

Effects and the Possible Remedies of Students' Truancy in Secondary Schools in Meru South Sub County, Kenya

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Abstract

Truancy is deliberate absence from school on the part of learners without the knowledge and consent of parents or absence of learners from school for which no reasonable or acceptable excuse is given. Truancy is a major challenge in Kenyan secondary schools. Truancy may have adverse affect on students, the school and the society at large. The purpose of this study was to establish effects and the possible remedies of secondary school students' truancy in Meru South District, Kenya. The study elicited views from principals, class teachers, counseling teachers and form two students, purposive and simple random sampling method was used to select 298 Form 2 students 8 Principal 8 counseling teachers and 8 class teachers. Questionnaire was used to collect data. Data was analyzed quantitatively and presented using frequency distribution table, bar charts and percentages. The study identified the effects of truancy as poor academic performance for the truants, their class and school, wastage of learning time, dropping out of school, poverty to the individual and family in future, involvement in delinquent behavior, family instability, social maladjustment and insecurity in the family. The suggestions for the remedies truancy were strengthening of peer, joint, group and individual counseling in secondary schools, involving parent and the surrounding school community in developing attendance and anti truancy policies, effectively monitoring of the truants, creating a friendly school culture, developing attractive co-curricular activities, holding regular motivation talks, organizing career guidance right from when students are in Form 1 and helping the students set and remain focused on clear goals in live.

Keywords: truancy. Effects of Truancy, Remedies of Truancy, Secondary school Truancy

INTRODUCTION

Truancy can be defined as "any absence from school not authorized by the school" (Bicknell, 1999). It could also be defined as the 'persistent, habitual and unexplained absence from school of a child of compulsory school age' (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, 1996 Truancy and Exclusion from School (TAEFS Report)

Le Rich (1995) defined a truant as a student who might be absent from school altogether or from a particular lesson or lessons with or without parental knowledge. According to Reid (2000:7) the prospective high risk truancy cases are learners who have experienced any of the following severely punished or bullied recently. Unduly moody or fearful; been under pressure from examinations; quarreled seriously with an educator; has become withdrawn and has overreacted to teasing or other classroom situations. All these are warning signs that a student could be on the way to becoming a truant. These could also be linked to emotional stress and psychological difficulties suffered by all learner occasionally. It could also be a manifestation of

severe traumatic encounters that learners may experience in their broader social context from time to time (Maynard, 2006)

Reid (2001) States that a higher proportion of truants than the normal school age population portray the following characteristics: They have higher levels of anxiety when in school and about school work in general; Tend to have fewer friends in school; Fail to undertake their home work when it is given; Have lower long term career aspirations; enjoy school life less; are prone to periods of absence from school due to ill health, and prefer fewer and different subjects to learners from similar social economic backgrounds who are good attendees.

The effects of truancy are enormous. According to Bimler and Kirland (2001) 40% of all street robberies in London, 33% of car thefts, 25% of burglaries' and 20% of cases of criminal damage were committed by 10 to 16 year olds in 1999 and are blamed on truants. Reid (2003) listed truancy as the greatest predictor of juvenile and adult crimes and of psychiatric problems. Reid further suggests that two thirds of offenders begin their criminal activities while truanting. Maynard (2006) observes that the implications of non school attendance become more worrying when concern is drawn to instances of truancy leading to delinquency, social disorder and education failure. According to Rayner and Riding (1996) Truancy leads to criminality or social alienation. According Reid (2002), Other difficulties in adult life which can be linked to truancy include: The inability to settle into routine work and or marriage, frequent job changes, isolationism, pathological disorders, poverty, higher separation and divorce rates, living upon income support, illiteracy, depression, temper tantrums and involvement with social workers and social services. Truancy is also associated with a significantly higher likelihood of becoming a teenage parent and of being unemployed or homeless in latter life. Males who truant are more likely to marry girls who played truant at a similar age at school. These truant families tend to have sons and daughters who also play truancy hence perpetuating a truancy syndrome into the next generation (Maynard, 2006).

Kenya Vision 2030 set an overall goal to reduce illiteracy by increasing access to education, improving the transition rate from primary to secondary school and raising the relevance of education (Republic of Kenya, 2007). In Session Paper Number 1 of 2005 the Government of Kenya committed itself to improve the transition rate from primary to secondary schools to 70% by providing Free Secondary Education (FSE). In pursuance of this commitment the Ministry of Education (2008) issued a circular on introduction of Free Secondary Education in which the Government pledged to pay ksh.10, 265 per child per year in all public secondary schools. All this was geared towards having secondary school education especially in day secondary schools affordable by majority of Kenyans and the government then expected more enrolment and retention of students in secondary schools (Ministry of Education, 2008). These very good plans and objectives by the government can easily be jeopardized by truancy.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study was guided by the following objectives

- I. To determine the effects of truancy in Meru South Sub county secondary schools, Kenya**
- II. To establish the remedies of truancy in Meru South Sub county secondary schools, Kenya**

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Dupper (1993) the most serious implication of truancy is its correlation with dropout rates. Bell (1994) found a correlation of not less than 81% between truancy and

dropout rates. Maynard (2006) observes that it would appear there is a prognosis for truants in terms of completing their schooling, securing stable employment and fulfilling responsible citizenship, without being a burden to their future spouses, families, communities and the state, is uncertain. Maynard (2006) further observes that the phenomenon of truancy is serious enough to warrant a counseling program that will be effective in treating truants in the light of their difficulties in such a way that they will obtain a balanced perspective of the value of regular school attendance.

A research by Hosefield and Helmke (2004), studied the connection between well-being class climate and truancy rates and found that the higher the well-being of students and the better the relationship with teachers is rated, the lower the truancy rate. Lapan, Gysbers, and Sun (1997) surveyed a statewide sample of high school students and found that in schools where comprehensive guidance and counseling programs existed, several positive relationships between counseling programs and students existed. These include: higher self-reported grades, student perceptions that they were being better prepared for their future, student perceptions that their schools were doing a better job providing information on post-secondary opportunities, and student perceptions that school climate was better.

Lifton (1994) identifies resilience as the human capacity of all individuals to transform and change, no matter what the risk; it is innate self-lighting mechanism (Werner and Smith 1992) according to Lifton (1994) resilience skill includes; teaching students to form relationships thereby gaining social competences, learning problem solving technique which incorporate meta-cognition, to develop a sense of identity whereby autonomy occurs and learning to plan and hope which translates into a sense of purpose and recognition of the future. To be able to teach resiliency skills, anyone involved with students must be able to recognize that everyone has innate resilience, and then the rebuilding of students resiliency can began.

Justin (2004) observed that attendance was greatly improved by interventions like a letter sent to parents informing them of their children's school attendance problem and a visit by school attendance officer. Difour (1983) outlined the following procedures used by west Chicago high schools regarding truancy. They include daily calls at home to parents of all those absent followed by forms to be completed, disciplinary actions against students for truanting, rewards and incentives for good attendance, graph chart showing students attendance and coordinating efforts of all individuals involved. Elburn (1983) found that when parents were contacted early, the incidences of truancy reduced.

Mason and Edie (1998) give a report on a program where a buddy system was developed in a Denver middle school. Thirty students with absentee problems selected a buddy forming a team. Teams were encouraged to call each other every night and agree to meet at a bus stop in the morning. The teams with an increased attendance were rewarded. This method of using students to monitor other students' attendance made significant strides in intervening in absence patterns of students and the middle school noted significant improvement in attendance rate by the end of the year.

Wheatly and Spillane (2001) suggests that schools need to develop an inclusive policy regarding attendance. That is a policy that includes students, teachers, administration, parents and the wider community in which the school is situated. Wheatly and Spillane (2001) further argues that without such a policy it is not uncommon to find that parents are often surprised and angry when they discover the broad discretion schools have in setting rules to punish

violators. Elburn (1983) further asserts that effective schools with high attendance levels tend to have a clearly stated and agreed policy that is known to staff, students and parents and is uniformly implemented.

According to Wheatley and Spillane (2001) some schools have chosen to respond to truancy in a punitive manner, making little attempt to understand the antecedents of truancy. Ryan (1998) notes that such responses prove to be both ineffective and alienating for most truanting young people who are already experiencing problems with authority figures, this brief critical action only serves to confirm the students view of teachers and other adults as hostile adversaries. Dryfoos (1990) concludes that misbehavior is not reduced by practices of suspension, detention, expulsion or employment of security guards. Gitonga (1997) observed that learners who admitted that they have once engaged in serious levels of truancy were likely to report low levels of exam performance. Eshiwani (1984) concluded that truancy in Kenyan schools affected truants academic performance.

Afande and Mathenge (2015) found that the approaches used in the management of truancy in secondary schools in Nyamira North district in Kenya include the following: safe learning environments; Individualized Instruction; early childhood education; availability of truancy; early literacy development; using reinforcement and reward systems; effective monitoring, registration and recording of attendance; mentoring/tutoring; systemic renewal; family engagement; acting fast on learning absence; ordinances; school - community collaboration; after- school opportunities; using a variety of instructional approaches; welcome back to school; learning communities within schools; career and technical education; student welfare; personalized learning; life-skills education; tutoring and mentor systems; counseling and therapy; in-service training; and alternative schooling.

METHODOLOGY

Research design

This study adopted descriptive survey research design. A descriptive survey design attempts to describe what is in the social setting like the school in the current study, the dependent variables were the effects of truancy while the independent variables are the remedies of truancy.

Study Population.

The study population included 1,650 form two students, 30 principals, 30 class teachers and 30 counseling teachers from 30 schools in Meru South District Kenya. Form two students were selected for this study because they are at the prime of adolescence stage. This is a volatile stage and they are likely to get involved in truancy as they attempt to experiment their sexuality, cognitive development, drug abuse, interests in firms and movies which would negatively affect their academic performance.

Sampling Procedure and Sample size

Stratified random sampling was used to select public secondary schools. Secondary schools were therefore stratified into three categories namely Boys schools only, Girls schools only and co-educational schools. Kathuri and Pals (1993) formula was used to calculate the number of selected form two students. In each of the schools selected data was collected, principals, counseling teachers and form two class teachers for the purpose of triangulation. Therefore, 298 Form 2 students from 8 schools, 8 Principals 8 Counseling teachers and 8 form 2 class teachers participated in the study.

Data Analyses

Data was analyzed quantitatively using descriptive statistics like percentages, frequency count, pie chart and bar charts. Data was manually analyzed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The first objective of the study was to establish the effects of truancy. Respondents were given a questionnaire with suggestions of the possible effects as well as open ended questions to enable them list other effects outside the suggested ones. The responses they gave on the effects of truancy are shown in table 1.

Table 1: Effects of truancy

	Effects of truancy		Student %	Class Teachers	GSC Teachers	Principals
1	Poor academic performance	258	86.6	100	100	100
2	Wastage of learning time	251	84.2	87.5	87.5	100
3	Poor class & school performance	248	83.2	75	37.5	100
4	Poor relationship with teachers and Parents	245	82.2	87.5	75	100
5	eventually dropping out of school	234	78.5	75	87.5	100
6	Poor health	183	61.4	62.5	87.5	75
7	Poverty to & family in future	174	58.4	50	37.5	62.5
8	Involvement in delinquent behavior	168	56.4	50	87.5	87.5
9	Family instability in future	156	52.3	62.5	37.5.5	67.5
10	Social maladjustment	138	46.3	50	75	50
11	Stealing % robbery in later life	129	43.3	62.5	37.5	37.5
12	Insecurity in the society	118	39.6	50	37.5	37.5

From table 2, 88.6% of students, 100% class teachers, counseling teachers and principals indicated that truancy affects academic performance. Responses on that truancy affects learning time was students 84.2, class teachers 87.5 counseling teachers 87.5 and principals 100%. On poor class and school performance responses were students 83.2% class teachers 75% counseling teachers 37.5% and principals 100%. The selection for poor relationship with teachers and parents was student 82.2, class teacher 87.5 counseling teacher 75% and principals 100%. Responses that truants eventually drop out of school were 78.5% from students, class teachers' 75% counseling teachers 87.5% and principals 100%. That truancy can eventually lead to poor health responses were 61.4 from students, 62.5 class teachers, 87.5 counseling teachers and 75% from principals. Responses that truancy would lead to poverty to individual and family in later life were as follows students 58.4 class teachers 50%, Counseling teachers 37.5 % and principals 62.5%. Involvement with delinquent behavior was selected by 56.4%, students 50% class teachers, 87.5% counseling teachers and 87.5 principals. Responses for family sustainability in future were students 52.3%, class teachers 62.5%, counseling teachers 37.5% and principals 75%. Social maladjustment responses were students 46.3%, class teachers 50%, counseling teacher 75% and principals 50%. 43.3% students, 62.5% class

teachers, 37.5% counseling teachers and 37.5% principals selected stealing and robbery in later life. Lastly, responses to insecurity in the society were students 39.6, class teachers 50%, counseling teachers 37.5% and principals 37.5.

The second objective of the study was to establish the possible remedies to truancy. A questionnaire was given to the respondent with suggestions on the possible remedies to truancy for them to select the suggestion they agree with. The questionnaire also had open ended questions to allow the respondents make their own independent suggestions. The responses are shown in table 2.

Table 2: Remedies of Truancy

			students	Class teachers	Counsel teachers	Principals
1	Regular class meetings with class teachers	246	82.6	87.3	75	75
	Suspension of truants	233	78.2	50	37.5	75
	Strengthening guidance and counseling	228	76.5	50	75	87.5
	Encouraging truants to join groups of hard working focused students	224	75.2	62.5	87.5	67.5
	Involving parents in joint counseling	222	74.5	87.5	50	100
	Regular motivation talks involving parents teachers and students	219	73.5	87.5	75	87.5
	Involving peers in peer counseling	193	64.7	75	100	100
	Individual counseling	185	62.1	87.5	87.5	87.5
	Developing exciting co-curricular activities that interest the students	164	55	62.5	75	87.5
	Sitting exams on arrival form holidays	158	53	62.5	87.5	87.5
	Creating a friendly school atmosphere	154	51.7	75	62.5	100
	Training students on study techniques.	144	48.3	50	50	50
	Training students on personal organization	130	43.6	50	50	50

Table 2 shows that the responses on having regular class meeting as a remedy to truancy ranked highest with students having 82.6%, class teachers 87.5%, counseling teachers 75% and principals 75%. 78.2%, 50% class teachers, 75% counseling teacher and 87.5% principals suggested suspension of truants to curb truancy on strengthening guidance and counseling the responses were students 76.5%, class teachers 50%, counseling teachers 75% and principals 87.6%. Responded who suggested encouraging truants to join hard working and focused groups were 75.5% from students, class teachers 62.5% counseling teachers 87.5% and principals 67.5%. Involving parents in joint counseling attracted 74.5% student responses, 87.5% from class teachers, 50% counseling teachers and 100% from principals. 73.5% students, 87.5% principals selected regular motivation talks. Responses on involving peer counselors were as follows: students 64.7%, class teachers 75% counseling teachers 100% and

principals 100%, while 62.1% students, 87.5% class teachers, 87.5% counseling teachers and 87.5% principals suggested individual counseling. Responses that favored the development exciting co-curricular activities were 55% students, 62.5% class teachers, 75% counseling teachers and 87.5% principals. The responses for sitting for examination on arrival from holidays were students 53%, class teachers 62.5% counseling teachers 87.5% and principals 87.5%. Responses on creating a friendly school environment were students 51.7%, class teachers 75%, counseling teachers 62.5% and principals 100%. Training students on study techniques was selected by 48.3% students, 50% class teachers, 50% counseling teachers and 50% principals. The responses for training students on personal organization were 43.6 from students 50% class teachers 62.5% counseling teachers and 50% class teachers, 62.5% counseling teachers and 50% from principals.

DISCUSSION

Concerning effects of truancy, this study concurred with the findings of Glenn (2004) that truants are placed at a disadvantage both socially and academically because they miss a critical stage of interaction and development with peers whilst simultaneously minimizing the likelihood of academic progress and success. All the respondents in the study suggested that truancy not only affects the truants' academic performance but also their social life now and in future. The effects with high responses included poor academic performance, wastage of learning time, poor school and class performance, poor health, poverty to individual and family in future, involvement in delinquent behavior, family instability, social maladjustment, stealing and robbery as well as insecurity in the society.

These findings are also similar to the findings of Maynard (2006) who did his study in South Africa and concluded that truants tend to be shy, inward looking people, and many are grateful for any interests and assistance which they receive from empathetic sources. That truants know failure and like most humans yearn for success but their opportunities for success is limited because they come from low income families and usually do not have the intellectual capacity to succeed with academic tasks in school. Maynard (2006) further observes that truants feel confused, less part of a community, general helplessness at school and unable to influence decision making. It also appears they stay out of school for trivial reasons, are not liked much by other children, often appears miserable, tearful, unhappy or distressed. They have poor concentration or short attention span, are often disobedient, often tell lies and have stolen things on one or more occasions. Bimler and Kirland (2001) found that 40% of all street robberies in London, 33% of car thefts, 25% of burglaries and 20% of cases of criminal damage in 1999 were committed by between 10 to 16 year olds and are blamed on truants. This further agrees with Hearly (In Smith, 1996) that all misdemeanors like theft, running away from home, use and distribution of drugs, burglary, vandalism, assault and robbery are routed in truancy. The findings of this study reflect that truancy has far reaching effects on not only on the truants but on their future career and families as well as the entire society.

Concerning remedies the study suggested various interventions that can be used to mitigate on the challenge of truancy in secondary schools. Most of the remedies recommended are school based and they include; regular class meetings to discuss effects of truancy as well as give students opportunity to talk about their challenges and dissatisfaction with the school as well as make suggestion on ways of improving the school; strengthening of guidance and counseling to address truants needs, involving parents in joint counseling, regular motivation talks, developing peer counseling programs. Strengthening and making co-curricular activities more interesting and exciting for students, creating a friendly school atmosphere, training students

on study techniques as well as personal organization, sitting examination immediately students come back from holiday and punishing the truants by suspending them from school. These findings are in agreement with the findings of a research by Dwyer (1996) which pointed out the various methods that may be used by school communities to attract and connect students to the school. This can be done by building an environment that has all or some of the following features: a supportive school culture, friendly and mutually respectful teacher/student relationships, opportunities for cooperative learning, catering for diversity, options for practical and applied knowledge, smaller scale school structures, avenues for school participation, collaborative work by teachers in curriculum planning and practice, flexibility in timetabling, subject choice and school organization, work organization and articulated curriculum linking cooperative learning practices to more individualized and independent modes of study.

As a remedy to Truancy the study also found that the ministry of education had developed a policy of having a class attendance registers which expects students to be checked and marked in the morning and afternoon as the lessons began. Other schools had gone further to develop a lesson attendance register where attendance was checked in every lesson. This is in agreement with other research findings by Saunders (1979) that early identification and apprehension of persistent truants is essential and demands vigilance on the part of the teachers in identifying truants at an early stage. After identifying them the teacher should befriend them to form a relationship that can help the truant feel attached not only to the teacher but also to the school. This attachment may end up preventing further truancy.

CONCLUSION

With regard to the findings of the study, it is concluded that truancy is a challenge in secondary schools and it has adverse effects to the truants themselves, their school and the larger society. Respondents were able to identify the effects of truancy on the individual which include; poor academic performance, wastage of learning time, poor relationship with teachers and parents eventually dropping out of school. Effects to the school include poor class and school performance and time wastage by teachers in following up truants and counseling them. Effects on the society include: Poverty to the truants family in future due to unemployment, family instability, insecurity as the truants go out stealing and committing other delinquent behavior both now as they truant and in future as they get involved in robberies and other crimes due to their social maladjustment

With regard to remedies, the findings of the study were that it is absolutely necessary that quick solutions to absenteeism be found to prevent its adverse effects. Respondents identified several remedial measures which include regular class meetings with the class teachers, regularly checking attendance through class and lesson attendance registers by class and subject teachers, strengthening group, individual, peer as well as joint counseling in secondary schools, regular motivation talks to students on study skills and personal organization and developing exciting co-curricular activities that will be attractive to the students including truants. The study recommends that class and subject teachers do the recording of absent students themselves. The findings were that in more than half the schools studied attendance registers were marked by the class monitors who are likely to cover their friends by marking them to be present when they are absent. School principals should regularly, at least once a week check the class and lesson attendance register and follow up those who missed lessons. The ministry should strengthen guidance and counseling in schools by having regular in-service training for counseling teachers; making it a policy that all schools select and train peer counselors as well as substantially reduce the load for counseling teachers to give them more

time to organize guidance and counseling for students. Curriculum developers should also re-evaluate the school curriculum with a view to reduce the teaching and learning load in order to leave enough time for co-curricular activities as well as time for group, individual and peer counseling. Schools should hold regular parents teacher association meeting and involve the students in making jointly agreed policies on truancy. These meetings should also regularly address the effects of truancy. Truants lack goals in life so the study recommends that students be guided on careers from as early as form 1. Schools can organize career days where they invite professionals to give career information to students. Students need to be encouraged to set their goals that will guide their school life.

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