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**Skipping English Language Lessons and its Effect on Senior
Secondary School Students in Imo State, Nigeria**

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Abstract

Literature abounds on the causes of truancy in schools among students but hardly has there been much on its effects on core subject like English Language of which deficiency could jeopardize truants' life careers. Being Survey study, Multi-stage and purposive sampling techniques were used to select 240 SS2 students: regular-in-class and truants from six public schools in the three geo-political zones of Imo State. Six hypotheses were drawn and a 50-item English Language objective test with four options having $r=0.78$ was used to gather data analyzed, using ANOVA. Findings revealed significant difference in the mean scores of regular-in- English Language lessons and truants: 23.95 and 20.54 respectively; no significant difference in the

performance of truants due to parents' income: $F(2, 117) = 0.923, p = 0.400$; in the performance of truants in respect of parents' educational qualification: $F(2, 117) = 1.202, p = 0.304$; and in the performance of regular and truants due to parents' professions: $F(2, 237) = 0.176, p = 0.838$. There was significant difference in the performance of regular students due to parents' income: $F(2, 117) = 0.256, p < .001$; and in the performance of regular students in respect of parents' educational qualifications: $F(2, 117) = 1.156, p < .000$. Education stake-holders should curb truancy in schools and classes. Government should enforce discipline and make school environment friendly. English Language teachers should keep subject attendance registers.

Key Words: truancy, academic achievement, subject attendance register, bullying, English language, school tone, discipline, success

Introduction

Truancy is any intentional, unauthorized or illegal absence from compulsory education, be it formal or informal, as long as such education has a programmed curriculum and it is structured towards building up of a "total being". It is an absence caused by students of their own free will, and usually does not refer to legitimate "excused" absences, such as ones related to medical conditions. Truancy is not just a universal problem, but an indicator of some other problems and its effects are such so serious that the life career of the affected may be jeopardized. Most students that play truants in core subject like English Language have reasons for their deviant behaviour, forgetting that this core subject, in a second language learning situation, must be deliberately learnt and mastered under the tutelage of a good teacher and with regular attendance at lessons (FGN, 2014).

The place of English Language is so important that truancy from its lessons will not only lead to poor mastery of the subject but will affect the truant in all other aspects of his academics and life careers. No wonder then, that most Nigerian graduates are deficient in the use of the language for which reason may not be far from the effect of truancy, boycotting classes, or 'playing hooky' in English Language lessons, as it may be called, when such people were in the acquisition stages in their various schools.

As earlier said, truancy of students from school and school subject lessons is a universal problem. There are a number of expressions in English which refer to truancy. In South Africa, the slang used is bunking, mulling, skipping or jippo. In Jamaica, it is called skulling. In New Zealand and Australia truancy is called wagging, bunking, "jigging", ditching, or skipping school. It is called bunking (off) or skiving or wagging in the United Kingdom and India, mitching, wagging or on the knock. In the United States and Canada, expressions for truancy include hookey, playing hookey, ditching, dipping, jigging, sluffing, skipping, cutting class, or simply just cutting. In the province of Newfoundland and Labrador, the act of truancy is known amongst

youths as "pipping off", and truant students are described as being "on the pip". In Trinidad and Tobago, it is referred to as breaking biche. In Singapore and Malaysia, it is referred to as fly. In the State of Utah, a sluff is a commonly used word referring to truancy. In Pakistan, it is referred to as bunking. In India, it is "Bunking" in English and "Dumma" colloquially. (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/canada>: retrieved on 6th June, 2016). In Nigeria, being a multilingual country, names given to truancy depend on culture and the environment where it occurs. Among the three principal tribes (languages), the Yorubas call a truant 'isansa', the Hausas call it 'dan iska', 'shashasha', or 'jahili' while the Ibos call such a truant 'efulefu', or 'agafu'.

The fact that a parent has provided an explanation in relation to a particular absence does not oblige the school to accept the explanation offered as a valid reason for absence. The School should communicate to parents their policies with regard to the notification and categorization of absence. Emeka, (2004) and Garry, (2009) attributed truants' poor academic performances in school core subjects like English Language, Mathematics and Sciences to learner-truant's home and school factors. Some of the factors identified were truant's intellectual incapacitation, poor study habit, lack of motivation, lack of vocational goals, low self-concept, and low socio-economic status of the family. Ajila & Olutola (2006) noticed that the consequences of these include indiscipline in schools and low level of educational standards as parents are mainly responsible for the educational and other developmental needs of their children.

Miller (2010) and Oyekanmi (2013), identified and categorized problems responsible for students' poor performance in English Language lessons of both truants and regular-in-English Language- lessons-students to teachers' poor methods of teaching, poor classroom management, lack of good presentation of lesson content, teacher's lack of sound mastery of subject-matter, non-use or inadequate use of subject attendance register(s) to caution irregularities and truancy at lessons, parents' attitude to their wards' education, inadequate provision of school necessities, lack of good relationship with their children's schools to monitor school and school subject attendances, and weaknesses of other agents of education.

In his own opinion, Okara, (2005) said that truancy in school and at school lessons are caused by poor monitoring of students' performances in school, and broken homes. Schuss & Smith, (2008), and Seeley, (2007) stressed that most truants and regular-in-class students suffer from single parenting. He buttressed this further to say that most students whose parents live under the same roofs are thousands of kilometres apart in their relationships which eventually has implicit negative effects on learners' school performances. Miller, (2010) observed that academic achievement depends on the combination of circumstances surrounding the learners (both regular-in class lessons and truants) and their efforts in the school subjects of their interest. He further said that the views of other people hold that children's performance in English Language is influenced by students' adaptability to school and classroom environments, English

Language teaching techniques and methods, special interest in the language teacher and the subject he teaches, self-discipline, maturity, and most importantly, his/her special ambition to learn; ... the absence of which causes truancy.

The habit of going home before classes, or remaining in the dormitory (for boarding schools), or hide-outs during English Language classes is unwholesome. Stuff, (1985), Ukeje, (2004) and Miller, (2010) maintained that leaving school before the closing time/date for vacation, failure to return on the re-opening time/date, breaking bounds or leaving the dormitory without permission, incessant absence from English Language lessons for whatever reason(s) lead to a total breakdown of school tone, discipline, law and order (Whitney, 2006 & Sense, 2012).

Tyerman, (2009) listed a number of conditions beyond the boundaries of the classroom that combined to create truancy problem among school children. These are:

- Lack of school materials which prompt many students to skip English Language lessons, ((Miller, 2010).
- Poor and unstructured English Language curriculum (Ukeje, 2004).
- Unfriendly school environment (Whitney, 2006).
- Lack of discipline in schools among teachers and students (Whiting & Child, 2003);
- Lack of good tie or strong cordial relationship between the school and home (Washington, 2010). On the premise of the aforesaid is this research work built to investigate the effect of truancy in English language lessons in selected schools in the three senatorial districts of Imo State of Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Truancy in English Language lessons among senior school students and its effects on their learning outcomes calls for concern. Literature abounds on the causes of truancy in schools among students but hardly has there been much on its consequences on core subject like English Language of which its deficiency could jeopardize truants' life careers.

This study, therefore sought to examine the effect of predictor variables on truants' academic achievement in English language among the Senior Secondary 2 students of Imo State, Nigeria.

Research Hypotheses

Based on the stated problems, the following research hypotheses were drawn and tested by this study:

Ho1: There is no significant difference in the performances of regular- in-English Language lessons and truant students in English Language.

Ho2: There is no significant difference in the performance of truant students in English Language lessons of (a) low income earning parents, (b) average income earning parents, and (c) high income earning parents.

Ho3: There is no significant difference in the performance of regular-in-English Language students of (a) low income earning parents, (b) average income earning parents, and (c) high income earning parents.

Ho4: There is no significant difference in the performance of truants and regular in-English Language lessons students whose parents are (a) traders, (b) civil servants, and (c) artisans.

Scope of the Study

The study examined the causes of truancy in English Language lessons and its influence on their academic achievement in English language among the Senior Secondary School students in Imo State, Nigeria.

Methodology

This is a survey study. The target population comprised of all Senior Secondary School 2 students in Imo State. Imo State, at the time of this study, had twenty-seven (27) Local Government areas divided into three (3) senatorial districts. From each district, one (1) local government was randomly selected and in each of the three local governments, two (2) public schools- one in the rural and the other in the urban were randomly sampled. This allowed six public secondary schools from which two hundred and forty (240) samples were purposively selected for the study: forty (40) from each of the six (6) schools. At school level, samples were drawn from Senior Secondary School 2 classes. Multi-stage sampling technique was used to select 240 homogeneous samples (120 regular-in-English lessons students and 120 truants in English language lessons, males and females) in the three geo-political Zones of Imo State, Nigeria. A 50- item objective English Language test with four options (A-D) was administered on the samples. The items were on Test of Orals, Written Comprehension, Lexis and Structures, and Summary Writing. From these, data were generated and analyzed using t-test and ANOVA to test for equality of means.

Results and Discussion

Hypothesis

HO₁: There is no significant difference in the performances of regular- in-English Language lessons and truant students in English Language.

Table 1: Means and Standard Deviation of regular students’ and truant student’s achievement in English Language lesson.

Variables	N	Mean	Std. D	Standard Error Mean	t-test for equality of means.			
					T	F	Sig. (tailed)	F
Regular students’ Achievement	120	23.95	13.119	. 8 4 9	27.745	119	. 0 0 0	23.544
Truants Students’ Achievement	120	20.54	13.109	1 . 1 9 7	19.178	119	. 0 0 0	22.950

Table 1 shows means and standard deviation of regular in English Language lessons students’ achievement in English Language and truant in English Language lessons students’ achievement in English Language achievement test. The mean score of regular students is 23.95 while the mean score for truant students is 20.54. The mean difference is statistically significant at 0.05 (alpha level $p < 0.05$). Therefore, there is significant difference in the mean scores of regular-in – English Language lessons students’ achievement and truant students’ achievement in English Language.

The findings above agree with Ajila & Olutola, (2006); Emeka, (2004), and Garry, (2009) who all discovered through their works that truants in class lessons, no matter how socio-economically favoured will be on the set-back academically. Ho2: There is no significant difference in the performance of truant students in English Language lessons of (a) low income earning parents, (b) average income earning parents, and (c) high income earning parents.

Table 2: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) of Truant Students’ Achievement in English Lesson by Parents’ Socio-economic Status

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower bound	Upper bound		
Low	72	11.83	4.821	.568	10.70	12.97	0	21
Average	37	13.08	4.786	.787	11.49	14.68	4	21
High	11	11.64	4.249	1.281	8.78	14.49	4	20
Total	120	12.20	4.761	.435	11.34	13.06	0	21

ANOVA

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F.	Sig.
Between Groups	41.898	2	20.949	.923	.400
Within Groups	2655.302	117	22.695		
Total	2697.200	119			

The result from the table revealed that there was no significant difference found in the performance of truancy students in relation to the income earning of their parents and their achievement in English Language, $F(2, 117) = 0.923$, $p = 0.400$ which is not significant at $P < 0.0$. Low income earning parents ($= 11.83$, $SD = 4.821$) Average income earning parents ($= 13.08$, $SD = 4.786$) and high income earning parents ($= 11.64$, $SD = 4.249$) did not differ on the reported amounts on the truants' achievement in English language. Therefore, it is concluded that there is no significant difference in the performance of truancy of performance of truancy students in English Language lessons with reference to their parents' socio- economic status.

These findings disagree with Miller, (2010), Ukeje, (2004), and Whitney, (2006) who found out that the socio-economic status of truants reflects in their academic performances.

Ho3: There is no significant difference in the performance of regular-in English Language students of (a) low income earning parents, (b) average income earning parents, and (c) high income earning parents.

Table 3: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) of Regular Students' Achievement in English Lesson by Parents' Socio-economic Status

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower bound	Upper bound		
Low	68	22.4	13.089	1.587	19.27	25.61	0	49
Average	37	23.00	13.449	2.211	18.52	27.48	4	50
High	15	25.13	13.010	3.359	17.93	32.34	9	48
Total	120	22.95	13.109	1.197	20.58	25.32	0	50

ANOVA

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F.	Sig.
Between Groups	89.202	2	44.601	.256	.001
Within Groups	20360.498	117	174.021		
Total	20449.700	119			

The result shows that there is significant difference in the performance of regular students in English Language lessons of (a) low income earning parents, (b) average income earning parents, and (c) high income earning parents, $F(2, 117) = 0.256$, $p < .001$. High income earning parents, ($= 25.13$, $SD = .13.010$) and average income earning parents ($= 23.00$, $SD = .13.449$) reported significantly less low income earning parents ($= 22.44$, $SD = .13.089$). Since the critical value of the F-ratio is Significant, it follows that hypothesis tested is not rejected. Hence, there is significant difference in the performance of regular students in English Language lessons of (a) low income earning parents, (b) average income earning parents, and (c) high income earning parents.

These findings agree with Miller, (2010); Seeley, (2007), and Tyerman, (2009) who found out that even if a student is regular in school and in school class lesson but is denied of all the necessary materials to facilitate good learning due to the student's poor, socio-economic background, definitely, such a learner will be adversely affected as this will reflect his/her academic achievement.

Ho4: There is no significant difference in the performance of truants and regular in-English Language lessons students whose parents are (a) traders, (b) civil servants, and (c) artisans.

Table 4: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) of Regular and Truant Students' Achievement in English Lesson by Parents' Occupational Status

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower bound	Upper bound		
Trading	144	23.64	12.792	1.066	21.53	25.75	0	50
Civil Service	54	22.72	12.987	1.767	19.18	26.27	4	50
Artisan	42	24.29	14.451	2.230	19.78	28.79	0	48
Total	240	23.55	13.091	.845	21.88	25.21	0	50

ANOVA

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F.	Sig.
Between Groups	60.869	2	30.434	.176	.838
Within Groups	40900.627	237	172.576		
Total	40961	239			

The result from the table revealed that there was no significant difference in the performance of regular and truancy students when taking with parents' occupation, $F(2, 237) = 0.176$, $p = 0.838$ which is not significant at $P < 0.05$. Trading (= 23.64, $SD = 12.792$), Civil Servant (= 22.72, $SD = 12.987$), and Artisan (= 24.29, $SD = 14.451$) did not differ on the performance of regular and truancy students' achievement in English language lesson. Therefore, it is concluded that there is no significant difference in the performance of truants and regular in- English Language lessons students with their parents' occupation.

This supports the findings of Emeka, (2008) and Miller, (2010) that both discovered that parents' professions or occupations have no significant influence on students' learning outcomes as children of peasant farmers, road-side mechanics and petty traders can attain the heights of their academic determination through hard-work and devotion.

Conclusion

Students who skip English Language lessons have reasons for their actions. The reasons put forward by the students are not always trivial. Some truants developed hatred for the teacher and the subject; some due to peer influence, while the school factors and English Language teachers' personality factors are the causes of truancy. It is sad to note that some predictor variables under study (learner factors, parental factors, teacher factors and school factors) had significant effect on truant students in English Language lessons. Students who were regular in English Language lessons performed better than the truants even though some of the truants would have performed better than they did if they had not been playing truancy due to the factors examined in this study.

Recommendations

It is therefore recommended that:

- Peer influence should be controlled by home and school as they monitor peers, students keep and check their school works in English Language regularly.

- Parents should value their children's education as they provide English Language lesson materials their children need to facilitate good and meaningful teaching-learning interactions.
- School/the government should provide English Language lesson attendance register, monitor students' attendances in English Language lessons,
- School and other education stakeholders should have rewards for good attendances at English Language lessons;
- Measure of punishment should be meted for truancy in English Language lessons,
- Routine inspection of students' workbooks in English Language should be done to check laziness on behalf of English language teachers and truancy among students.

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