TRUANCY AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS: AN IMPEDIMENT TO FUNCTIONAL EDUCATION FOR VALUES, KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Our schools are vested with numerous problems of varying degree and magnitude, these problems manifest in different forms and shapes with their adverse consequences on the education system and the society at large. One of these problems is truancy which is a quiet but devastating monster ravaging our educational system. Our contemporary society seems not to be aware of the prevalence of this ugly phenomenon in our schools. This is because little or nothing is being said about it talkless of identifying it as one of the problems of needing urgent attention in schools. This paper took a wholesome look at the incidences of truancy in our secondary schools, the causes, effects and suggested remedies and made a case for our society to give this problem the attention it deserve. If this is done our schools will take their rightfully position in providing functional education for values knowledge skills for national development.

School are established as the agent of the society to mould the habits, interests and feelings of children and transmit the societal norms, culture, values and tradition from one generation to another. Despite this, some students seem not to understand why they should be in school and attend classes. They do this by not attending classes or dodging some lessons and extra curricular activities. This voluntary absence from school and dodging lessons often is referred to as truancy. According to Gabb (1997) a truant leaves home but either does not get to school or escapes from school or class to engage in any other activities he/she fancies. Gullant and Lemonie (1997) also opined that truancy is avoidance behaviour towards school as a result of the existence of other reinforcing activities outside the school or home. Rothman (2001) opined that truancy is an act of staying away from school without leave. Truancy has been linked to serious delinquent activity in
youths and this significant negative behaviour have potentials to curtail possibilities of meaningful academic achievement. It is a predicator of multiple risk behaviours among adolescents. Truant adolescents have been reported to engage in risky sexual practices, illicit drug use, alcoholism, cigarette smoking and other acts of anti-social behaviours. It has been suggested that the unsupervised time the adolescents have when they are truants allows them to initiate and maintain unhealthy behaviours. Truancy in childhood may be also associated with adverse social and health outcomes later in life. Studies have reported that adults who were truants as adolescents were more likely to experience marital or job instability and psychological maladjustment when compared to their counterparts who were not truants at their adolescent stage.

A 1990 study by Obondo and Dhadphale reported that about 10% school non-attendance by children in Kenya was due to truancy. Olley (2006) studied 169 Street youths in Ibadan, Nigeria and about 17% of these had a history of truancy. These studies suggest an association between truancy and being on the streets as well as that truancy is an important contributor of non-attendance to school.

Truants are found virtually everywhere including on the streets hawking merchandise, in game parlor playing video games and involved in various anti-social behaviours throughout neighborhoods. With truancy, rates in some communities as high as 20% it a problem that has reached a crisis level. This is true since truancy leads to delinquency and delinquency often results in failure to pass mandatory examination test used to determine graduation eligibility. This problem has serious economic and leadership implications for the nation.

**Incidences of Truancy**

Truancy refers to any international unauthorized or illegal absence from compulsory schooling. It describes absence from school caused by students of their own free will and does not refer to excused absence from school. There are four main categories of truancy as discussed below.

Students being in school but absent in class, students neither in school nor in the classroom but at home, students who keep away from the class as a result of the difficulty in school subject of dislike for the subject teachers and those neither at home nor in the classroom. Owodummi (1996).

Under category one some students may leave their homes for school, but on getting to school they will not enter the classroom to receive lessons. They intentionally absent themselves from lesson being taught there for no just cause. They will keep on hibernate around the school premises until school over. Such students do not do assignments talkless of copying notes.

The next category involves those who find it difficult to leave their homes for school for flimsy and unfounded reasons. At times they may fake sickness, at other times they may say that one demand or the other is being made from them by the school
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authorities and of which failure to meet the demands they school keep away from school. In families of working class parents the students may pretend as if they are preparing for school until their parents or guardians leave for work and then they relax. When the parents/guardians return from work they will claim to have attended school for the day if asked.

Some students will leave their homes in the morning for school and only end up finding their way to unknown and undisclosed destinations. They will continue to deceive their parent/guardians for a long time before their tricks are exposed.

The fourth category are those students who absent themselves from classes as a result of difficulty in the school subjects or their dislike for the subject or the teacher. These categories of truants are rampant in our schools today both at primary and secondary levels. The situation can definitely not make for functional education for values, skills, knowledge and national development. Truancy is a global phenomenon as it obtains in different part of the world to the extent that some countries have legislations against it and courts where truancy cases are handed.

**Factors Responsible for Truancy**

Stoll (1993) submitted that factors responsible for truancy are many and varied. Lands down (1990) is of the opinion that there is no point in seeking single factor explanation for a complex phenomenon like truancy. In the same vein Rohrman (1993) posited that factors influencing truancy fall into four broad categories namely: child/personality, family, school, society/community. Osanrelre (1996) also discussed the causes of truancy under factors resident in the school, home, peer group and society. In addition to all these factors Gesinde (2005) has also identified the contributory role of the government in truancy behaviour among school children.

Study carried out by the United States office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) identified four factors as the correlates of truancy. These include family factors, school factors, economic influences and student's variables. According to the above study family factors include lack of guidance or parental supervision, domestic violence, poverty, drug or alcohol abuse in the home and indifference on the part of parent /guardians towards their wards education. In a family where some or all the above mentioned conditions prevail such a home can not by any means detect when a child becomes a truant. Children from such homes have a field day doing whatever pleases them with their education. In families/homes where the reverse is the case children cannot indulge in truancy without the parents/guardians detecting their change in behaviour towards school attendance and nip it in the bud.

On the side of the school climate issues such as school size attitude of teachers to students, relationship among students especially tile senior ones to the junior ones and the administrative structure of the school. Some school administrators are non-challant to the welfare of their students by reneging in their obligations to the students. According to
Omoegun (1995) one of the major functions of the school is the provision of care and guidance. This includes the provision of conducive learning environment and other learning facilities and other conveniences.

Adana (1987) is of the view that fear of punishment scolding, bullying, ridicule and shame of setbacks from examination failure are among the factors that can keep students away from school. As earlier pointed out, student's variable like drug and alcohol abuse, lack of social competence, mental health difficulties and physical health can lead student^ to engage in truancy.

The community environment contributes in some ways to push students into truancy. This is because economic conditional and differing culturally based attitude toward the education of children are also important.

Consequences/Effects of Truancy
Truancy has many negative and adverse effects on the truants and the society at large. It has been clearly identified as one of the early warning signs that the youth is heading for potential delinquent activity, social isolation and educational failure. Several studies have established lack of commitment to school as a risk factor for substance abuse, delinquency teenage pregnancy and dropping out of school. Bell, Rosen and Dynlacht (1994) have shown that decades of research have identified a link between truancy and later problems in life such as violent crimes, marital problems, adult criminality and incarceration.

Truancy has social and financial impact on the truant youths. Academically they make low grades and achieve little educationally. They usually drop out of school resulting in high dropout rates which is inimical to functional education for values knowledge, skills and national development. Other negative consequences of dropping out of school occasioned by truancy include little employment prospects, lower salaries if employed, but often times not employed or under employed. Truant school dropouts are more likely to depend on their parents’ or relatives' good will for survival.

Other consequences of truancy and dropout are less educated work force as youths who are the future leaders become uneducated as a result of truancy and dropping out of school. This will obviously have adverse effect on the nation's workforce and hence low productivity.

This will as well increase unemployment and the illiteracy level of the nation. In a situation whereby educational institution of different levels turn out graduates of different cadres annually and push them into the labour market what chances have the truants/dropouts. The above situation will adversely effect the nation's development since employment and literacy levels are among the indices for determining national development.

From the foregoing, it could be established that truancy as social vice has numerous negative effects on both the truants and society. On the part of the truants the act makes them school dropouts, uneducated unemployable, security risks and replete with
anti-social behaviours. The society on the other hand is not better for it as the truants/school dropouts make no meaningful contribution to the growth and progress of the society. They engage in numerous anti-social behaviours such as smoking, illicit sex, alcoholism, armed robbery, kidnapping and even social interest especially as they are vulnerable to manipulation by the elites especially politicians and evil minded numbers of the society to satisfy their insatiable quest for power and wealth.

Measures to Curb Truancy

Having discussed the incidences of truancy, the factors responsible for truancy among students and their effects on the truant students and the society at large it will be pertinent to examine palliative measures to curb the obnoxious practice or reduce it to the barest minimum. As earlier pointed out many factors such as the student's factor, the home, school, the peer group and the community/government contribute in one way or the other to the prevalence of truancy among our secondary students. Consequent upon the above each of the mentioned agents has significant roles to play towards the curbing of this social menace.

Students should give a deep thought to the consequences of truancy on themselves and the entire society their families inclusive. Senior students should be humane in their dealings with their younger ones in the school. This is because the type of treatment meted to the junior ones may push them into truancy, they should avoid bulling the younger ones as much as possible because once the younger and junior ones develop a feeling of insecurity in the school they will develop apathy to school attendance and remaining in their classes.

The home should play its expected roles in this regard. Parents should show active interest in the welfare of their children and wards. They should always monitor the behaviour of their children so as to detect when they derail in their duties especially schooling.

The school owes it as a duty to provide conducive learning environment for students. They should ensure the availability of qualified and dedicated staff, conducive classroom environment and teaching and learning materials. The school guidance counsellors have a lot to do in this regard because the counselling services they provide will go a long way in helping students out of this situation. They should provide different group counselling situations that can encourage youths to examine and analyze the damagers inherent in truancy.

The society through the agency of the government should make the school environment as attractive for teaching and learning as possible. This could be achieved through the provision of the needed manpower and materials necessary for making the atmosphere of the school appealing to the students. Anything to the contrary will be counter productive and hence result in students developing cold feet to school attendance and remaining in school.
Conclusion

It has been established that truancy exists among secondary school students in our society as discussed in this write up. This ugly incident carries with it numerous devastating effects on the truants and society at large. Efforts should be intensified to check this anti-social behaviour and this could only be done by all hands being on deck and every one playing their expected roles towards the education of the students. The society should see truancy as one of the greatest hindrances to the achievement of functional education for values, knowledge skills for national development.

References


