
Original Paper

Truant Behaviour and It's Effect on Academic Achievement of Learners in Public Primary Schools in Kenya

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to find out the effects of truancy on academic achievement among pupils in public primary schools in Kenya. The study would assist teachers on specialized intervention methods so that they can have knowledge on how to intervene on truant behaviour in primary schools. Teachers and pupils in Nairobi County were interrogated about the causes and factors that lead to pupil's truancy. Questionnaires and interview methods were used to collect data from teachers and pupils. The findings indicated that truancy affected enormously the academic achievement of learners and further, the study showed that learners from poorer zones of Nairobi County had high numbers of truancy than schools from well to be zones. There was also gender discrepancy where by truant behaviour was found to have affected more boys than girls in the different social class schools. What the teachers revealed indicated that truancy in Nairobi County could be prevented if there were policies put in place by the government on workable solutions to assist learners. They further indicated that various programs could attract learners stop truant behaviour. Such programs included sports and feeding programs which were highly recommendable. Truancy affected pupils from an early time of school attendance and therefore it is recommendable a multifaceted approach be considered therefore early intervention was found to be useful.

Keywords: truancy, truant, behavior problem, special needs learners, specialized intervention, Individualised Education Program, pockets of poverty schools and well to be schools

1. Introduction

Truant behavior has been rated among the 10 problems facing schools globally with a daily absentee rate as high as 30% in many cities. A 2003 report by National Center for Justice reported that rate of truancy had increased steadily by 58% between 1985 and 1998 (Gonzales et al, 2002). According to Heilbronn (2004), the increase in truancy was so rapid that the office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention named it as a top priority. The disturbing trend forced the United States Department of Education to prepare a manual that would give schools some guidelines on how to reduce it (US Department of Education, 1996). In its commitment to address the problem of truancy, the Washington legislature appropriated \$8.3 million for programs serving truants and youth at risk during the 1995-97 (Mason Burley & Edie Harding, 1998).

In Kenya truancy related absences are common. Despite the adoption of Free Primary Education in 2003, irregular school attendance remains a problem. In Nairobi and other urban areas, children who are supposed to be in school walk on the streets, shops, bars, parks and other crowded areas aimlessly. Others are seen hawking items, sneeving glue in the streets and market places during school hours as observed by Kingendo, Mugo and Kombo (2010). A family study of children with school absenteeism by Obondo & Dhadphale (1990), indicated that approximately 10% of school absenteeism in Kenya was found to be due to truancy. A DFID report of 2010, indicate that 1.5 % million children in Kenya do not attend school regularly. Referring to the ILO report on access to education in Kenya, the DFID report observed that of those not attending school, 13.4% of girls and 12.5 % of boys miss school for no reason. The finding implied that those students who missed school for no reason were classified as truants.

1.1 Learners truant behavior disorder and its effects on academics

Truancy behavior disorder is a worldwide phenomenon that has been destroying the future of children and youth irrespective of gender. This behavior has been identified as a warning sign of learner academic and social failure due to frequent suspension, expulsion, delinquent activity and dropping out (Cohen, L., Manion, L. & Morrison, K (2001). On the other hand this behavior is denying children meaningful learning opportunities and depriving countries of a vital source of economic growth and stability.

Kenyan truant learners spend their day either in the streets loitering, selling items or indulging in petty crimes. Schools continue to use punitive measures such as expulsion and corporal punishment while dealing with truant learners. This threatens the education achievement of the learners. The current shortage of knowledge continues to hinder progress towards this end. Therefore, this study aims at finding out causes as of truant behavior disorder among learners as well as its impact on their academic performance. The study also aims at finding out the available intervention programs so as to gather information that would contribute to development of effective truancy prevention and elimination measures (King'endo et al, 2010).

2. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to find out the impact of truancy on academic performance of learners in public primary schools in Nairobi County, Kenya. It seeks to find out why learners engage into truancy and its effects on their academic achievements. This was with a view to developing specialized learner assistance educational programs on truant behaviour in Kenya.

3. Method

This study adopted a descriptive research design. According to O'Keefe, D.7 Stoll, P (1995)), causal comparative is concerned with what the phenomena is like, but if possible how and why it occurs. It involves finding out the effect of past factors on the target characteristics of the population of the study. In this research design, all the events or variables had occurred before the researcher collected data (Heilbrunn, J (2004). The investigator then took one or more dependent variables and examined the data by going back through time seeking out causes, relationships and their meanings. The design was found best for this study since the researcher collected data after the events had taken place.

3.1 Participants

Both male and female pupils in public schools in Nairobi County were surveyed. In terms of gender distribution in both pockets of poverty and well to be schools, the sample in both social status types of schools show those girls were less than boys in terms of their responses regarding truancy. However the indicators have very slight differences, though this distribution may have been found to be consistent with the normal gender distribution in the Kenyan schools. Usually, male students are more in number than female students. In all the schools visited the teachers' gender was, 50% were males and 50% were females, the table below indicates that.

Status of the schools	Boys	%	Girls	%	Total	%	Out of 60	Boys	Girls	Head Teachers
Pockets of poverty										
A	105	54	91	46	196	26	15	8	7	1m
B	53	51	51	49	104	14	8	4	4	1 f
C	80	49	82	51	162	21	13	6	6	1f
Well to be										
A	68	51	65	49	133	17	10	5	5	1m
B	84	50	85	50	169	22	13	7	7	1m
Total							60	31	29	5

3.2 Procedure

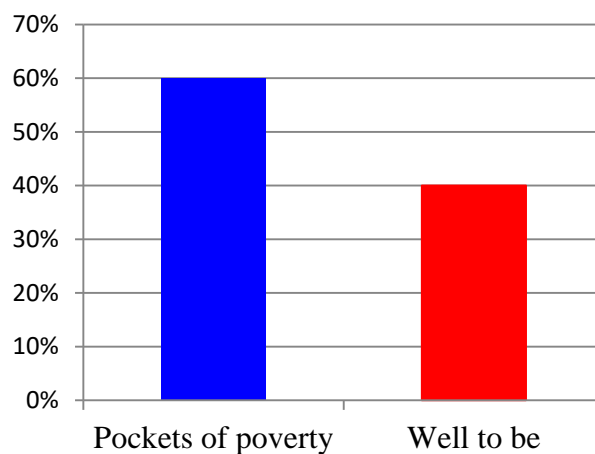
The study targeted class six learners as this is the age when they can be identified as exhibiting truant behavior. It is also the period when subject teachers on the other hand try to exert pressure on learners so that they can acquire academic skills. Due to this pressure, learners can become vulnerable and may be tempted to play truant. The choice of teachers was based on their role as imparters' of academic skills. Therefore a population of 2,589; 1,294 males and 1,395 females learners and 456 deputy teachers of which 88 males and 368 females were considered from twenty seven public primary schools in Makadara sub-county in Nairobi County.

We got permission from the Ministry of Education to collect data from the selected public primary schools in Nairobi County. With the permit, we then approached the targeted schools and booked for appointments with the principals on the material day to administer the tools. Due to the large sample we used two research assistants. We held training seminars for the research assistants, regarding the research and the observation of ethical issues. The research assistants were taken through the two sets of data collection tools and exposed briefly to the overall purpose of the study. They were also advised to be as courteous as possible to the respondents and to assure them that the information they provided would not be used against them. The training of the research assistants was done within one day in the researchers' office. The research assistants discussed the tools and shared experiences of researches they had done before. Possible obstacles such as requests for money from respondents and also the latter's unwillingness to give information were discussed and possible solutions to the same shared.

4. Data Analysis

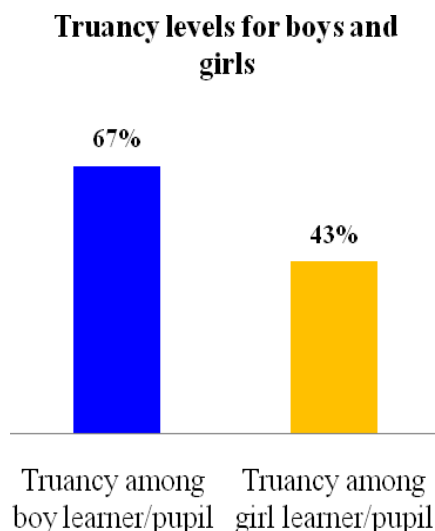
Once data was obtained from the field, the quantitative one was then coded and analysed aided by computer using a statistical software SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) programme for windows. It was then summarised using distribution tables, bar graphs, and pie charts for all items. The qualitative data was reported as per the themes.

Schools by status



The distribution of the schools by status showed reasonable discrepancy. This was assumed so, due to their nature and the societal attitudes by parents, teachers and even pupils around Makandara constituency in Nairobi County. As the Figure indicates, the most truant pupils within Makandara constituency were found in pockets of poverty schools with 60% of the pupils sampled compared to well to be schools with only 40% of the total sampled population. This shows that Makandara constituency of Nairobi County is populated by very low income residents, showing the struggles the residents encounter to live. And also the schools in zones of pockets of poverty indicate the highest rates of truancy; this indicates that mostly these pupils cannot attend to their academics as they have to work during school hours to earn their daily living. Makandara area is actually among the undeveloped areas and is found in the periphery of Nairobi County.

4.1 Truancy and gender

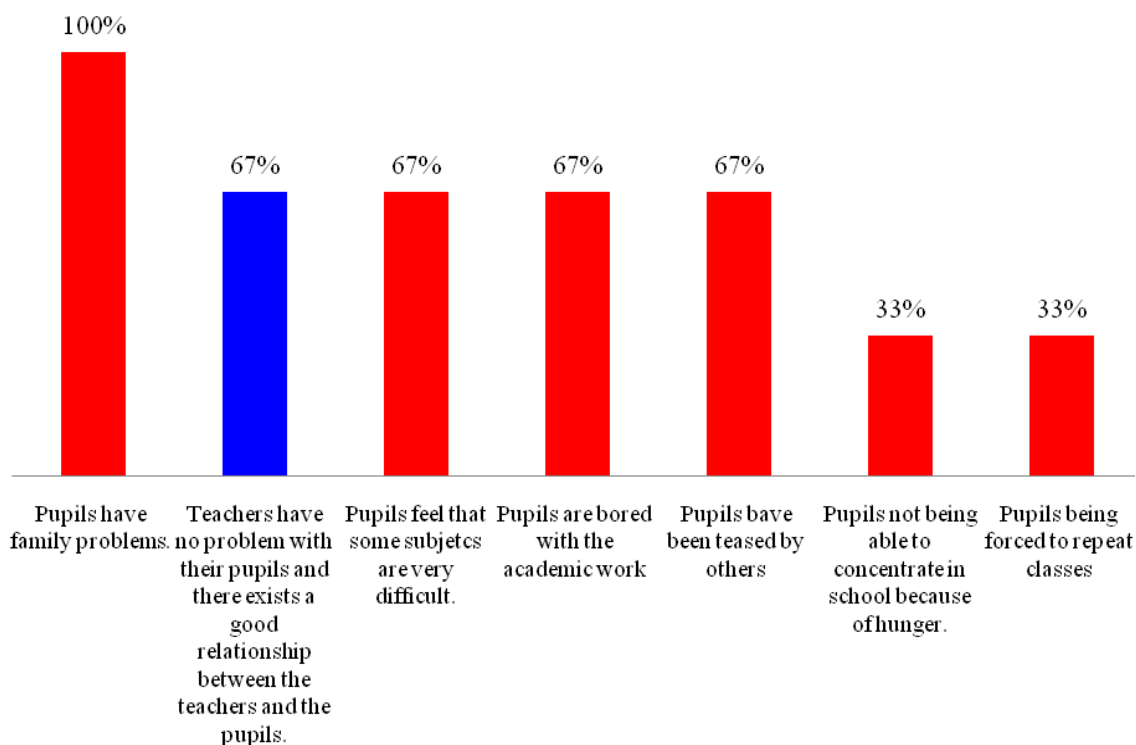


Male manifestation of truancy behavior was higher, while that of female was lower. Difference between male and female manifestation of truancy behaviour was found to be in line with the findings that most street children were boys who had dropped out of schools due to behavioural problems and always in conflict with the law King'endo et al asserts in (2010). The results in figure the above figure shows that the boys were more involved in truancy than girls. Again the findings, support Bridgeland et.al findings (2006), that learners who have low class attendance soon become less interested in schooling and end up dropping out. The aggressive nature of boys tends to push them to manifest various acts of misbehavior.

4.2 Causes of truancy in primary schools

The information gathered from the two categories of schools had notable findings. In the pockets of poverty schools pupils responses were that some subjects were difficult and boring, this concurs with Monkie (2004) as earlier noted in chapter one in this document. At times they did not concentrate much as they had missed class earlier therefore they could not catch up with the rest of the class. This, according to them, made the subjects boring. Learners also did not like to repeat classes and in fact 51% strongly agreed, this also was repeatedly noted among learners in well to be schools. In this matter 33% of teachers reported the same though they felt that in both categories of the schools the worrying problem for truant pupils was family problems, at times they suffered even hunger and had to work to find food to eat. Other times they missed school to take care of their younger siblings while their parents were absent from homes. All these reasons may have caused truancy in both types of schools. These problems affected schools generally in Makandara constituency. This information responds to the worries raised in the Kenyan government policy in the MOE Act (2012), directing teachers to investigate parents on why pupils miss school. Table 4.3 and figure 4.4 capture the information discussed in the content.

Deputy head teachers



Attendance and performance of learners in pockets of poverty schools

Good	Fairly good	Poor
5	15	40

The records from the pockets of poverty schools indicated that there were several cases of non school attendance which was as a result of various reasons such as poverty. Some factors were due to lack of books, lack of parents concern over matters affecting the pupils and bullying among others. Learners school attendance indicated that poor attendance was the highest, supporting that poor school attendance affected the performance of learners.

Attendance and performance of learners in well to be schools

Good	Fairly good	Poor
20	30	10

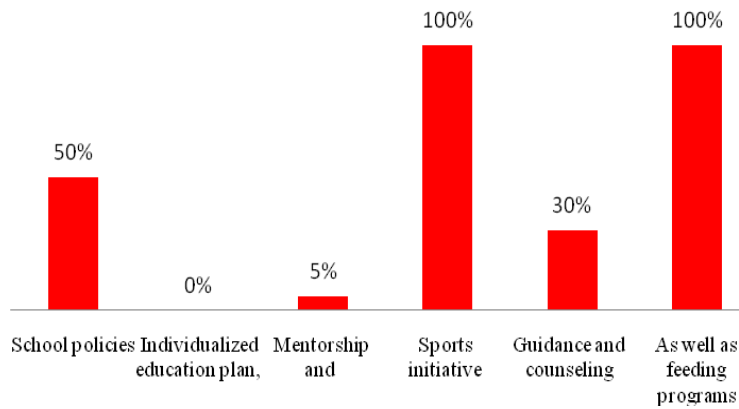
Records from the well to be schools indicated that there were only few cases of non school attendance as opposed to those of the pockets of poverty. The performance of the target respondents was noted to be fairly good. This was attributed to factors such as availability of enough books, pupils never went hungry and parents and teachers concern over matters affecting the pupils.

4.3 Intervention programs for truant learners

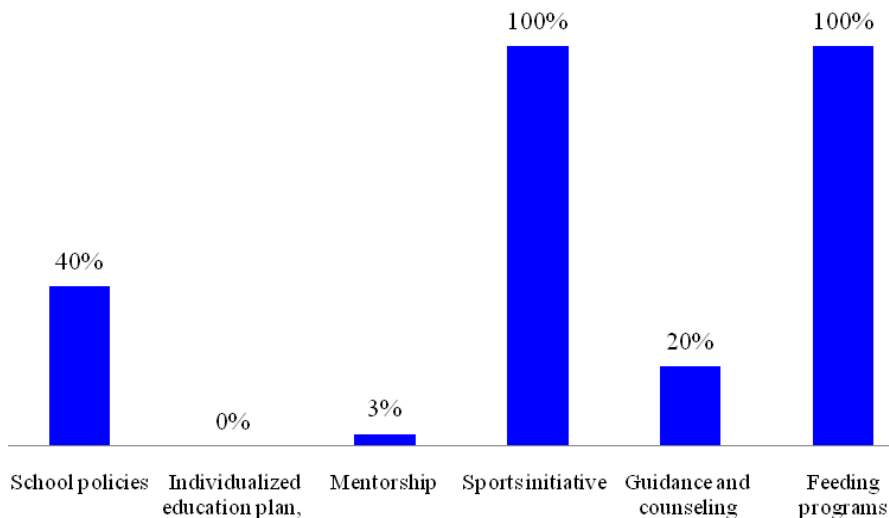
In this section teachers information was considered from both realities. Their opinions on which

programs favorably worked for truant learners were evaluated. Their responses were very indicative as their responses underlined certain issues such as sports and feeding programmers which were rated highly. Their opinions were that both activities attracted huge numbers of learners to schools. School policies didn't score much since there seemed to be no existing school policies to address matters of truancy amongst learners. Guidance and counseling as well as mentorship were rated lowly too because the two practices seemed to be practiced very lowly in most schools. There was no mention of existence of individualized education plan in both school categories. This implies that teachers were not conversant with special needs education, as they would have understood that an IEP context is key to assist learners with truancy behaviour disorder.

Well to be



Pockets of poverty



5. Conclusions and Recommendation

From the analysis it can be concluded that good attendance was important because it is linked to pupils' attainment and future career prospects. This pointed out that poor attendance has adverse effects and is associated with disruptive behaviour. Nevertheless the priority given to attendance varied amongst pupils and schools. It was noted from the records that some pupils had home-related factors and a few

had personal factors such as laziness and the habit of poor attendance. Most observed home factors, included parents putting a low value on education, disorganized lifestyles and inadequate parenting. Some teachers believed that parents condoned most truancy. Others felt that school factors were an important cause of absence. These included inappropriate curriculum, teaching, school attitudes, harassment, bullying and peer pressure. In addition, primary school teachers noted the influence of personal factors such as low pupil self-esteem and embarrassment at perceived inadequacies.

Teachers thought that truancy affected pupils' academic achievement and also isolated pupils from their classmates. Teachers pointed out that truancy could affect regular attendance. From the records it was noted that a combination of home, school and individual factors, caused learners to skip school. The problem is unlikely to be resolved by a single approach. Truancy starts young. Many learners begin truanting earlier when they open school and continue to do so in the end. Therefore, early intervention would be worthwhile to prevent pupils developing the habit.

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