, these individuals may employ deviant behaviors to attain their goals and retaliate against the society, merely to "make a point".

These deviant behaviors include innovation, retreatism, ritualism and rebellion. Innovation is the attaining of societal goals by illegitimate means, and innovators create their own ways to go about obtaining what they want. Ritualism is the acceptance of means but forteiture of the goals. Retreatism is the rejection of both means and the goals. Rebellion is the combination of rejection of both societal goals and means and replacement for other goals and means. The primary contribution of the anomie theory is also sociological in its emphasis in the role of social forces in creating truant deviance.

One of the negative sides of the anomie theory has been criticized for generality. Critics note that the theory's lack of statements concerning the process of learning deviance or truancy includes the internal motivators for deviance or truancy.

The theory has been, however, adopted for the study due to its recognition of the assumption that socially accepted goals such as education and hard work bring success. Therefore, those who study hard have the proclivity of high academic achievement, which is a reflection of success. The theory also appears to suggest that students who do not study hard may not be academically successful, hence low academic achievement, which also reflects failure. Truan-

cy is generally characterized by laziness, irresponsibility, lack of interest and absence from school, which may be a prelude to low academic performance. Students may be, therefore, bound to get low grades if they are not serious with their studies, culminating into low academic performance.

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

### Area of Study

Ukum is a Local Government Area in the Benue state of Nigeria with its headquarters situated in Sankera. It has an area of 1,514 square kilometers (585 square miles) and a population of 216,930 as per the 2006 census. The main occupation of the people of Ukum is farming, while few are traders and civil servants.

### Research Design

This study adopted a survey research design. This design is chosen because it enabled the researchers to select samples from a large population. Also, the design is compatible with both descriptive and inferential analysis.

### Sample and Sample Procedure

The sample for the study is 250 respondents who were secondary school students, selected using a simple random sampling method. The respondents were drawn from secondary school students in the area. In the process of selection of the respondents, the researchers used balloting method to select respondents.

### Instrument of Data Collection

A questionnaire was the instrument used to elicit information from students. The questionnaire was divided into two sections. The first section inquired about the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents where variables such as age, sex and marital status were featured. The second section centered on the effects of truancy on academic achievement in respect to the performance of the students on terminal examinations and their dropout status.

### Method of Data Collection

The researchers took five days to distribute the questionnaires to the respondents. Most of the questionnaires were not returned on time as some were delayed for one week before collation.

### Method of Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics is adopted for data analysis in this study. The research questions were answered by means of descriptive statistics using simple percentages, while a chi-square test was used to test the hypotheses through SPSS version 16.0.

## RESULTS

Table 1 presents socio-demographic characteristics of respondents with respect to their age, sex and marital status. The Table shows that respondents in the age ranges of 11-15 were a majority (127) representing 50.8 percent. Those in the age range of 16-20 were minority (78) representing 31.2 percent, while respondents who were in the age range of 20 and above were 45 representing eighteen percent.

**Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents**

| Demographics | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| *Age* | | |
| 11-15 | 127 | 50.8 |
| 16-20 | 78 | 31.2 |
| 20 and above | 45 | 18 |
| *Sex* | | |
| Male | 146 | 58.4 |
| Female | 104 | 41.6 |
| *Marital Status* | | |
| Single | 208 | 83.2 |
| Married | 41 | 16.4 |
| Divorced | 01 | 0.4 |

*Source:* Field survey, 2013

**Table 2: Chi-square results of relationship between truancy and performance in terminal examinations**

| Truancy | Examination performance | | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Pass | Fail | |
| Truants | 19 (31.3) | 29 (16.7) | 48 |
| Non truants | 144 (131.7) | 58 (70.3) | 202 |
| Total | 163 | 87 | 250 |

$\chi^2$ Calculated=17.181
$\chi^2$ Tabulated = 15.812
Degree of Freedom =1
Level of significance=0.01

In Table 2, the null hypothesis, which states that there is no significant relationship between truant behavior and performance in terminal examinations, has been rejected. This is because the calculated Chi-square value, which is 17.181, is greater than the tabulated value of 15.812 with a degree of freedom of one at a 0.01 level of significance.

**Table 3: Chi-square results of relationship between truancy and dropouts among secondary school students**

| Truancy | Dropouts | | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Dropout | Non- dropout | |
| Truants | 19(16.7) | 29(31.3) | 48 |
| Non-truants | 68 (70.3) | 134(131.7) | 202 |
| Total | 87 | 163 | 250 |

$\chi^2$Calculated=0.599
$\chi^2$ Tabulated = 0.367
Degree of Freedom =1
Level of significance=0.01

In the Table 3, the null hypothesis, which states that there is no significant relationship between truant behavior and dropout among secondary school students, has been rejected. This is because the calculated Chi-square value, which is 0.599, is greater than the tabulated value of 0.367 under 1 degree of freedom with a significance level of 0.01.

## DISCUSSION

Findings have proved that truant behavior has a significant effect on students' academic achievement in terms of their performance in terminal examinations as it leads to failure in these examinations with Chi-square calculated value of 17.181 being greater than the tabulated value of 15.812 with 1 degree of freedom at a 0.01 significance level. This may not be unconnected with high rates on truants who are likely to repeat classes due to failure in terminal examinations. The findings conform to the study by Geo-Opah (2003) who argues that due to absence from school, students usually repeat classes which testifies their failure in these examinations as they are also unlikely to meet up with the curriculum set for them. This finding also tends to agree with several studies and assertions by the US Department of Education (1996), Wheat (1998) and Boga (2013), which indicate that truancy has the propensity to negatively affect educational achievement of students.

The above findings may also have collaborated the assumption by Merton's Anomie theory that socially accepted values like hard work could propel success (Merton 1957). Therefore, students who study hard and attend classes are likely to record success in their educational pursuits but those who are lazy are likely to meet failure in their academic endeavors.

The results have also revealed that there is a significant relationship between truant behavior and dropout rates among secondary school students as the calculated Chi-square value of 0.599 was greater than the tabulated of 0.367 with 1 degree of freedom at a 0.01 significance level. This shows that truancy has negative consequences on the dropout as students who are chronic absentees tend to dropout in the long run. This finding collaborates with arguments by Geo-Opah (2003) that students who are truants have the tendency to drop out of school, as schooling does not make meaning to them. The students see schooling as punishment and something they are doing for the interest of their parents and not for their self-interest. Heilbrunn's (2007) analysis also seems to point to this direction, which suggests that truancy is related to dropout. In the process of his analysis of the cost of truancy on public spending, he appears to argue that truancy has an immense influence on dropout rates and that if reduced, spending on social services could also be reduced. Boga (2013) in her study also shows that dropout in secondary schools in Ukum is influenced by truant behavior of the students.

This finding appears to be in agreement with the propositions of the anomie theory. Again, the assumption that socially accepted goals such as hard work and education lead to success could explain the influence of truant behavior on dropouts. By extrapolation, it is possible to assume that truancy (which is a deviant act) could result in failure of educational pursuit. Drop out is a condition that reflects such failure. Thus, Merton's anomie theory could fit into the explanation of the relationship between truancy and dropout, which is also a reflection of academic achievement.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study it has been concluded that truant behaviors have profound effects on the academic achievement of

secondary school students in Ukum. However, these effects tend to be negative as truancy could lead to poor performance or failure in terminal examinations. Also, it has the tendency to increase the rate of dropouts in secondary schools in the area. Therefore, Merton's Anomie theory, which supposes that socially accepted goals such as education and hard work could assure success seem to agree with the findings. Thus, students who study hard can achieve more academically, while those who do not are bound for failure.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations have been made for the study:

a. More and purposeful research should be carried out to determine the causes of truancy among individual students in secondary schools since this could hamper academic achievement of students. The school authorities and the Ministry of Education should sponsor this.

b. There should be massive incentives for students who excel academically and severe punishment for those who are failures. This may encourage truants or potential truants to take academic matters seriously.

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## APPENDIX I

## QUESTIONNAIRE

**Section A: Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents**

1.  What age category do fall into:
    11-15 [  ] 16-19 [   ] 20 and above [   ]
2.  Sex: Male [  ] Female  [   ]
3.  Marital status: Single [  ] Married [  ] Divorced [   ]

**Section B: Effects of Truancy on Academic Achievement of Students**

4.  What is your level of attendance to classes?
    Often [  ] rarely [   ] Not at all
5.  What is the average pass mark for terminal examinations in your school?
    40% [  ] 50% [  ] 60% [  ]
6.  What average did you get from your last terminal examination?————————————
7.  Are you currently out of school? Yes [   ] No [   ]
8.  If yes, at what class did you stop schooling?————