

Effect of Truancy on Academic Performance Among Public Secondary School Students in West-Pokot County, Kenya

By

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to investigate the effect of truancy on academic performance among public secondary school students in West-Pokot County, Kenya. Truancy is a concern in education. Teenage truancy puts their prospects of reaching their educational objectives in danger. Students who are always absent in school fall behind their counterparts in the classroom. The objectives of the study were to determine the effect of occasional truancy on academic performance among public secondary school students in West-Pokot county, Kenya, to assess the effect of habitual truancy on academic performance among public secondary school students in West-Pokot county, Kenya, to establish the effect of chronic truancy on academic performance among public secondary school students in West-Pokot county, Kenya, and to find out the effect of casual truancy on academic performance among public secondary school students in West-Pokot county, Kenya. The study found that students who engage in truant behavior fall behind academically and eventually drop out of school. They also attribute their frequent truancy to peer pressure, their socioeconomic status, and their subpar academic performance. The study recommends that in order to eradicate all forms of absenteeism, the school administration should act immediately. Peer counselling, in addition to providing students with professional assistance and counselling services, can help achieve this.

Key Words: Kenya, Absenteeism, Academic Performance, Dropout and Truancy, West Pokot

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Introduction

According to Lannap (2017), truancy is defined as any deliberate, unauthorized, or unlawful absence from compulsory schooling. This negates the principle of regular attendance in classroom teaching and learning and has detrimental effects on the victim's educational development. Unusually, the phrase does not refer to legal "excused" absences, such as those caused by medical issues, but rather characterizes absences that students cause of their own free will. The precise definition of the phrase varies from school to school and is typically stated in the school's handbook of policies and procedures. Truancy refers to repeated or unapproved absences from school, frequently occurring without a parent's knowledge (Rivers, 2010). Additionally, students may skip class without permission from their instructors or administrators. It could develop into a habit, which usually leads to a persistent issue. The four forms of truancy that will be the subject of this study are habitual, chronic, occasional, and casual (Musa, 2014).

Occasional truancy is a type of truancy in which a pupil does not frequently and consistently miss school. Students' attendance is erratic or non-regular in this sort of truancy. Examples of occasional truancy is where a mother refuses to send her child to school to be left home to look for other siblings or a case where a youngster fails to go to school due to family holiday. Habitual truancy happens when a pupil (truant) is frequently and consistently absenting from school without his parents' or school administrators' knowledge or agreement. The majority of frequent truants are students who skip several full days of academic activities at school. Their regular absence has established a pattern or habit. It is vital to remember that students who are chronic truants are more likely to lag behind in their schoolwork, perform poorly academically, and possibly lose their attachment or positive attitude toward school (Richard, 2015).

Chronic truancy denotes a prolonged period of unexcused or excused absence from school. Persistent absence is defined by experts and an increasing number of states as missing 10% of the school year, or roughly 18 days. The repercussions of excessive absences are severe for parents as well as pupils. Parent-teacher conferences, warning letters, and other strategies are used by schools to address minor truancy. However, parents who allow their children to skip too much school may face fines in several areas. Casual truancy happens when a student's absence from school is unintentional. Truancy, or unexplained absence from school, does not happen on a regular and continuous basis, but rather happens by chance. For example, pupils who lingered near the school bell in order to attend classes that piqued their attention. A casual truant is a student who skips school and misses up to 10% of the total number of working days during an academic session. A casual truant is someone who skips school to avoid an unpleasant situation during the school day. He is receptive to suggestion and persuasion, making him the most responsive. He is the marginal person who, if left alone, will slip into truancy but is receptive to correction if properly handled (Mwansa, 2021).

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Due to the fact that high truancy rates can also be an early indicator of educational failure, they negatively affect all students by reducing the rate of instruction (Hoff, 2019). There is a correlation between student attendance and academic achievement, as evidenced by the fact that kids with greater truancy rates also have lower academic achievement and are more likely to drop out (Gottfried, 2019). In their research, Feniger et al. (2019) found that truants who miss school often repeat classes; even when they don't, they still feel worse about themselves since they think they aren't competent or qualified for the class. He says that because they are not interested in learning, their achievement is frequently low. While some students attend school in order to appease their parents and guardians, the bulk of truants view it as a form of punishment. It is highly likely that absentee students won't be able to finish their coursework. Consequently, the performance and overall scores of these students are usually low. Ayinde and Olasehinde-Williams (2020) report that there is a positive correlation between truancy and academic performance among students in southern Nigeria. Robinson et al. (2018) claim that children's educational attainment suffers as a result of truancy. Similar to this, Vercellotti (2018) argues that since absentee children find it difficult to comprehend what is taught, the relationship between attendance and achievement can be understood by applying basic common sense. Per Nightingale et al. (2019), students who miss school run the chance of experiencing learning issues.

Globally, issues of truancy have been widely reported. The truancy issue has emerged as a widespread psychological and sociological one in the field of education. It has been linked to the teenage child's personality, home, school, society, and the government (Mays, 2022). Truant behavior is one of the top ten issues that American schools are dealing with, with daily absentee rates reaching 30% in some areas. According to a National Center for Justice research from 2003, there was a 58% increase in the rate of truancy between 1985 and 1998 (Gonzales et al, 2015). Heilbrunn (2017) reports that the office of juvenile justice and delinquency prevention deemed the truancy increase to be of utmost importance due to its quick rise. The US Department of Education was compelled by the alarming trend to create a guidebook that would provide schools with recommendations on how to lower it (US Department of Education, 2016). In 1995–1997, the Washington legislature allotted \$8.3 million for programs that assist at-risk kids and truants (Burley & Harding, 208). This was a legislative commitment to address the issue of truancy.

As per Rivers (2010), truancy is a societal issue that has been linked to school dropout, substance abuse, gang activity, and criminal activity. It impacts several urban schools. As children get older, the issue of truancy gets worse, according to Lehr et al. (2014). Additionally, some study suggests that the conduct may take place gradually before being recognized. According to these studies, there are a variety of reasons why students choose to skip class even when they are aware that doing so may have consequences. Academic issues like disagreements with teachers or test anxiety could be the cause. For whatever reason, a student's chances of missing that one crucial class that could significantly affect their marks are higher when they miss a day of school. When a student starts to lag behind, it gets simpler for them to skip more classes, which creates a habit that is harmful to their performance.

Research indicates that truancy has always been a widespread occurrence in schools in Sub-Saharan Africa. One of the most common types of student misconduct in South African schools, according to a study aimed at gaining teacher insights into the most common forms of

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student indiscipline, is truancy. According to Mashiane's (2017) report, 475 out of 1194 students missed class. However, according to Monkie (2018), precise national statistics on absentee students in South Africa are unavailable. He concluded that being absent from school caused bad grades, criminal activity, and school dropout.

In Kenya, several studies on truancy were conducted. Kanga (2015) in his study states that truancy may be caused by family background, poverty among other factors. Truancy caused poor academic performance of truants, their peers and school as well as wastage of time and school resources. The study recommended regular sensitization between school administration and teachers to discuss ways of dealing with truancy. promote the idea that students often become influential and powerful in groups. Students want to be recognized by their friends, even students who are performing well might easily be duped by their friends and start skipping classes where they are performing better. At this stage, kids may skip school. Sometimes, parents and instructors may have differing views on how their child is acting (Nyaga, 2019).

The underlying elements should be carefully considered when designing and implementing interventions to minimize truancy (Randle-Filer, 2022). However, several studies focus on truancy and ignore the connection between student truancy and academic performance. Parts of West Pokot County's schools are reporting startling absenteeism among students who have been linked to hunger. The issue is getting worse; hundreds of students are avoiding certain schools because their families are going without food, putting them at risk of closing. Given this context, the aim of this study will be to investigate the influence of truancy on academic performance of students in secondary schools in West Pokot County, Kenya.

Problem Statement

Regardless of gender, truancy behavior disorder is a global issue that has been ruining children's and youth's futures. This behavior repeated suspension, expulsion, delinquent behavior, and dropping out has been recognized as a warning indicator of learner academic and social failure. However, this conduct consistently denies kids the chance to learn anything worthwhile, and it robs nations of a vital source of stability and economic prosperity. Kenyan students who are absent from school spend their days wandering, selling goods, or committing small-time crimes. When it comes to truant students, schools still employ severe tactics including corporal punishment and expulsion. This puts the students' academic success at jeopardy. Furthermore, nothing is known about the connection between public secondary school students' truancy and academic achievement. It is to this end that the researcher intends to fill the gap by investigating the effect of truancy on academic performance among public secondary school students in West-Pokot county, Kenya.

Objective or Research Question

The objective of the study was to assess the effect of truancy on academic performance among public secondary school students in West-Pokot County, Kenya.

Review of the Literature

Oluremi (2013) did study on chronic absenteeism and secondary school performance in South Western Nigeria. 80 respondents were chosen by the researcher using basic stratified and random selection approaches as a population sample. The researcher used three study tools to gather data,

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including a questionnaire survey regarding the educational environment, a record of student academic achievement, and an attendance register. Chi-Square and T-test results were used to determine the viability of various hypotheses. The study discovered that persistent absenteeism does, in fact, contribute to poor academic performance, which has both immediate and long-term effects on pupils as well as on society at large.

Musa, (2014) did a study on habitual truancy on academic performance of secondary school students in Ogun State, Nigeria. Respondents were 200 SSS2 students chosen using simple random sampling. All hypotheses were evaluated at the 0.05 level of significance. According to the findings peer group effects, students' socioeconomic origins, and poor academic achievement are all contributing factors to absenteeism and truancy in our secondary schools. It was suggested that parents should guide and model their children, as well as pay special attention to their children's financial and material needs.

Richard (2015) looked on the effects of chronic absenteeism on secondary school grades in Nyandarua County. The research's target group consisted of 869 students from three grade levels from 11 schools, and it found 72 respondents by using stratified, simple, and purposive sampling procedures. Of these, 54 students, 9 teachers of classes, and 9 guidance and counseling staff members made up the respondents. Both inferential and misleading statistics were considered in the analysis. The study's findings indicated that persistent absenteeism among students affected their academic performance.

Mwansa (2021) conducted research on the consequences of persistent absenteeism and academic performance in secondary schools in Zambia. The study employed a mixed method design. The sample consisted of fifty-five (55) respondents comprised of forty-nine (49) teachers, three (3) Deputy Head teachers and three (3) Head teachers from three selected boarding secondary schools in Namwala District. From the key findings, it was established that truancy levels were high in the selected schools under study. Furthermore, the study found out that teachers faced challenges in the face of truancy in various ways such as poor curriculum coverage, challenges on executing lesson plans, poor understanding of subject contents and challenges in fostering a culture of discipline.

London, Sanchez and Castrechini (2016) did a study on the relationship between chronic absenteeism and students' academic success. The study included information from a primary school and a secondary school, two separate institutions. The data that was examined included the years 2008 through 2011. 21 schools in total participated. According to the study, kids who have poor attendance typically miss essential instructional components and are at a higher risk of suffering unfavorable consequences. Poor academic performance was a result of repeated absences and their consequences.

John, (2017) did a study to establish the various factors that causes chronic truancy and their influence on student academic performance in Machakos County. This study employed an ex-post factor study design. The study population was limited to Machakos County secondary school pupils. To choose the required respondents, a simple random sampling technique was utilized because it avoids the chance of bias in respondent selection. The structured questionnaire was the respondents' favorite data gathering instrument. SPSS software was used to generate frequency of answers, percentages, tables, and figures from the acquired data. The findings revealed that chronic truancy in Machakos was influenced by individual, home and school related factors.

Bassey, (2020) did a study on chronic truancy and secondary school students' academic performance in English language. Descriptive study design was utilized in this study. simple random sampling was utilized to select a sample of 200 respondents. Face and content validity were performed on these instruments by experts. The instrument's reliability was estimated using the test-re-test reliability method. The findings revealed that chronic truancy had a considerable impact on secondary school pupils' academic performance in English.

Ampofo et. al. (2022) did a study on chronic truancy as predictor of poor academic performance in Ghana. The information was gathered by descriptive and correlational research methods, as well as a questionnaire. The sample size of 331 was determined using a multi-stage sampling technique, which includes 206 students and 25 teachers. The results of the study show that among junior high school students, peer pressure, a broken home environment, physical punishment/bullying, teachers' attitudes, and poverty are the main predictors of chronic absenteeism. This study also found a positive correlation between truancy and the school environment. Once again, the results of this study show a strong correlation between chronic truancy and parental socioeconomic position.

Theoretical Framework

The study was guided by Differential Association Theory. The proponent of the theory is Edwin Sutherland. It is one of learning theories of deviance. According to the theory, social interactions can teach people both bad and good behavior. Most learning occurs in small groups of individuals. The learning of aberrant behavior includes the commission tactics. These tactics could be simple or intricate. Learning impacts motivations, urges, justifications, and attitudes. Definitions from legal codes, such as those found in school disciplinary regulations, instruct and enlighten about the paths that are best and worst for motivations and desires. Students may be more prone to skip class without cause if there are more definitions that support breaking the law than those that oppose it. Different relationships may vary in terms of frequency, duration, priority, and intensity.

Deviant people define themselves by what they have experienced in the past. Students can take the experiences they had as children in the past and extrapolate the meanings from those experiences to create a framework for decision-making in the future. The study found that because students spend most of their time in school, if they are mistreated by their parents or other close relatives in this case, their parents, guardians, or teachers they will have a very different outlook on life and, consequently, behave differently. If the person, his or her family, or their surroundings are supportive, the case may be different. Depending on how their prior experiences have shaped how they view the current situation, a person's response to the same circumstance may vary.

Family and financial issues have an impact on children and can result in deviance. When families fail to provide for their children's basic wants and desires, deviance may occur (Bosiakoh & Andoh, 2010). These kids engage in a range of aberrant behaviors that eventually lead to delinquency in order to satisfy their needs and desires. According to the study, people are predisposed to acting in deviant ways if they are exposed to delinquent youngsters at a young age. Individuals who are found to be delinquent were exposed to delinquent peers as children, and as a result, they formed the mental habits that contributed to their delinquency and finally turned into delinquent individuals. This theory was crucial to the study because it addresses how

peer pressure at school and social networks shape students' behavior, both positively and negatively, and how that behavior impacts their overall academic achievement.

Methodology

Research Design

This study utilized descriptive research design. Descriptive research design measures several variables where many respondents account experiences (Neumann, 2000). Descriptive design focuses on determining the frequency with which something occurs or the relationship between variables (Bryman & Bell, 2007). A descriptive design, according to Bryman and Bell (2007), aims to gather data that depicts current phenomena by posing questions about people's perceptions and attitudes.

Target Population

The target population for this study was drawn from public secondary schools in West Pokot County. This study targeted 34 public secondary schools, 34 head teachers, and 619 teachers in West Pokot County (West Pokot County Education Office, 2023). The target for the head teachers and teachers was because they are resourceful regarding the information on truancy and academic performance among public secondary school.

Sampling Technique and Sample Size

Stratified sampling technique was utilized in the study for selecting the schools. The reason for using the stratified sampling method was because it enabled the researcher to even sample the population which may be inaccessible (Aldi, 2016). In contrast to alternative sampling methods, the stratified sampling process ensures that the sample fairly represents every demographic sector. Consequently, the population was more accurately represented by stratified random sampling since the researcher was able to oversee the subgroups and ensure that each was included in the sampling (Dunne, 2012). The population was divided into strata that is the head teacher's strata and the teacher's strata. This enabled the researcher to be able to pick the population equally from the various groups.

The head teachers in the selected schools were selected using purposive technique. In using purposive sample technique to pick head teachers, the researcher assumed that the respondents provided the information needed as they are in charge of curriculum supervision (Rai, & Thapa, 2015). The choice of their schools predetermined their inclusion. The researcher employed purposive sampling to extract as much information as possible from the data that was collected. This enabled the researcher to convey the major impact of the findings on the population (Etikan et al. 2016). Teachers were sampled using stratified sampling where the stratas was by gender that is male and female teachers. The reason for using the stratified sampling method was because it enabled the researcher to even sample the population which may be inaccessible (Aldi, 2016).

A sample size of 10 schools was chosen from the 34 target secondary schools. This represented 30% of the target population. The justification for this sample size was based on Mugenda and Mugenda's (2003) claim that a descriptive survey requires a sample size of between 10% and 30%. A sample of 10 head teachers was chosen for this study. This represented 30% of the target population. The justification for this sample size was based on

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Mugenda and Mugenda's (2003) claim that a sample size of 10% to 30% is sufficient for a descriptive survey.

The study used the Yamane (1967) formula to determine the sample size of the teachers. The formula is as follows:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where

n= the required sample size

N = is the Target Population (619 teachers)

e = accuracy level required.

Standard error = 5%

Sample calculation for households

$$n = 619 / (1 + 619(0.05)^2)$$

$$n = 619 / 3.46 \quad n = 178.9$$

A sample of 179 teachers was used.

The distribution is as shown in table 1

Table 1. Sample Size

Target Population	Population size	Sample ratio	Sample size
Secondary school	34	0.3	10
Head teachers	34	0.3	10
Teachers	619	0.289	179

Source: West Pokot County Director of Education Office (2023)

Data Analysis

Both quantitative and qualitative data were gathered for the study. The raw data was analyzed using SPSS Version 24 to provide results. The quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviation and presented in form of tables and graphs. The inferential statistics that was utilized in this study was a correlational analysis. Pearson Moment Using correlation analysis, assessed for correlation between independent and dependent variables, and plotted on interval and ratio scales. Thematic analysis was employed to examine qualitative data. This technique involves relating messages and information to trends by accurately and analytically identifying certain elements of each. Content analysis gives a qualitative picture of the respondents' concerns, ideas, perspectives, and methods. Additionally, it offers priceless historical and cultural insights through text analysis.

Findings and Discussions

Habitual Truancy

Extent of Agreement on Habitual Truancy

The respondents were requested to indicate the extent to which they agreed with statements on habitual truancy. The responses were placed on a five Likert scale where 0-1.49=strongly disagree, 1.5-2.49-disagree, 2.5-3.49-moderate, 3.5-4.49=agree, while 4.5-5=strongly agree. The findings are as shown in table 2.

Table 2. Extent of Agreement on Habitual Truancy

Extent of Agreement on Habitual Truancy	N	Mean	Std. Dev
Frequent absences from school lead to poor academic outcomes, which have short- and long-term effects on society as a whole as well as the pupils	149	3.929	0.766
Peer group dynamics, students socioeconomic backgrounds, and subpar academic achievement all contribute to habitual absenteeism	149	4.643	0.488
Student habitual truancy leads to challenges on executing lesson plans	149	3.821	0.772
Student habitual truancy leads to poor understanding of subject contents in class	149	3.929	0.716
Habitual truancy affects the level of fostering a culture of discipline	149	4.143	0.591
Composite mean		4.093	0.667

Source: Field Data 2023

According to the results in table 2, the respondents agreed that peer group dynamics, students socioeconomic backgrounds, and subpar academic achievement all contribute to habitual absenteeism (mean=4.643), followed by habitual truancy affects the level of fostering a culture of discipline (mean=4.143), frequent absences from school lead to poor academic outcomes, which have short- and long-term effects on society as a whole as well as the pupils (mean=3.929), habitual truancy contributes to dismal academic performances which not only affect the students but also the society at large in both short and long term (mean=3.929), and that student habitual truancy leads to challenges on executing lesson plans (mean=3.821). This depicts that peer group dynamics, students socioeconomic backgrounds, and subpar academic achievement all contribute to habitual absenteeism. The findings agree with a study by Oluremi (2013) who discovered that persistent absenteeism does, in fact, contribute to poor academic performance, which has both immediate and long-term effects on pupils as well as on society at large.

Correlation Analysis

The researcher used a Pearson moment correlation to determine the relationship between the study variables. The findings are shown in table 3.

Table 3. Correlations

		Academ ic perform ance	Occasi onal truanc y	Habitual truancy	Chronic truancy	Casual truancy
Academic performance	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.612	.598	.644	.678
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.	.425	.541	.225	.968
	N	149	149	149	149	149
Occasional truancy	Correlation Coefficient	.612	1.000	.033	.435	.001
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.002	.	.000	.003	.002
	N	149	149	149	149	149
Habitual truancy	Correlation Coefficient	.598	.122	1.000	.026	.008
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.004	.001	.	.000	.000
	N	149	149	149	149	149
Chronic truancy	Correlation Coefficient	.644	.037	.026	1.000	.124
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.002	.000	.001	.	.002
	N	149	149	149	149	149
Casual truancy	Correlation Coefficient	.678	.001	.008	.114	1.000
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.003	.001	.003	.000	.
	N	149	149	149	149	149

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Field Data 2023

According to the findings shown in table 3, occasional truancy has a positive correlation with academic performance ($r=0.612$, $p=0.02$). In addition, the study found a significant positive relationship between habitual truancy and academic performance ($r=0.598$, $p=0.04$). Additionally, the study discovered a significant positive association ($r=0.644$, $p=0.02$) between chronic truancy and academic performance. Finally, the study found that casual truancy has a positive correlation with academic performance ($r=0.678$, $p=0.03$). The results corroborate research by Oluremi (2013), who discovered a favorable correlation between absenteeism and academic achievement in secondary school students in southwest Nigeria. The results of the study demonstrated that truancy did, in fact, have a major impact on local pupils' academic performance. There is a correlation between student attendance and accomplishment since

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students with greater truancy rates also have lower academic achievement rates and are more likely to drop out of school.

Conclusion

The study concluded that peer pressure, students' socioeconomic backgrounds, and subpar academic performance all contribute to habitual truancy. The study also concluded that chronic truant children have low concentration or short attention spans, are frequently disobedient, and frequently tell lies. These findings contribute to poor school and class performance and the waste of learning time.

Recommendations

The study recommends that it is imperative that the school administration move quickly to end all forms of truancy. Peer counselling, in addition to providing students with professional assistance and counselling services, can help achieve this. In order to effectively address the various forms of trancies, school policies must also be reinforced. This is due to the fact that every school has internal truancy policies in addition to Ministry of Education policies. Therefore, a review of current policies is required to ensure that only those are adopted that help minimize truancy and that those that appear to increase it are eliminated.

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