THE EFFECTS OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS TRUANT BEHAVIOUR ON EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT: COUNSELING INTERVENTION

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ABSTRACT

This paper examined secondary school students truant behaviour on Educational development. It looked at the causes of truancy from the perspective of child factors, home, school, peer groups and socio economic factors. It succinctly explained the counseling intervention that can be employed to salvage the situation.

Introduction

Punctuality is one of the basic requirements for effective teaching learning process. The prevailing situations occasioned by the current social and economic conditions among other reasons appear to inhibit the realization of the students educational objectives of good performance. This problem does not seem to attract much attention from the authorities concerned and is therefore left to degenerate into a serious problem that may eventually affect the overall performance of students at that level. Something ought to be done to arrest the situation and to put the students educational pursuit in its proper perspective. This paper attempted to identify the problems, analyse them and suggest proper solutions with the hope of reducing it to the barest minimum.

Definition of Truancy

Truancy has been defined in various ways by different educationists. Akinyele (1982) defined truants as irregular in attending school, a few may choose to come once or twice a week or may show up in the morning and disappear later, while some may persistently absent themselves. This means that the student is likely to learn nothing at the end of it all and may likely end up as being a drop out. From this, truancy is unapproved absence from the school, usually without parent's knowledge. Ayanniyi (1988) defined truancy as "remaining a way from school without parental knowledge or consent"

Truancy can be defined as a continuous absence from school for no legitimate reasons. Some of the legitimate reasons include observance of religious holidays documented, students illness or injury requiring a doctor's care, a death in the student's immediate family, situation beyond the control of the student like parent marital problem and farming as determined by the school authority or such other circumstances which cause reasonable concern to the parent for the safety of the student like religious and political crisis in the community. Akinyele (1982) in an article "Causes and remedy of Truancy in Schools". Stated that truants are irregular in attending school, a few may choose to come once or twice a week or may show up in the morning and disappear later, while some are persistently absent.

Expressing a similar opinion, Ayanniyi (1988), defined truancy as "remaining away from school without parental knowledge or consent". The above two authors have attributed truancy to the child's attitude of keeping away from school without the knowledge of his / her parents or permission from school. This simply means that children on their own decide to sometimes refuse to attend school without any genuine reason or permission from the school or their parents.

Sanders (1990) made further clarification of truancy to mean unlawful absence from school and classified such absence into three namely: without holding, truanting and school phobia. Without holding is a situation whereby a child is kept at home by his / her parent at the time he / she should be in school. Truanting is whereby a child stays away from school without the knowledge or agreement of parent or of the school, while school phobia is when a child stays at home despite every effort by his parent to get him to school. Kinder (2000) pointed out the differences in extent of absences. From avoidance of single lessons to absence of several weeks. The extent of absence differ from school to school and is usually defined in the school's handbook of policies and procedures.

Wilking (2000) defined a truant as any student missing for more than 30 minutes of instruction without an excuse, three times during the school year, such students must be reported to the proper school authorities. This classification and referral helps to identify the importance of school attendance and is intended to help minimize interference with lessons instruction. Similarly, the Education Code (2000) described a truant as any pupil subject to compulsory full time continuation education who is absent from school without a valid excuse for three full days or absence for more than 30 minutes period during school day without a valid excuse on three occasions in one school year.

From the various definitions given Above, truancy simply means disobedient. Children are sent to go to school, it is a law that they go there, if they choose not to go

they are disobeying their parents and the authority. Truancy is identify as one of the early warning sign that youth are headed for undesirable behaviour.

Causes of Truancy

Truancy is as a result of one or more factors in a child's life which prevent regular school attendance. The possible causes and contributing factors are numerous and diverse. These include the child's factor, parental / home factors, school factors, peer group factors and socio-economic factors. They must be recognized and an attempt must be made at minimizing them.

Views of professionals in schools and educational welfare service on the causes of truancy were collected and analysed by Kinder et al (1995). According to them, the causes of truancy include personal factors, family and community factors, school factors, individual factors which include lack of self-esteem / social skills, confidence, poor peer relations, lack of concentration, lack of academic ability and self management skills. While the family and community factors include parentally condoned absence, not valuing education, domestic problems, inadequate or inconsistent parenting economic deprivation and a community lack of self-esteem. Within the school, professionals identified the case of the school climate such as school size, lack of school fence, teachers inability to control their students and inconsistent procedures in place for dealing with absenteeism which could make some students slip away unnoticed if the school system were not in place to detect them.

According to Special Prevention Intervention Remediation involving Truancy (2003), many potential factors have been identified as causes of truancy in our secondary schools. These include an unstable home life, poverty, substance abuse, lack of interest in school, and the perception by young people that their parents, communities and school do not care about their academic progress. There are so many other factors responsible for students truancy, but for this particular study the researcher will discuss only the child factors, the parental / home factors, the school factors, peer group factors, and socio-economic factors.

The Child Factors

The child who is excessively shy and different, who lack s any self esteem or self-confidence and who is unable to make friends, can often demand long time support and the involvement of a variety of professionals to achieve regular attendance. According to Link (1972) children with challenging behaviour may sometime find it easier to stay away from school rather than to attend school only to get into trouble. Such children need to be welcomed and to feel valued.

Mann, et al (1978) attribute the causes of poor attendance in school to continued failure in school learning. According to their findings, continued failure of the students suggest that even if a student is well adjusted on entering school, such is practically certain to have favourable effect on his personality. As he grows to adolescent stage, feeling of failure, frustration and over sensitivity tend to increase. Reaction to such feeling always takes the form of withdrawal. To remedy the situation according to them, those that reach a serious frustration point should be referred for psychiatric evaluation because of academic difficulties. Other means of remedying the situation include rebuilding the student ego, giving them the confidence and assurance that they can learn to succeed.

Since in many, though not all cases, the decision to play is taken by children themselves, Wakefield (1996) begins with the views of the children on the causes of truancy and he reported on interviews he had with 160 children of year 7 and above. For the children the main causes of truancy and disruptions were described in rank as follows:

1. The influence of friends and peers, who are seen encouraging truancy as a status-seeking activity or as way of joining a clique or blending in, and some times teasing or pushing the child into truanting.
2. Relationship with teachers, seen as lacking respect / fairness.
3. The content and delivery of the curriculum, seen as lacking in relevance and stimulus.
4. Family factors either parental attitudes or family problems.
5. Bullying
6. The classroom climate, either because of teachers' inability to control, or problems arising from the child's own personality or learning abilities.

In a similar opinion, Bauman (1999) listed about seventeen contributing child factors responsible for truancy, they are as follows:

1. Poor self-concept, low of self-esteem.
2. Poor academics performance; particularly behind in reading and math'
3. Socially isolated, poor inter-personal skills, lack of positive peer relationship at school.
4. Feeling of lack of control over life (i.e. no matter how hard I try, I will not succeed).
5. Little or no extra-curricular involvement.
6. Mental and / or emotional instability childhood, depression.
7. Unidentified learning disabilities.
8. Vision and auditory problems that have gone undiagnosed language barriers.
9. Poor health.

10.   Negative peer relationships, older, non-school oriented friends.
11.   Substance abuse.
12.   Fear of school teachers and / or administrators.
13.   Experience recent traumatic event (divorce or death or love one).
14.   Fear of a physical protection of going to or at school.
15.   Teenage pregnancy.

These factors also contribute to the continued failure in learning.

Cooper (1972) saw the child's factors of truancy from different dimension. According to him, the age of a child has bearing on his school attendance. This is more so with the age of enrolment into school. Cooper made an examination of school attendance of 832 pupils. They were divided into groups according to their ages of enrolment at school. The result showed that, pupils enrolling for the first time at the age of 6 and 7 have more regular attendance record than those pupils starting school at the age of 5. The implies that –re-mature registration of pupils into school negatively affects their likeness for the school which consequently affect attendance. A child learns when he is ready to learn. Children have trouble with abstract thinking putting things in temporal order and concentration. They also have less than average scores in their intelligence. This pattern of abnormalities led to the conclusion that these children have not developed the cognitive control to manage their feeling or methods and therefore cannot their actions.

Parents / Home Factors of Truancy

A child copies the people he lives with. Most important of all in determining the type of reaction he will show in a school situation. Kaplan (1971) described the home as a laboratory within which human nature takes shape. According to him the dynamics of human interaction in the home provide children with experience that lay the foundation for later adjustment. It is the basic institution for providing the child's primary socialization. Since the family is the most important and influential agent of socialization it fosters the most, important relationship that people enter into in their life's time.

Okon (1988), reported that few truants received affection or training. Those who come from families where there is love and discipline rarely play truancy for long. He attributes truancy to lack of care and training from the parent and the non-challant attitude exhibited by some of this parents either because they themselves did not attend school or they do not have any value attached to it. Divorce or broken homes are also factors that cause truancy. Taking care of the family or the children is a joint responsibility of both parents, in the case of single parents especially where the

mother is absent the children hardly get enough attention, which has a lot of consequences. Truancy inclusive.

Similarly Gullatt and Dwayne Brinkman (1996), opined that one's family is the causal factor of like and dislike of school. According to them, it is the responsibility of the family to provide the child with emotional care and individually rendered attention, warmth, consideration, and personal concern should be things which every one can be confident to receive permanently and regardless of merit from his parent. A home that failed to make important continuations produces poor personal and socially mal-adjust children. Bauman (1999) further explained that it is rather the parents who are responsible for their children's regular school attendance and who send them to school despite occasional reluctance or anxiety. This implies that parent should teach their children that school attendance is not optional and that they should go to school whether they went to or not.

According to Giles (1999). The factors stemming from the child's family are as follows:

1. Parent's lack appreciation for value of education.
2. Parents are high-school drop outs
3. Financial difficulties (lack of adequate nutrition, clothing, transportation, inability to pay fees).
4. Ineffective parenting, lack of parent control and supervision
5. Family instability (one-parent-child relationship frequent moving)
6. Inappropriate role models
7. Child abuse and / or neglect (physical, psychological)
8. Substance abuse, alcoholic parent
9. Parents convenience (sibling kept home to baby-sit young ones)

According to Educators Encyclopedia (2003) since children are guided by the behaviours of their parents, the responsibility for school attendance should be placed on parents. But some times students may illegally be away from lesson without the consent of their parents. In either case, whatever explanation is given to any action that may lead to the students absence or poor attendance to the school, parents are directly involved, because they are supposed to check the movements of their children. As far as attendance is concerned, parents can greatly improve school attendance. The word "parent" in this finding refers to a guardian and any person who has the actual custody of the child.

Many well known educationist believe firmly that this antisocial behaviour (truancy) is from the home. It can be pointed out that the root of the social problems in the country is from the family's failure to teach the young ones a good exemplary life and

appreciation of honesty. So parental attitudes can be identified as one of the contributing factors to truancy which is predictor to juvenile delinquency.

School Factors of Truancy

School is the first wider place outside the family in which the child forms and extends his relationships with others. He makes friends and establishes social behaviour. Yoloye (1971), conducted a research in Ibadan and cited that, "many of the primary schools children who drop out of school do so because parents weigh up the advantages and disadvantages of their children continuing to attend school and find out that the disadvantages out weigh the advantages.

Okon (1988), has showed that the secondary school curriculum is not serving the purpose which it is meant for. According to him a teacher must know the fact that youths have a lot of energy in them and these energy must be used adequately if not, they will always find other ways of using the energy, which may be fighting and other anti-social ways of behaviour, including truancy from school. A happy and conducive learning environment is a necessary factor in reducing truancy. The school curriculum should try to meet the needs of the students to prevent them from looking outside for the things they couldn't get at school.

Siann, and Ugwegbu (1988) observed that most students, even if they found learning exciting and rewarding, expect the school to equip them to compete effectively for jobs and places in higher institutions. Thus students and their parents do not perceive school as fulfilling the functions they went it to. This may lead to poor attitudes to school.

Guallat and Dwayne (1997) on their book "Truancy: what a Principal could Do" "explained that the secondary school students absenteeism is found to b e related to classroom social climate which is as follows:

a. Classes with stricter grading practices are found to record higher number of truants.
b. Higher competitive classes with teachers who control the classroom climates strictly, record higher number of absenteeism. Those who cannot conform with the competitive nature of the class may withdraw.
c. Classes where students have low teacher support record high levels of absences.

There is therefore, relationship between classroom climates and the level of attendance among members of the class. This behaviour problems to a great extent, can be addressed through schools, and the best way is by improving all machineries in

school that make learning conducive. When a student realizes that he / she gains in learning, he will want to learn and that will improve his attendance in school.

According to Giles (1999), truancy could be as a result of school programmes, attitude and practices of some teachers. He listed nine factors resulting to truancy as follows:

1. Uninteresting and irrelevant curriculum.
2. Improper class placement (above or below abilities).
3. Failure to identify and provide services for problem students.
4. Poor pupil teacher relationships.
5. Insufficient counseling and guidance staff.
6. High students / teacher ratio.
7. Low teacher expectation.
8. Lack of parent school communication
9. Too weak or too rigid administration of policies.

Giles, furthermore stated that some children possibly absent themselves from school because they feel school is not offering them useful or relevant materials. This may happen either because of poor or irrelevant teaching methods employed by the teachers, poorly designed curriculum, poor class ventilation, lack of good moral conduct by the teachers, etc all this make the school boring to the students and result in truancy.

Baker (2000) expressed the view that students poor attendance is an attribute of poor performance by their respective teachers. He contended, in his investigation, that students would refuse to go to school early or even completely absent themselves, if they see n o reason for going. His findings clearly indicate that act of truancy among the students is due to teachers inability to conduct and deliver interesting lessons and their inability to motivate their students and make them more receptive to diverse views. He concluded that most of these children do not attend school because they cannot see what they will gain from sitting through out the lesson. They find them boring, they make no progress and they are not likely to succeed in examinations, so see no reason in going to school.

Peer Group Factors of Truancy

There is strong desire by youths to seek the companionship of other youths of their age. This desire is actually supported by the adolescent's wish to feel accepted and this always starts at the teenage age. At this age, the child starts identifying himself with a particular group that has the same type of interest with him. He tries to adopt those attitudes that will be acceptable to the group to which he belongs. This types of

group which the adolescents associate themselves with is called peer group. Uche (1980), Described peer group thus:

> *"Peer group is the child's own friends and equals. They have their own forms of behaviour and values and are made up of the play group, schools mates etc, the cheque and many gangs. They are formally organized"*

Odebunmi (1990) explained that the desire to join a group is actually supported by the inability of the parents to show love, acceptance and recognition to the child. The strong influence of peer pressure on truancy cannot be over emphasized. Some absentees begin their absenteeism alone and they graduate to group absenteeism.

Peer victimization as identified by Kochenderfer (1996) is another great factor in school avoidance among students. He said bullying behaviours by a stronger child against a weaker one is one of such act of victimization. There is also teasing by school mates. The victims at this level exhibit behaviour problems. The victimized, according to the findings are anxious and insecure with lower self-esteem and more likely to be depressed. They have greater difficulty adjusting to school situation, show no interest in school work resulting to absenteeism.

Karlin *et at* (1996) stated that the opinions of peers are very important to both boys and girls. If parents are not careful enough and they don't show their disfavour strongly, a child may be influenced by the behaviour pattern of his peers, and if the schools have little interest for him or if he is not motivated to learn, the influence of a truant friend may be very effective and detrimental. For example Woolfolk (1999) stated that when a students doesn't come to school because of his class mates, such cases can be effectively tackled by creating a pleasant atmosphere in the classroom. Creating an accepting relationship, showing love, creating an avenue for interaction, giving them a pat on the back, smile and a kind word, warmth and affection, all help in reducing absenteeism by a child who has been influenced by other peers attitudes.

Baker et al (1997) are of the opinion that, the power of peer groups is responsible for most school absenteeism. According to them, if the student body in a school does not value school attendance, the rate of absence are likely to be higher.

Socio-Economic Factors of Truancy

Many educationists are of the view that socio-economic factors are responsible in aiding truancy among secondary school students in Nigeria. Jersild *et al* (1975). Identified poverty as being among the factors responsible for anti-social behaviour of children. According to World Book Encyclopedia (2002) Poverty means the

economic condition in which people lack sufficient income to obtain certain minimum level of health services, food, housing, clothing and education. These are as a result of the family inability to earn enough money to maintain the proper standard living makes if difficult for parent to provide their wards with essentials of live including learning materials and this lead to truancy and frustration on the part of the child.

In a similar opinion, Akinyele (1982) explained that in some Nigerian homes, for economic reasons some children have to hawk bread "or *akamu*" before going to school. Most times these children are late to school which usually attracts punishment and some of such children would prefer truancy than to go to school to be punished.

Adeyemo, (1985) explain that lack of materials like textbooks, exercise books, pens, mathematical sets, rulers and good uniforms make children absent themselves from the school as they would not like to be punished by the teachers. Also student who fails to comply with school requirement like paying of school fees at a stipulated time or providing certain materials to school like cutlasses, brooms etc for school work the next step is for such children to keep away from the school.

Reid (1986) identified children from low income and large families at a higher rate of disadvantage throughout their schooling, childhood and adolescence. The higher the occupation of the bread winner at the student family, the greater is the level of academic achievement. Since truancy is a step to dropout, constant occurrence should be properly checked and controlled.

Baker, *et al* (2001) in their book tittles *"Truancy Reduction: keeping student in school"*. Opined that problems of poor attendance is due to poverty resulting to non payment of school fees charged by the authorities and in capability in providing learning materials required by the school. In Nigeria most families take their wards away from school to make them work and contribute in one way or the other to the up-keep of their families female children are married out if the parents cannot afford school fees.

Counselling Explanations/Interventions underlying Truant Behaviour

An understanding of human personality and an awareness as to the needs of a child by the school constitute the first steps in devising a programme which will help the truant make a better adjustment to school and to life. The individual student should be the focus of attention, and he should experience the warmth of a favourable school environment.

The particular nature or causes of student truant problem is significant only as such knowledge will be used to improve the environment and stimulate the child toward

maximum personal fulfilment and self-actualization for attempting to provide for the truant child:

The student may be given some assistance by

1. Correcting or improving the undesirable conditions in his life which are precipitating the problem.
2. Assisting him in finding suitable friends and people with whom he might associate or identify.
3. Providing for conferences through the guidance service with teachers and other adults who may be contributing to the problem through unreasonable demands.
4. Encouraging the parents to show an interest in the child and aiding them in improving conditions which may be precipitating the problem.
5. Correcting any situation in which the truant is being influenced by any other person or group.
6. Providing classroom enrichment experiences by which the truant can gain a feeling of success.
7. Modifying the school programme to enable him to fuifill his needs more satisfactorily and always keeping demands and expectations realistic in terms of his capabilities.
8. Visiting the home and in various ways encouraging the parents to express their affection and appreciation for the child and demonstrating a genuine interest in him at school.

In Conclusion, most students make satisfactory adjustment to school and conduct themselves in an acceptable way appropriate for their school and community. However, there are some students who do not conform is truants and whose behaviour constitutes a source of concern for the counselor and teacher. These truants require special attention from counselor and other school personnel and must receive remedial or therapeutic assistance if they are to resolve their difficulties and progress toward better adjustment.

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