

Perceived Indices of Truancy Among Selected Adolescents in Oyo Town: Implications for Behavioural Change

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Abstract

The study investigated perceived indices of truancy behaviour among selected adolescents in Oyo town. The descriptive survey study had 200 randomly selected adolescents from five secondary schools in Oyo town. A self-designed instrument tagged Adolescent Truancy Scale (ATS) was employed in collecting data for the study and the data was subjected to t-test statistical analysis to test the 2 stated hypotheses. The findings revealed that significant differences existed in the perceptions of male and female adolescents as touching causes of truancy ($3.50 > 1.96$). Also, significant differences existed in the perceptions of adolescents from educated and those from uneducated homes ($2.41 > 1.96$); the two hypotheses were thus rejected. Implications were drawn for the findings. It was recommended that government at all levels should make schools more students-friendly to attract students and sustain their interests in school attendance.

Keywords: Adolescent, Truancy, Absenteeism, Delinquent behaviour, environment.

Background to the Study

In recent times, there has been a general outcry that students' academic performances are deteriorating most especially at the post primary school level (Aremu, 2004). The nation today is witnessing an unprecedented indiscipline and moral laxity in her institutions of learning. This situation is a wrong signal for the Nigerian adolescents' future. The school plays an important role in the socialisation of the young ones in the society. The school provides basic training in human relationship and in the regulation of individual behaviour, as well as providing opportunities for acquisition of needed competencies (Olufadeju, 2000). When a child therefore refuses to make himself available in the school, he becomes a burden to the family and the society at large. This major reason makes the problem of adolescent truancy an issue that demands urgent attention and solution.

There have been various suggestions for the downtrend in students' academic performance by educationists and counselling psychologists. According to Akinboye (1980), poor school attendance is an indicator of poor academic performance. He noted that poor school attendance makes for poor progress and for difficulty in forming friendly links with other children. According to him, the typical truant is unhappy at home, unpopular at school and unsuccessful in his class work.

Truancy has been defined as absence from school for no legitimate reason (Stoll, 1990). The key terms of this simple definition have, however been much debated. Atkinson, Halsey, Wilkin and Kinder (2000) point to differences in the extent of absence from avoidance of single lesson to absences of several weeks, while the National Centre for School Engagement (2008) defines truancy as any unexcused absence from school.

Though, there have been speculations as regards the causes of truancy, it has not been possible to identify correctly what aspect of the school curricular is faulty. Among these speculations are perhaps, the poor school environment in most of the schools, poor psychological knowledge and method of teaching, ignorance and illiteracy of parents, and inadequate facilities in most of the Nigerian secondary schools.

The National Centre for School Engagement (2008) argued that the factors that contribute to truancy stem from three realms: family and community, school and personal psychological characteristics. The school factors identified are: lack of effective and consistently applied attendance policies, poor record-keeping, teachers' characteristics (such as lack of respect for students and neglect of divers student needs), unsafe environment etc. Parts of the home and community factors identified are: family health or financial concerns, pressures arising from teen pregnancy or parenting, safety issues (such as violence near home), parental alcoholism or drug abuse, negative role models (such as peers who are truant or delinquents), parents/guardians who do not value education etc while the personal factors include poor academic performance, unmet mental health needs, alcohol and drug use and lack of vision of education as a means to achieve goals.

Whatever the causes of truancy, the effect is quite enormous on the adolescent learner and the society. Truancy has been clearly identified as one of the early warning signals of students headed for potential delinquent activity, social isolation, or educational failure via expulsion, suspension or dropping out out (Huzinga, Loeber, Thornberry & Cothorn, 2000). Bell, Lee and Dynlacht (1994) found that truants have low self-esteem and experience greater feelings of rejection or criticism from their parents than non-truants.

Truancy is a gateway to crime. High rates of truancy are linked to high daytime burglary rates and high vandalism (U.S. Department of Education, 1999). According to the Los Angeles County Office of Education, truancy is the most powerful predictor of juvenile delinquent behaviour. Truancy is the first sign of trouble; the first indicator that a young person is giving up and loving his/her way (USDE, 1999). When young people start

skipping school, they are telling their parents, school officials and the community at large that they are in trouble and need our help if they are to keep moving forward in life.

Taking the above evidences into consideration, one would see that relationship and influence on truancy may be very vital. It has a long-lasting consequence on the Nigerian society. This paper therefore examines perceptions of selected adolescents towards truancy with the aim of making recommendations for behavioural changes in secondary school adolescents.

Statement of the Problem

Chronic school absenteeism has been identified as a precursor to undesirable outcomes in adolescence, including academic failure, school drop-out and juvenile delinquency. In spite of the effects of truancy on adolescent functioning, little research has been conducted to identify the causative factors and methods of its reduction, particularly among secondary school adolescents in Nigeria. The undesirable behaviour if not arrested could make the future of the Nigerian society bleak, since today's adolescents are the future leaders.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to find out some demographic variables associated with truancy behaviour of school going adolescents in Oyo town. The study also aimed at comparing the perceptions of adolescents in relation to the indices of truancy among school going adolescents.

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. There will be no significant difference in the perceptions of male and female adolescents in relation to truancy.
2. There will be no significant difference in the perceptions of adolescents from highly educated homes and those from uneducated homes in relation to truancy.

Methodology

Research Design

The study employed the descriptive survey design. This was considered appropriate because the study involved a large number of participants.

Population and Sample

The population for this study included adolescents in secondary schools in Oyo town. However, because not all school-going adolescents could be reached, some samples were selected for the study.

Two-hundred adolescents were randomly selected from five schools with records of truancy and other delinquent behaviours. Forty students each were randomly selected from each of the five schools.

Instrument

An adapted scale titled 'Adolescent Truancy Scale (ATS) was employed in collecting data for the study. The scale has two sections: A and B.

Section A contains the demographic data like sex, age range, religion, etc, while section B has twenty question items on four-point likert responses, from Strongly Agree (SA) to Strongly Disagree (SD).

Validity and Reliability of Instrument

The scale was subjected to vetting by experts in the field of psychometrics and counselling psychology. All the modifications were incorporated into the final draft of the scale. This ensured the content and face validity.

The scale was also administered on a smaller number of school adolescents a week after the study; the correlational coefficient was 0.65, which the researcher found satisfactory. This ensured its reliability.

Procedure for Data Collection

The instrument was administered by the researcher with the help of some teacher friends who served as research assistants. The researcher having randomized the participants instructed them on the purpose of the study and distributed the questionnaires. The questionnaires were retrieved after the expiration of the time slated for the response.

Data Analysis

The stated hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance with the student t-test statistical method.

Results

The results of the findings are hereby presented table by table.

Hypothesis I: There will be no significant difference in the perceptions of male and female adolescents in relation to truancy behaviour.

Variables	N	X	SD	Df	t-obs	t-crit	P
Male	96	1.58	14.04	198	3.50	1.96	Rejected
Female	104	71.40	64.45				

The result in table I above shows that the t-obs (3.50) is greater than the t-crit (1.96) i.e $3.50 > 1.96$ at 0.05 level of significance. The null hypothesis was thus rejected meaning that adolescent boys and girls differ on their perceptions of causes of truancy.

This finding is not strange however, as male adolescents are prone to truancy than the female adolescents. This corroborates the findings of Akinranti (1980) who found no statistical difference in the male and female perception of truancy among secondary school adolescents.

Hypothesis II: There will be no significant difference in the perceptions of adolescents from highly educated and uneducated homes.

Variables	N	X	SD	Df	t-obs	t-crit	P
Educated Home	88	31.01	5.25	198	2.41	1.96	Rejected
Uneducated Home	112	29.30	7.07				

The findings on table II above show that the t-obs (2.41) is greater than the t-crit (1.96) i.e $2.41 > 1.96$. This implies that there are differences in the perceptions of adolescents from highly educated and uneducated homes on causes of truancy.

The reason for the finding may not be far-fetched. It means adolescents from lowly or uneducated homes are prone to truancy than their counterparts from highly educated homes. The finding is in conjunction with Igbogbor (1984) who found that truant adolescents served as major source of help to their parents' home and business, were doing less in school than non-truant counterparts.

Conclusion

It can be concluded in this study that significant differences existed in the perceptions of male and female adolescents and adolescents from highly educated homes and adolescents from uneducated homes in relation to truancy. Also, it was found that male adolescents and adolescents from uneducated homes are more prone to truancy than their female adolescents from highly educated homes.

Implications of findings for Behavioural Change

The goal of any counselling intervention is to alter the undesirable or maladaptive behaviour. Therefore, the implications of these findings are:

- Adolescents who are the future Nigerian leaders are at risk, if the truancy behaviour is not tackled earlier. It means rogues and misfits will be saddled with the responsibilities of governance. There is therefore the need for adolescents to change their behaviour and become useful citizens of the society.
- The adolescent truants from uneducated homes will eventually become liabilities to their families and society at large. They may eventually become miscreants or area boys and participate in all forms of crime. This may be unsafe for the Nigerian society.

Recommendations

- The government should equip Nigerian secondary schools to be more student –friendly and attractive to students.
- Teachers should be trained in human relation to be more accommodating and emotionally intelligent to handle students' misbehaviour.
- Guidance counsellors should be deployed to all secondary schools and be empowered and equipped to establish behavioural change interventions to avert maladaptive behaviours in schools.
- Parents should be well-enlightened and informed to take good care of their wards and create time to monitor their progresses.
- Young adolescents should be re-orientated as touching life values. The get-rich quickly syndrome among Nigerian adolescents needs a form of cognitive restructuring for a better Nigerian society.
- A truancy court should be established in all Local Government Areas to hear cases of truancy as reported by the school authority with the parents, school authority and truants in attendance.

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