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TRIGGER FACTORS OF TRUANCY BEHAVIOUR AMONG ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PUPILS AS REPORTED BY TEACHERS IN KWARA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Truancy behaviour is detrimental to both the pupils' and teachers' overall achievement, parents' effort as well as the security of the pupils. Various factors contribute to the act of absence of pupils from school. This study investigated trigger factors of truancy behaviour among elementary pupils as reported by teachers in Kwara State, Nigeria. The study is descriptive and it involved 450 participants who were selected from the population, which comprised all primary school teachers in Kwara State. The purposive and stratified sampling techniques were used to select the respondents. A researcher-designed questionnaire titled "Trigger Factors of Truancy Behaviour Questionnaire (TFTBQ)" was used. The questionnaire possessed a reliability coefficient of $r=77$, after being subjected to the test retest method. Two research questions and two hypotheses were raised and formulated for the study. All hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance. The result revealed that school-related factor was the most significant trigger factor of truancy behaviour. Respondents were different in their report of trigger factors of truancy behaviour based on gender but similar on teaching experience. It was recommended that school-related and home-related factors should be given priority while working on trigger factors of truancy behaviour among elementary school pupils; and learning environment should be pupil-friendly.

Key Words: Trigger Factors, Truancy Behaviour, Elementary School, Teachers

Introduction

Truancy behaviour among elementary school pupils could be described as an act of any intentional, unjustified, unauthorised, or illegal absence from school within the period stipulated for compulsory attendance. It is the absence from school activities caused by pupils of their own free will, which usually may not refer to legitimate excused absences, such as ones related to medical conditions. The behaviour is called skipping class when it involves attending school but not going to class.

There seems to be an influx in truancy behaviour across the different states in Nigeria owing to the school population that is steadily on the rise. With the growing level of truancy behaviour among pupils, the multiplier effects become conspicuous on daily basis. The devastating effects of this behaviour could be overwhelming and therefore calls for attention in order to be able to mitigate the trend. However, trigger factors of truancy behaviour among pupils vary across individuals, schools,

background, disposition and the society at large. The role of *in loco parentis* played by teachers often affords them the opportunity to be closely associated with pupils and thus be able to report various aspects of their (pupils) behaviour, particularly truancy behaviour. Truancy behaviour, which is synonymous to habitual act of being absent from school without permission, is an age long problem affecting the overall success of education when considered globally. Truancy behaviour is exhibited in different dimensions among elementary school pupils. According to Amos (2016), there are three major patterns through which truancy behaviour is exhibited: habitual; occasional; and casual. Habitual truancy behaviour occurs when a truant pupil constantly and continually absent him/herself from school without the due knowledge or consent of his/her parents and the school authorities. Habitual truants mainly miss numerous full work of school days. Their frequency of absenteeism becomes a regular behaviour or habit. Occasional truancy behaviour occurs when the pupil does not constantly and continually absent him/herself from school. The pupil's level of absenteeism from school without the permission of the parents or school authority is not regular. For example, a pupil fails to attend school because he/she helps to take care of the siblings at home once in awhile. Casual truancy behaviour occurs when the pupil absents him/herself from school by chance. This act of truancy or unexcused absence from school is not regular and constant but happens by chance. All these patterns of truancy behaviour have attendant effects on the pupils, school and parents' achievement.

In every country of the world, there is always a specified period for compulsory school attendance. A pupil who indulges in failing to attend school without permission from related school authorities and goes about to roam about the streets is termed truant. Bill (2010) reported that hundreds of thousands of American students are absent from school without permissible excuses each day, and this issue is ranked among the top ten problems facing schools across the country. Therefore, truancy is a national problem in America and contributes significantly towards the undermining of the American educational system. The study further reported that 1.5%, 1.8%, 2.0%, and 2.4% of the entire student population of England, Wales, Scotland, and Ulster respectively miss class without authorisation, and one in five students are identified as committing truancy in Scotland each day. The reports are indication that the phenomenon of truancy behaviour in schools is a global pandemic. The overall prevalence of truancy in Swaziland was 21.6% with variation between male and female among 1328 participants: 27.4% (605) and 17.9% (723) in males and females respectively (Siziya, Muula & Rudatsikira, 2007). In Mozambique, the prevalence of truancy was 36.6% (38.4% of males and 35.1% of females) (Seidu, 2015). Nigeria is not exempted in the global problem of truancy behaviour particularly among elementary school pupils with its devastating consequences.

Rodriguez and Conchas (2009) indicated that truancy's consequences are extensive, resulting in negative implications for multiple levels of society. In the short-term, truancy can predict maladjustment, poor academic

performance, school dropout, substance abuse, delinquency, and teen-age pregnancy. In the long-term, evidence reveals that truancy is a predictor of poor adult outcomes, including violence, marital instability, job instability, adult criminality, and incarceration. Truant pupils are at risk of many negative outcomes, including educational failure, social isolation, bullying behaviour, low self-esteem, child sexual harassment, violence and maladjusted adulthood. In addition to placing pupils at risk, truancy has harmful social and financial consequences. Communities with high rates of truancy are likely to have corresponding rates of daytime criminal activity, insecurity and vandalism (Bill, 2010). Regardless of the dire consequences, the involvement of elementary pupils in truancy behaviour could be blamed on different factors.

Some of the major factors influencing truancy are poor relationship between children and parents, poor physical conditions at home, use of corporal punishment in the house and lack of parental interest in the child's welfare, low self-esteem (Bill, 2010), pupils' poor interest, peer influence, broken home, poor learning environment (Fareo, 2013), and distance between home and school (Afolabi, 2019). Adeloje (2008) reported a high correlation between home circumstances and persistent truancy among secondary school students in Kano, Nigeria. This implies that the home environment contributes to truancy behaviour among students. The responses in the study were different based on gender and qualification. DeSocio, VanCura and Nelson (2007) indicated that as many as 30% of youths who are absent on a given school day are representative of school disengagement,

or detachment. Krucik (2013) categorised causes of truancy among school children into three, viz: school (poor tracking of attendance, unsafe learning environment, bullying etc.); parents (poor parenting skills, inability to supervise children, neighbourhood violence, pressure to stay home or work to help the family etc.) students (giving in to peer pressure to skip school, boredom, lack of ambition, poor grades (especially being held back by a grade), low self-esteem, participation in gang activity etc.). The study rated school-related problems as the most frequent cause of truancy, which is followed by parent and student.

The teachers' report of trigger factors of truancy behaviour among elementary school pupils becomes imperative considering the age of children at that early stage of education and their significant affinity with home as well as playmates, which could be potential determinants of school attendance and otherwise. In Nigeria, children at elementary school stage are usually between the ages of four and twelve which is the age range when most children are peculiarly attached to their parents and peers than school activities. In addition, children at that stage may not consider it wrong exhibiting truancy behaviour. Since teachers are the custodians of the school attendance records and equally monitor the behaviour of each pupil, they are considered much appropriate in this study to report truancy behaviour among pupils. However, some variables could interplay to determine the perception of individuals on different issues in the society. Such variables which are factored into this study are gender, years of teaching experience and educational

qualification. Ajiboye (2020) found no significant difference in the trigger stimuli of anxiety among higher education lecturers based on qualification and years of experience, but difference based on gender. Contrarily, Adeyemi (2019) found significant difference in the teachers' expression of solutions to truancy among secondary school students in Irepodun LGA, Kwara State based on gender, educational qualification and work experience. Thus, this study examined trigger factors of truancy behaviour among elementary school pupils as reported by teachers in Kwara state, Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Truancy behaviour is detrimental to pupils' achievement, progression and school completion and personal security. Certainly, pupils who miss school are often far behind their peers in the classroom. This, in turn, leads to low self-esteem and increases the likelihood that such pupils will drop out of school. Henry (2007) found that truancy predicted maladjustment, poor academic performance, school dropout, substance abuse and delinquency. Fareo (2013) concluded that truancy hinders effective learning and could lead to poor academic performance of truants. Further, female manifestation of truancy behaviour was found to be significant with at-test value of -2.88 ($P < 0.05$). Khalid and Khalid (2017) found that there are three main factors or indicators which are badly affected by absenteeism, which are class participation, coordination of students with teachers and peers, and the third is the grades of students. The attendant effects of truancy on the pupils, teachers, parents and policy makers in the education industry have often generated research attention in the society.

Considering the devastating effects and the gap in research, this study investigated trigger factors of truancy behaviour among elementary school pupils as reported by teachers in Kwara State, Nigeria.

Purpose of the Study

This study aimed at investigating teachers' report of trigger factors of truancy behaviour among elementary school pupils. It also sought to identify the most significant factor stimulating truancy behaviour. It also determined the influence of gender, years of teaching experience and educational qualification on teachers' report of trigger stimuli of anxiety among elementary school pupils in Kwara State.

Research Question

- i.) What are the trigger factors of truancy behaviour among elementary pupils?
- ii.) Which is the most significant trigger for truancy behaviour among pupils?

Hypotheses

- i.) There is no significant difference in the trigger factors of truancy behaviour among elementary school pupils as reported by teachers based on gender.
- ii.) There is no significant difference in the trigger factors of truancy behaviour among elementary school pupils as reported by teachers based on teaching experience.

Method

The study was a descriptive survey design. The population for this study consisted of all teachers in the primary schools across Kwara State, Nigeria. However, the sample of 450 was drawn

from the three senatorial districts of the State. The purposive sampling technique was used to select six schools with the highest number of teachers in each senatorial district. The stratified sampling technique was used to select 150 participants from each of the senatorial district, which is 25 respondents from each school selected.

The instrument used to collect data for this study was a structured questionnaire type titled "Trigger Factors of Truancy Behaviour Questionnaire (TFTBQ)". The instrument was patterned in the four points Likert scale format of Strongly Agree; Agree; Disagree; and Strongly Disagree with values on a continuum of 4-1 point. The highest and least possible mean score for each item is both 4 and 1 respectively. Thus, the average mean score for each category of trigger factor

for truancy behaviour is 2.50 ($4+3+2+1=10 \div 4=2.50$). Any category with 2.50 and above was considered significant while below 2.50 was considered not significant. The one with the highest average mean score was considered the most significant. The test retest method was used to obtain the reliability through the Pearson's Product Moment Correlation formula. A value of $r=0.77$ was obtained. While collecting data, the researcher obtained the informed consent of the respondents that participated, which suggests that participation was voluntary. The data collected were subjected to the descriptive and inferential analysis of mean, t-test and analysis of variance (ANOVA) statistics. All hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Table 1: Demographic Data of Respondents

Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	172	38.2%
Female	278	61.8%
Total	450	100.0
Teaching Exp		
1-10 Years	281	62.5
11-20 Years	136	30.2
Above 20 Years	33	7.3
Total	450	100.0

The result in Table1 shows that more females (61.8%) participated than males (38.2%) while more teachers with 1-10years (62.5%) of work experience participated than those with 11-20years (30.2%) and above 20years (7.3%).

Research Question 1: What are the trigger factors of truancy behaviour

among elementary pupils as reported by teachers?

Research Question 2: Which is the most significant trigger factor for truancy behaviour among pupils as reported by teachers?

Table 2: Mean of Trigger Factors of Truancy Behaviour among Pupils as Reported by Teachers

Truancy Behaviour is triggered by:	Mean
Pupil-Related	2.13
lack of interest in school	2.41
boredom	2.37
poor school grades	1.16
low self-esteem	1.95
Average Mean=	
School-Related	3.22
poor tracking of pupils' attendance	3.17
unfriendly learning environment	2.94
poor teaching methods	3.48
bullying in school	3.20*
Average Mean=	
Peer-Related	2.15
giving to peer pressure to skip school	3.13
participating in gang activities	1.91
imitating classmates who engage in truancy	2.02
associating with classmates with low grades	2.12
Average Mean=	
Home-Related	3.14
poor parenting skills	2.99
inability to supervise children's academic progress	3.10
involving children in household chores during school hours	3.07
inability to provide learning materials (e.g. textbooks, pens)	3.08*
Average Mean=	

* = Significant

The result in Table 2 shows that school-related factor has the highest mean score average (3.20) followed by home-related factor (3.08). Others are peer-related (2.12) and pupil-related (1.95). Thus, both school-related and home-related factors are significant because they have mean score above 2.50 (the cut-off point), which answered research question 1. School-related with the

highest is the most significant, which answered research question 2.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference in the trigger factors of truancy behaviour among elementary school pupils as reported by teachers based on gender.

Table 3: t-test result on Reported Trigger Factors of Truancy Behaviour Based on Gender.

VARIABLES	N	MEAN	DF	CAL.T	CRIT.T	P.VAL	DECISION
MALE	172	48.13	448	3.15*	1.96	0.000	Sig.
FEMALE	278	53.21					

*Sig; $p < 0.05$

The result in Table 3 shows that the cal.t (3.15) is greater than the crit.t (1.96) with a corresponding p. less than the significance level ($p < 0.05$). The hypothesis was, therefore, not accepted.

Thus, there is a significant difference in the trigger factors of truancy behaviour

among elementary school pupils as reported by teachers based on gender.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference in the trigger factors of truancy behaviour among elementary school pupils as reported by teachers based on teaching experience

Table 4: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) based on Teaching Experience

TEACHING EXP.	SS	DF	MS	CAL.F	CRIT.FP.	DECISION
BETWEEN GROUP	942.96	2	471.48	2.83	3.00 0.10	NOT SIG
WITHIN GROUP	23123.31	447	51.73			
TOTAL	24066.27	449				

The result in Table 4 shows that the cal.F (2.83) is less than the crit.F (3.00) with a corresponding p. (0.10) greater than the significance level. The hypothesis was therefore accepted. Thus, there is no significant difference in the trigger factors of truancy behaviour among elementary school pupils as reported by teachers based on teaching experience.

Discussion

The result in Table 2 provided answers to the research questions. It was revealed that school-related and home-related (mean scores= 3.20 and 3.08 respectively) are the significant factors that triggers truancy behaviour among elementary school pupils as reported by teachers. However, school-related factor is the most significant factor that trigger truancy behaviour among elementary school pupils as reported by teachers. Both peer-related and pupils-related trigger factors were not significant. Some of the items indicating school-related are poor tracking of pupils' attendance, unfriendly learning environment and bullying. This could be a reflection of what obtains in

elementary schools, that pupils' attendance, unfriendly learning environment and bullying activities are not adequately monitored. The situation might, therefore, trigger truancy behaviour among pupils. Fareo (2013) equally found poor learning environment as a major cause of truancy among secondary school students, while Krucik (2013) also found school related factors as being the most frequently reported cause of truancy among students. This implies that the tendency to skip school days by pupils is determined by school environment; both human and non-human factors.

Home-related was ranked 2nd as being the trigger factor for truancy behaviour among pupils. This finding agrees with Bill (2010), Fareo (2013) and Krucik (2013) who had earlier rated parent/home as one of the most frequent factors that influence truancy among students. One may attribute the reason to the fact that the home plays significant roles in encouraging/discouraging pupils' attendance since parents, to a large extent, determine when their children leave home and go

to school. Some of the issues alluded to by respondents as triggering truancy behaviour are poor parenting skills, inability to supervise children's academic progress, and involving children in household chores during school hours.

This implies that truancy behaviour among pupils is a product of their experience at home. Thus, parents' attitude to pupils' academic progress and engagement in household chores are potential trigger factors for truancy behaviour.

On the other hand, peer-related and pupils-related were not significant trigger factors for truancy behaviour among pupils. This corroborates Krucik (2013) who rated students as the least factor that caused truancy. This reason could be that personal characteristics may not significantly influence elementary school pupils as much as the environment (school and home) because of their tender age. Nevertheless, Fareo (2013) rated peer influence high as a factor causing truancy among secondary school students. The difference between this study and Fareo (2013) could be adduced to the fact that elementary school pupils are often more influenced by home rather than peers. Therefore, peers are not likely capable of influencing their (pupils) truancy behaviour.

The result of the analysis of hypothesis showed that there was significant difference in the trigger factors of truancy behaviour among elementary school pupils as reported by teachers based on gender. Thus, male and female teachers were different in their report of trigger factors of truancy behaviour. The analysis revealed that female respondents (mean = 53.21) had higher report on trigger factors of truancy

behaviour than male counterparts (mean = 48.13). The reason for this could be that, female teachers because of their tenderness, might be closer and more concerned with truancy behaviour of pupils and thus being able to report more on trigger factors of various behaviours among pupils, particularly truancy. The result in this study is similar to that of Ajiboye (2020) in which both male and female lecturers in higher education differed on the expression of trigger stimuli of anxiety. Also, Adeloye (2008) found significant difference based on gender. This implies that it is likely that both males and females would always be different in their expression of truancy behaviour among elementary school pupils.

There was no significant difference in the trigger factors of truancy behaviour among elementary school pupils based on teaching experience. Regardless of the variation in the number of years spent in teaching, respondents' reports of trigger factors of truancy behaviour were similar. This corroborates the findings of Adeloye (2008) and Ajiboye (2020) where respondents were similar in their responses on causes of truancy and trigger stimuli of anxiety respectively based on work experience. This implies that, work experience would not always influence teachers in their expression of truancy behaviour among elementary school pupils.

Conclusion

Based on the research questions and hypotheses, it could be concluded that the significant trigger factors of truancy behaviour are school-related and home-related. Some of the features of these factors are poor tracking of pupils' attendance, unfriendly learning

environment, bullying, poor parenting skills and involvement of pupils in house chores during school hours. Both male and female teachers were not similar in their report of trigger factors of truancy behaviour among elementary school pupils; Female group reported more trigger factors of truancy behaviour than the male group. Regardless of teaching experience, teachers would always be similar in their report of trigger factors of truancy behaviour but would differ based on qualifications.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following are recommended:

- *School-related and home-related factors should always be put into consideration when attending to trigger factors of truancy behaviour among elementary school pupil;*
- *The elementary school environment should be pupils-friendly and tracking of attendance be given priority in order to enhance attendance and discourage truancy behaviours;*
- *Guidance Counsellors should assist to reduce truancy behaviour among pupils by working on bullying activities which is one of the barriers to school attendance;*
- *Parents should monitor pupils academic progress and desist from engaging them in house chores during school hours; and*
- *Gender should be considered when requesting teacher's report of trigger factors of truancy behaviour.*

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