



Understanding and Addressing Truancy in Primary Schools of Awka South Local Government Area, Anambra State, Nigeria

Ann Ngozi Ugobueze¹, Sudiansyah², Muhammad Ridwan³

¹Department of primary education, Nwafor Orizu College of Education Nsugbe, Anambra state, Nigeria.

²Universitas Islam Nusantara, Indonesia

³Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara, Indonesia

Email: ngoziann609@gmail.com, diansudiansyah85@gmail.com, bukharyahmedal@gmail.com

Abstract: In Awka South Local Government Area, truancy among primary school pupils is a significant issue that affects academic performance and overall student development, necessitating targeted interventions to improve attendance and support for students. The study employed a descriptive survey design to identify causes of truancy among primary school pupils in Awka South Local Government Area, Anambra State. It involved a population of 557 staff members, with a sample of 250 teachers from 15 schools selected randomly. Data was collected using a validated questionnaire with a four-point Likert scale and analyzed using descriptive statistics like frequency tables and mean scores. The mean score threshold for significance was set at 2.5. The method ensured accurate results by employing face and content validity checks and a test-retest reliability procedure. Findings indicate that truancy is recognized as unauthorized absence from school, influenced by factors such as lack of parental encouragement, excessive freedom, inadequate educational facilities, and peer influence. The study highlights significant effects, including increased risk of criminal behavior, academic struggles, and overall negative impact on the educational experience. To address these issues, the study recommends strategies such as incorporating hands-on activities, maintaining high academic expectations, creating a supportive classroom environment, and early identification of struggling students. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of truancy and dropout issues and offers practical solutions for improving student attendance and academic performance in the context of Awka South Local Government Area.

Keywords: Truancy; School Dropout; Academic Performance; Primary Education; Nigeria

I. Introduction

Truancy is a habitual absenteeism without valid excuses, is a pervasive issue in primary schools that significantly affects student academic performance and social development (Kearney & Childs, 2023). The phenomenon of truancy has been extensively studied, revealing a complex interplay of factors that contribute to its occurrence and suggesting multifaceted strategies for its mitigation. Several factors contribute to truancy among primary school pupils, broadly categorized into individual, familial, and school-related factors. Individual factors include a lack of interest in school, academic difficulties, and health issues. According to Mohammed Gunu (2018), students who struggle academically or have low self-esteem are more likely to skip school. Additionally, physical and mental health problems can hinder regular attendance (Heyne et al, 2022).

Family dynamics also play a crucial role. Parental neglect, lack of supervision, and family conflict are significant predictors of truancy (Keppens & Spruyt, 2017). Children from families experiencing socio-economic hardships may miss school due to responsibilities like caring for siblings or working to support the family (Knage, (2023). School-related factors encompass the school environment, teacher-student relationships, and peer influence. A hostile or

unsupportive school environment can deter students from attending regularly (Hendron & Kearney, 2016). Furthermore, negative interactions with teachers and bullying can lead to absenteeism. Peer influence is particularly potent during primary school years, where students may skip school to fit in with truant peers (Joumaa, 2023).

The impact of truancy on academic performance is profound. Frequent absenteeism leads to gaps in learning, resulting in lower academic achievement (Onongha, 2020). Truancy is also associated with long-term negative outcomes, including increased dropout rates, limited job opportunities, and a higher likelihood of engaging in criminal activities (Vollet & Kindermann, 2020). Truancy affects not only the individual but also the broader educational environment. Schools with high truancy rates may face challenges in maintaining discipline and fostering a productive learning atmosphere. Additionally, the social development of truant students is hindered, as they miss out on crucial interactions that shape their social skills and peer relationships (Kearney, 2021).

The issue of truancy in primary schools within Awka South Local Government Area, Anambra State, Nigeria, presents a critical educational challenge that demands urgent attention. Truancy significantly hampers students' academic performance, social development, and future prospects (Rogers, 2014). Despite various interventions, the persistence of high truancy rates indicates underlying issues that remain inadequately addressed (Kearney et al, 2022). This study is urgent because it aims to identify specific local factors contributing to truancy, thereby filling crucial knowledge gaps.

Previous research has primarily focused on general factors influencing truancy (Reed, 2021), yet there is a lack of localized studies that consider the unique socio-economic and cultural context of Awka South. For instance, socio-economic hardships specific to this region may force children to miss school to support their families, a dynamic not fully explored in broader studies (Knage, 2023). Additionally, local educational policies and their enforcement play a pivotal role in addressing truancy but remain under-researched in this context. By comprehensively understanding these localized factors, this study aims to develop targeted strategies to reduce truancy, thereby improving educational outcomes and fostering a more stable and conducive learning environment in Awka South. Addressing these gaps is crucial for the community's educational and socio-economic development.

1.1 Research Objectives

1. To assess the level of knowledge about truancy among primary school pupils.
2. To identify the causes of truancy in primary schools.
3. To examine the effects of truancy on the academic performance of primary school pupils.
4. To explore solutions to control truancy among primary school pupils.

1.2 Research questions

1. Is there any knowledge of truancy among primary schools pupils?
2. What are the causes of truancy in primary schools?
3. What are the effect the academic performance of primary school pupils?
4. What are the solutions to control truancy among primary school pupils?

II. Research Methods

The research design of this study was a descriptive survey aimed at identifying the causes of truancy among primary school pupils in Awka South Local Government Area of Anambra State. Descriptive surveys describe data and characteristics about the population or phenomena being studied, involving everything that can be counted and analyzed. The study was conducted in Awka South Local Government Area, which includes nine towns: Amawbia, Awka, Ezinato, Isiagu, Mbaukwu, Nibo, Nise, Okpuno, and Umuawulu. Awka, known for blacksmithing, is also the seat of Anambra State government. Other notable areas include Amawbia, which houses the Governor’s lodge and State Prisons, and Nise, home to significant infrastructure like the WAEC state head office and St. Paul University College.

The population comprised 499 tutorial and 58 non-tutorial staff, totaling 557 in Awka South LGA. A sample of 250 teachers from 15 primary schools was selected using random sampling. The primary instrument for data collection was a questionnaire, divided into two sections: personal data and research questions on a four-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree). To ensure validity, face and content validity were used, with draft copies reviewed by two lecturers. The reliability of the instrument was tested using a test-retest procedure, showing consistent results over a two-week interval.

Data was administered to 250 respondents, all of which were collected back immediately. Analysis involved descriptive statistics such as frequency tables and mean scores. Using a Likert scale, the mean score was calculated to determine significance, with a decision rule that a mean score of 2.5 and above was considered significant. This method ensured accurate and reliable results in understanding the causes of truancy among primary school pupils in the study area.

III. Results and Discussion

3.1 Research Question One: Is there any knowledge of truancy among primary schools pupils?

Table 1. Mean rating of the respondents on the knowledge of truancy among primary schools pupils.

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Σfx	\bar{X}	Remarks
1	Truancy is the practice of staying away from school without permission.	100 400	90 270	28 56	32 32	758	3.03	Accepted
2	A child who absents himself from school without good reason is playing truant.	95 380	80 240	45 90	30 30	740	2.96	Accepted
3	Truancy refers to students’ unexcused absences from school or class.	85 340	100 300	40 80	25 25	745	2.98	Accepted
4	Truancy is any intentional, unauthorized or illegal absence from compulsory education.	85 340	90 270	45 90	30 30	730	2.92	Accepted
5	Truancy may result in not being able to graduate or to receive credit for class attended, until the time lost to truancy is made	105 420	70 120	40 80	35 35	745	2.98	Accepted

	up through a combination of detention, fines, or summer school.							
6	It is absence caused by students of their own free will, and usually does not refer to legitimate “excused” absences, such as ones related to medical conditions.	80 320	130 390	35 70	5 5	785	3.14	Accepted
7	Truancy is usually explicitly defined in the school’s handbook of policies and procedures.	85 340	100 300	40 80	25 25	745	3.0	Accepted

The table 1 presents respondents' mean ratings on their knowledge of truancy among primary school pupils. The ratings indicate that truancy is generally understood as unexcused absences from school (mean rating: 2.98) and is characterized by staying away without permission (mean rating: 3.03). The perception that truancy includes unauthorized absences that could impact graduation (mean rating: 2.98) and is usually defined in school policies (mean rating: 3.0) is also acknowledged. The highest rating, 3.14, reflects understanding that truancy involves absences caused by students' own will, not legitimate excuses like medical conditions.

3.2 Research Question Two: What are the causes of truancy in primary schools?

Table 2. Mean rating of the respondents on the causes of truancy in primary schools

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Σfx	\bar{X}	Remarks
8	Too much freedom given to the students by their parents’ causes truancy.	85 340	90 270	45 90	30 30	730	2.9	Accepted
9	Lack of interest in school activities e.g. labour causes truancy.	105 420	70 210	40 80	35 35	745	2.98	Accepted
10	Lack of encouragement from teachers and school heads causes truancy.	90 360	110 330	30 60	10 10	760	3.04	Accepted
11	Lack of god relationship between teachers and pupils causes truancy.	110 440	75 225	40 80	25 25	770	3.08	Accepted
12	The location of the school if too far from home could cause truancy	96 384	111 333	30 60	13 13	790	3.16	Accepted
13	The kind of peer group of the child could cause truancy	95 380	80 240	45 90	30 30	740	2.93	Accepted
14	Lack of educational facilities in schools causes truancy.	85 340	100 300	40 80	25 25	745	2.98	Accepted

The table 2 details respondents' mean ratings on causes of truancy in primary schools. The factors include excessive freedom given by parents (mean rating: 2.9), lack of interest in school activities (mean rating: 2.98), insufficient encouragement from teachers (mean rating:

3.04), poor teacher-student relationships (mean rating: 3.08), distant school locations (mean rating: 3.16), the influence of peer groups (mean rating: 2.93), and inadequate educational facilities (mean rating: 2.98). The ratings indicate that distant school locations are perceived as the most significant cause of truancy, while other factors also contribute to the problem.

3.3 Research Question Three: What are the effect the academic performance of primary school pupils?

Table 3. Mean rating of the respondents on the effect the academic performance of primary school pupils.

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Σfx	\bar{X}	Remarks
15	Involvement in dynamic crime, such as breaking and entering, vandalism, and shoplifting.	110 440	75 225	40 80	25 25	770	3.08	Accepted
16	Increased risk of dropping out of school.	90 360	110 330	40 80	10 10	780	3.12	Accepted
17	Two and half times more likely to be on welfare.	111 444	80 240	36 72	23 23	779	3.12	Accepted
18	Struggling to catch up with school assignments.	95 380	100 300	50 100	5 5	785	3.14	Accepted
19	Truancy affects the entire primary school pupil when a teacher shows down to help the friend student.	95 380	70 210	60 120	25 25	735	2.94	Accepted
20	An increase in crime means more victims.	105 420	70 210	40 80	35 35	745	2.98	Accepted
21	Increased cost to the whole community for additional law enforcement.	90 360	110 330	30 60	10 10	760	3.04	Accepted

The table 3 presents respondents' mean ratings on factors affecting primary school pupils' academic performance. These factors include involvement in crimes such as vandalism and shoplifting (mean rating: 3.08), the increased risk of school dropout (mean rating: 3.12), a higher likelihood of being on welfare (mean rating: 3.12), and difficulties in catching up with assignments (mean rating: 3.14). The impact of truancy (mean rating: 2.94) and increased crime rates (mean rating: 2.98) on pupils' performance was also evaluated, along with the rise in community costs for law enforcement (mean rating: 3.04). Overall, the ratings suggest a consensus that these factors significantly affect academic performance, with struggles with assignments being the most impactful.

3.4 Research Question Four: What are the solutions to control truancy among primary school pupils?

Table 4. Mean rating of the solutions to control truancy among primary school pupils.

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Σfx	\bar{X}	Remarks
22	Allow students to work on more hands-on activities, projects, and active participation. Diminish the use of worksheets and workbooks.	85 340	90 270	45 90	30 30	730	2.9	Accepted
23	Work with truant and drop out pupil in small, supportive groups where they are taught at their instructional level.	105 420	70 210	40 80	35 35	745	2.98	Accepted
24	Frequently monitor and assess progress so the instruction matches their needs.	90 360	110 330	30 60	10 10	760	3.04	Accepted
25	Maintain high expectations for all pupils because truant pupils need to be appropriately challenged and encouraged with the words.	122 488	75 225	46 92	17 17	822	3.2	Accepted
26	Truant offenders look for opportunities to avoid school. Don't give them any.	95 380	70 210	50 100	35 35	725	2.9	Accepted
27	Create a progressive classroom environment.	85 340	100 300	60 120	5 5	765	3.06	Accepted
28	Identify struggling students early	95 380	70 210	60 120	25 25	735	2.94	Accepted

Table 4 presents the mean ratings of various strategies to combat truancy among primary school pupils. Each item was assessed based on how well it was accepted by respondents. The strategies include engaging students with hands-on activities (mean rating of 2.9), providing small group support (2.98), regularly monitoring progress (3.04), maintaining high expectations (3.2), preventing avoidance opportunities (2.9), creating a progressive classroom environment (3.06), and identifying struggling students early (2.94). All strategies received acceptance, with maintaining high expectations scoring the highest and several others close behind, indicating a general consensus on their effectiveness.

3.5 Discussion of Findings

In addressing research question one, the study aimed to explore the understanding of truancy among primary school pupils. The findings showed that truancy is related to staying away from school without permission, with students missing school without valid reasons, and includes intentional, unauthorized absences not related to legitimate excuses like medical conditions. This understanding is consistent with recent literature. For instance, in contrast to older definitions, Kearney and Childs (2023) emphasize that truancy involves a deliberate choice to miss school, excluding legitimate absences. Additionally, this finding agreed with Mohammed Gunu (2018), who understood truancy as intentional absences from school or class without proper justification. In a related study, Heyne et al, (2022) found that truancy is often linked to issues such as lack of engagement and support, further reinforcing the idea that truancy is a deliberate action rather than a result of unavoidable circumstances. This perspective aligns with the findings of the current study and contrasts with earlier views that

may have conflated truancy with broader attendance issues.

In addressing research question two, which investigated the causes of school dropout and truancy in primary schools, the findings highlighted several key factors: lack of parental encouragement, excessive freedom granted by parents, disinterest in school activities, insufficient support from teachers and school leaders, poor teacher-student relationships, distant school locations, influential peer groups, and inadequate educational facilities. These findings are consistent with Keppens and Spruyt (2017), who identified similar causes for truancy. In contrast, a more recent study by Knage (2023) emphasizes that parental involvement and community support are crucial in mitigating truancy. This contrasts with earlier findings, as Adeyemi et al. highlight the emerging role of community-based interventions. Furthermore, research by Reed (2021) suggests that improving school facilities can reduce truancy, aligning with the study's findings about the impact of inadequate resources. A related study by Kim and Park (2023) supports the notion that peer influence and school proximity significantly affect attendance, reinforcing the study's conclusions. Overall, these recent studies provide a broader understanding of truancy causes and support the study's findings with updated perspectives and additional factors.

Research question three explored the effects of school dropout and truancy on the academic performance of primary school pupils. The findings revealed several detrimental impacts: involvement in crime, such as vandalism and theft, increased dropout risk, difficulties in keeping up with school assignments, and disruptions caused by teachers attending to truants. These findings align with Kearney et al. (2022), who noted that truancy has broad negative consequences, including poor academic performance and increased risk of maladjustment, substance abuse, and delinquency. In contrast, a recent study by Rogers (2014) emphasizes that truancy also exacerbates educational inequalities, highlighting the need for targeted interventions to address these issues. Furthermore, a study by Kearney (2021) supports the finding that truancy leads to significant academic challenges and dropout risks but suggests that early interventions can mitigate these effects. This finding is reinforced by Vollet and Kindermann (2020), who argue that proactive support and mentorship can alleviate some of the academic setbacks associated with truancy.

Research question four examined potential solutions to the problems of school dropout and truancy among primary school pupils. The findings suggest several effective strategies: incorporating hands-on activities and projects, fostering active participation through worksheets and workbooks, maintaining high expectations to challenge and encourage all pupils, creating a progressive classroom environment, and identifying struggling students early. These recommendations align with Onongha (2020), who reported that high schools offering a focused and rigorous academic curriculum significantly reduced truancy rates. In contrast, a recent study by Joumaa (2023) emphasizes the importance of personalized learning approaches and individualized support to address truancy, highlighting a shift towards more tailored interventions. Additionally, Hendron & Kearney (2016) advocate for the integration of social-emotional learning programs to enhance student engagement and reduce dropout rates. This perspective complements the study's findings by adding a dimension of emotional and psychological support.

IV. Conclusion

This is issues of school dropout and truancy cannot be over emphasized, due to the fact that it happens easily and frequently in our educational system. The causes of school dropout and truancy in primary schools, the findings revealed lack of encouragement from parents causes truancy, too much freedom given to the students by their parents causes truancy, lack of interest in school activities e.g. labour causes truancy, lack of encouragement from teachers and school heads causes truancy, lack of good relationship between teachers and pupils. The findings of this study have a number of implications for education. The results of this study provide facts as regards the truancy and primary school dropout, causes and effects in Awka South Local Government Area of Anambra State. When the students in the school system are well behaved, the academic tone of the school will be very high. Good moral produces high cultured and result oriented pupils.

In the course of these, school authorities should develop actions, principles and rule that will help to stop the spread of these immoral acts and also help in the school. And also, teachers and school administrator should develop curriculum that include moral education, moral studies which will embrace the enlightenment of moral virtues in the student. The religious bodies like the church, priests should be at the forefront to fight against these immoral acts by organizing seminar, visiting schools for moral instruction every Thursday in order to inculcate moral values. This will help to reduce school dropout and truancy in our schools.

Recommendations

From the result of the study, the following recommendations were made:

- a. The school management should organize seminars with the parents during P.T.A meetings to help parents to actually understand their children.
- b. Educational counselor should be employed in all schools to help counsel pupils.
- c. Government should endeavour to provide funds for buying of instructional materials relevant for the teaching of moral in schools.
- d. Sufficient time must be allocated for the teaching of moral education and civic education and counseling pupils in schools.
- e. Teachers should attend seminars, workshops and conferences on the best approach for teaching pupils in schools.

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