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Psycho-Social Factors as Predictors of Truancy Behaviour among Secondary School Students in Ogun State, Nigeria

Ogundokun M. O. & Olawole O. O.

Department of Guidance and Counselling University Of
Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria

Abstract

The study investigated some psycho-social factors as predictors of truancy behavior among secondary school students in Ogun state, Nigeria. Descriptive survey research design was employed. A stratified random sampling technique was employed in selecting 300 participating students from the five schools randomly selected from the list of 18 secondary schools in Ijebu North Local Government Area of Ogun State were involved in the study. Their age ranged between 11 years and 19 years with mean age of 10.4 years and the standard deviation of 4.46. Six valid and reliable instruments were used to assess the truancy behaviour among the students and psychological factors (self-efficacy, self-esteem, anxiety, child-parent relationship and peer-group influence). Multiple regression analysis was used to analyse the data. The result demonstrated that each of the psycho-social factors jointly predicts the truancy behaviour but peer-group influence is the most potent predictor of truancy behaviour. The implications of the findings for educational and counselling practice were highlighted.

Key words: Self-efficacy, Self-esteem, Child-parent relationship, Peer- group influence, Truancy behaviour.

Introduction

Student academic achievement has become a subject matter of importance to all stakeholders in education (educational psychologists, teachers, academics, school administrators, managers, policy makers and planners) (Aremu, 2002). It is

obvious that poor academic performance or academic failure is not desirable learning outcome. So many factors have been identified as predictors (Bakare, 1994, Aremu, 2002) of which causations residence in the child, family, school, society, government etc were identified among the string is the truancy that residence in the child. Any student who wants to succeed in his/her academic is analogous to any business organisation that wants to record success in its operations and services.

Punctuality is one of the vital keys which organizations use in order to attain enviable success. Truancy is an act of staying away from school and irregularity of student's attendance in classroom, without genuine and concrete reasons. It is also an unjustified behaviour of a child of not doing his/her class work or leaving school environment without the permission of parent or guardian and the school authority. Truancy could not only lead to academic failure but also lead to exhibition of some antisocial and delinquent behaviours that latter have negative effects on the truant's life career and on the society at large.

Truancy is a multifaceted and multi-causal problem. Identifying causal factors of truancy is vital in developing preventive methods and interventions (Lehr, Sinclair & Christenson, 2004; Reid, 2005). Research suggests that even though the main causes of truancy vary from study to study, a combination of home, school and individual factors may be involved (Aremu, 2002).

Therefore this study investigates how some psycho-social factors (self-esteem, self-efficacy, anxiety, parent-child relationship and peer-group influence) predict truancy behaviour among secondary school students. Self-esteem one possesses self-respect and self-acceptance; self-esteem is the sense is other way one feels about him/herself, including the degree to which of self-worth that an individual develops about him/herself; how someone respects, rates, prides or like himself (Akinade, 2001). Self-esteem includes the personal worth and competence that one associate with one's self-concept. It is also the amount of relative value we attach to ourselves, it is what, where, who and how we think we are in a giving situation.

Mike (2002) reveals that poor academic performance for some children may lead to low self-esteem which may lead to truancy and dropping out of school. This, in turn, may lead to the formation of a gang to regain a sense of self-esteem. More so, students who miss school fall behind their peers in the classroom and this in turn, leads to increase the likelihood that at risk students will drop out of school. Siegel and Senna (1997) posit that truancy is a problem-issue behaviour syndrome of (low Intelligence Quotient (IQ), turbulent family life, low self-control and impulsivity, drug use, depression, malnutrition, abuse and disease) that gangs may form when children with this syndrome are brought together or seek one another out as a support group.

Self-efficacy is another identified predictor of truancy among secondary school students. Self-efficacy refers to beliefs about one's capabilities to learn or perform behaviour at designated levels (Bandura, 1986, 1997). Self-efficacy is grounded in a larger theoretical framework known as social cognitive theory, which postulate that human achievement depends on interactions between one's behaviours, personal factors (e.g. thought, beliefs), and environmental conditions (Bandura, 1986, 1997). Learners obtain information to appraise their self-efficacy from their actual performances, their vicarious experiences, the persuasions they receive from others, and their psychological reactions.

Self-efficacy beliefs influence tasks choice, effort, persistence, reliance and achievement (Bandura, 1997; Schunk, 1995). Compare with students who doubt their learning capabilities, those who feel efficacious for learning or performing a task participate more readily, work harder, persist longer when they encounter difficulties and achieve at a high level. This means that any student who is not efficacious (or has low self-efficacy) would not be motivated to learn, not hard working, not persistent in academic work and that they may achieve very low and thus engages in truancy because everything in school would be boring to him.

Self-efficacy has been shown to be more reliable than past performance as a predictor of future performance (Siegel, Galassi & Ware, 1985) but low self-efficacy has been linked to increase cheating, lack of concentration, low motivation, lack

of persistence and depression (Finn & Frone, 2004). Conversely, high self-efficacy has been associated with pursuit and achievement of goals, problem solving and persistence (Vrugt, Langereis & Hoogstraten, 1997). Self-efficacy reduces a person's vulnerability to depression, diminishes stress effects and increases personal accomplishments (Christopher, Bound, Jean-Marie, Alison & George, 2006). People with a high sense of efficacy are more absorbed in their activities set and maintain more challenging goals. It is a major contributor to the level and quality of human functioning (Bandura, 1983).

Anxiety is also found to be a predictor of truancy among students. Generally, anxiety is an aversive emotional experience that motivates individuals to move away from, remove, or control the source of anxiety. It is marked by subjective feelings of tension and fear, increased psychological arousal, perception of danger and risk, decreased cognitive and behavioural performance and/or avoidance and escape. Wilcockson (1995) sees anxiety as a state of undirected arousal following a precedence threat of danger. When fear is seen as a specific threat, anxiety relates to a more insidious and vaguely perceived threat. Research on anxiety shows that anxiety arousal associated with a decrement in performance and any students who performs poorly may engage in truancy as a result of lack of interest in academics (Covington & Omelich, 1987).

McMaster (1995) shows that students who left school early were significantly more likely to have a lifetime diagnosis of social phobia. Almost half of the adult patients suffering from anxiety disorder reports dropping out of school. The child who experiences school phobia, more preferably called school refusal is of a much smaller percentage. Kearney (2007) explains that some symptoms of anxiety-based school refusal and truancy tend to overlap. For example, both truant and anxiety-based school refusing children display nervousness about returning to school after a prolonged period by absence. Farrington (1980) shows that truants were lazy, lacked concentration, were restless, were difficult to discipline, did not care about being a credit to their parents and were not clean and tidy on their arrival at school.

Parent-child relationship refers to the interrelations between parents and their children. Parent-child relationship starts from parenting. The kind of parenting style adopted by parents affects the child's behavioural dispositions. This parenting style (parent-child interaction and upbringing or child-training) could be divided into three methods: authoritative parenting, authoritarian parenting and permissive parenting (Ofogebu, 2002). In authoritative parenting style, parents are fully in control of the child and explain why they have to take charge of the child and support the child. Authoritative parents raise up children who can be self-reliance, explorative, assertive, balanced in self-esteem, independent, sociable and competent in life (Akinola, 2005). In authoritarian parenting style, parents are not caring and loving (Ofogebu, 2002). The children of these parents are not permitted to challenge rules and restrictions. The child in this environment may grow up feeling insecure, with low self-esteem, truancy, hostile, discontent and insertion.

In permissive parenting style, the child is left to grow without interference by parents, believing, of course wrongly, that this would make the child to be more responsible in life. Permissive parents are not punitive; do not bother to shape child's behaviour. Akinola (2005) posits that result of this is that the child may grow up to be immature, dependent, lacking in self-esteem, in self-control and self-reliance. McDowell (1996) also asserts that overprotective parenting may lead to anger, depression, rebellion, increased dependency, eating disorders, panic disorders, low self-esteem, emotional withdrawal etc. From these, it could be deduced that authoritative and permissive styles may encourage truancy. Consequently, parent-child relationship could encourage or discourage truancy behaviour in child.

Peer influence is the influence exacts on individuals by his/her peer group, which could be positive or negative. The peer group influence is possible because children spend much of time with their age groups, they tend to be easily affected by the behaviour the group they belong exhibit. It is through friends and peers they acquire or learn both acceptable and unacceptable behaviours in the peer group. Mike (2002) reports that some children who are truant socialize with other

truants children and social groups begin to form. A gang may form in order for its members to gain a sense of self-esteem vis-à-vis their role and activities in the gang. Within the gang, students will also find alibi for their truancy, other children to socialize with, and a venue for venting any humiliation, frustration, or anger, they may feel as a result of their failures in the school setting.

Students may engage in truancy provided it is in consonance with norm of their peer group. On the other hand, if truancy is not sanctioned by their peer group norm, students may not be encouraged to engage in such an abnormal behaviour. The findings from these studies suggest that some psychosocial factors are predictors of truancy behaviour among secondary schools students.

Research Questions

1. To what extent could each of the independent variables (self-esteem, self-efficacy, anxiety, parent-child relationship and peer influence) when combine predict truancy behaviour among students.
2. What is the relative contribution of each of the independent variables to the prediction of truancy behaviour among students?

Research Design

This study adopts a descriptive survey research design of an ex-post facto type to examine the psycho-social factors predicting truancy behaviour among secondary school students in Ijebu North Local Government Area of Ogun state.

Participants

The target population for the study was all secondary school students in Ogun State of Nigeria. A multi-stage random sampling technique was employed in selecting 300 participating students from the five schools randomly selected with equal allocation method from the list of 18 secondary schools in Ijebu North Local Government Area of Ogun State, Nigeria. A total of 300 participants comprising 60 students from each school (30 students from Junior Secondary and 30 students from senior secondary Classes). With the use of stratified random sampling, the researchers ensured that (15) males and (15) females were considered from each of the classes (i.e. Junior and senior classes). Their age range between 11 and 19 years with mean of 10.4 years and the standard deviation of 4.46.

Measures

Demographic information was collected from participants regarding their age, gender, class, religion, etc. The participants completed six questionnaires: Self-efficacy Scale (SES), by Schwarzer and Jerusalem (1993), Self-esteem Rating Scale (SERS) by Hudson (1982), Anxiety Scale (AS) by Sarason (1980), Child-parents Relationship Scale (CPRS) by Pianta (1992), Peer-group influence Scale (PGIS) and Truancy Scale (TBS)

TBS was a self-developed instrument that was used to measure the level of truancy behaviour among the students. The TBS consists of 16 items which were answered on four-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = unlike me to 4 = truly like me. The scale was subjected to a pilot study in order to establish the psychometric properties. 50 questionnaires were administered to the prospective respondents; TBS yielded a coefficient cronbach alpha of .77; after three weeks the test-retest reliability of the instrument was found to be .79. Higher scores indicate higher level of truancy.

The SES (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1993) was used to measure the individuals' efficacy. SES has 10 items constructed on a four-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 =

Not at all true, to 4 = Exactly true. The reliability coefficient cronbach alpha for the scale was .76. The test-retest reliability was found to be .90.

SERS (Hudson, 1982) was used to measure the level of self-esteem. SERS has 25 items constructed on five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = Rarely or none of the time to 5 = Most or all of the time. The reliability coefficient Cronbach alpha for the scale was .92. The test-rest reliability was found to be .90.

Anxiety Scale (Sarason, 1980) was used to measure the level of anxiety. The scale consists of 20 items which were answered on True or false response. The reported reliability coefficient alpha of the instrument was .81. The test-retest reliability was found to be .79.

CPRS (Pianta, 1992) was used to measure the level of relationship among the child and the parents. CPRS has 15 items constructed on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = Definitely does not apply to 5 = Definitely applies. The reliability coefficient cronbach alpha for the scale was .88; after three weeks the test-retest reliability of the instrument was found to be .89.

PGIS is a self-developed instrument that was used to measure the influence of peer on individuals. PGIS consists of 10 items which were answered on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree. The scale was subjected to a pilot study in order to establish the psychometric properties. 50 questionnaires were administered to the prospective respondents; PGIS yielded a coefficient cronbach alpha of .90; after three weeks the test-retest reliability of the instrument was found to be 93.

Procedures

The questionnaires were personally given out to the participants after permission was sought and consent given by the principals of the schools involved in the study. The researchers explained the difficulty items to the participants who were instructed verbally to complete the items without help or influence of fellow participants. Although, such external influence cannot be totally eliminated for obvious

reasons, but was minimized by researchers' close supervision. A period of one hour was allowed for completion of the questionnaire.

Data Analysis

The data were analysed with Multiple Regression analysis tested at the 0.05 level of significant.

Results

Table 1: Regression Summary table showing the joint effects of the independent variables on truancy behaviour among secondary school students

R = .561
 R² = .315
 Adj. R² = .306
 Std. Error = 14.897

Source	Df	SS	MS	F	Sig.
Regression	5	30106.803	7526.701	33.917	.000
Residual	294	65465.767	221.918		
Total	299	95572.570			

Table 1 shows the prediction of all the five independent variables to the dependent variable yielded a coefficient regression R = .561, multiple R² of .315 accounting for 31.5% of the variation in the truancy behaviour among the students. Thus the result from Table 1 shows that each of the independent variables (self-efficacy, self-esteem, anxiety, child-parent relationship and peer-group influence) jointly predicts the truancy behaviour among students $F(5;294) = 33.917 (P<0.05)$.

Table 2: Relative contribution of the independent variables to truancy behaviour among students

Variables	B	SE	β	t	Sig.
Self-efficacy	.815	.087	.382	9.347	.000
Self-esteem	.647	.308	.122	2.102	.036
Anxiety	.264	.100	.172	2.633	.009
Child-parent relationship	.383	.065	.346	5.880	.000
Peer group influence	.975	.078	.504	12.494	.000
(Constant)	14.801	5.053		2.929	.000

Results in Table 2 show the relative contribution of each of the independent variables to the prediction of truancy behaviour among students: peer group influence ($B = .975$, $t = 12.444$, $P < 0.05$); self-efficacy ($B = .815$, $t = 9.347$, $P < 0.05$); child-parent relationship ($B = .383$, $t = 5.880$, $P < 0.05$); anxiety ($B = .264$, $t = 2.633$, $P < 0.05$) and self-esteem ($B = .647$, $t = 2.102$, $P < 0.05$).

Discussion

Results of the present study revealed that peer group influence is a significant predictor of truancy behaviour. This finding is consistent with the earlier research findings of Mike (2002), Balogun (2003) and Angeles (1996) who found that group size and unanimity always influence the extent to which a group exerts influence on its members. This result is easily explainable bearing in mind that the likelihood of the group becoming a gang is uncertain but the potential is there because the gang students may find alibi for their truancy, other children to socialize with and a venue for venting any humiliation, frustration or anger may result in their failures in the school setting.

Self-efficacy was found to be a significant prediction of truancy behaviour. This lends a good credence to several studies which have shown positive correlations between self-efficacy and truancy (e.g. Bandura, 1993; Finn & Frone, 2004). High self-efficacy has been associated with pursuit and achievement of goals, problem solving and persistence (Vrugt, Langereis & Hoogstiaten, 1997). Conversely, low self-efficacy has been linked to increase cheating, lack of

concentration, low motivation, lack of persistence and depression (Finn & Frone, 2004). It is certainly not surprising that students who have strong self-efficacy and are persistent in their efforts reading and studying for their examinations and attending school regularly would have a high academic performance than those who have weak self-efficacy and apply little efforts at their studies and even absenting themselves from school.

The findings of this study indicate that child-parents relationship was found to be a significant predictor of truancy behaviour. This result is in consonance with prior studies (Denney, 1973; Epstein & Sheldon, 2002) who found that environmental factors and their relationship to truancy found definite correlation between poor home circumstances and persistent truancy among the children. The possible explanation for the result may not be unconnected with a functional perspective of poor physical conditions of the home, the relationships between children and parents; the use of corporal punishment in the home, lack of parental interest in the child's welfare and lack of strong ties with a responsible adult of good standards.

The findings in this study indicated that anxiety was found to a significant predictor of truancy behaviour among students. This result supports the findings of the previous researchers (Carington & Omelich, 1987; Wilcockson, 1995) who found that anxiety arousal is associated with a decrement in performance. An explanation for this finding in that any student who performs poorly may engage in truancy as a result of lack of interest in academics.

Self-esteem was also found to be a significant predictor of truancy behaviour among the students. Previous studies have also revealed that poor academic performance for some children may lead to low-self-esteem which may lead to truancy and dropping out of school, this in turn may lead to the formation of a group to regain a sense of self-esteem (Siegel & Senna, 1997; Mike, 2002). It is certainly plausible that absenteeism is detrimental to students' achievement, promotion, graduation, self-esteem and employment potential. Clearly, students who miss school fall behind their peers in the classroom (Mike, 2002).

Implications of the Findings for Educational and Counselling Practice

This study has an implication for the work of teachers, counsellors, educational psychologist and other stakeholders in education to take appropriate step in reducing truancy behaviour in our schools.

There is need for educational psychologists to identify psychosocial variables such as peer group influence, self-efficacy, child-parent relationships anxiety and self-esteem which precipitate truancy among students through psychological assessment and provision of appropriate counselling intervention programmes to eliminate or reduce truancy tendency among students.

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