

# Relationship Between Pupils' Truancy And Academic Performance: An Empirical Investigation

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## **Abstract**

*There is copious evidence in the literature, pointing at different drivers of pupils' academic performance. While truancy is among the drivers, existing authors have considered it as having only an indirect impact on the pupils' achievement scores. Away from this common philosophy, this study examines the direct impact of truancy on academic performance of primary school pupils. To provide empirical flavour to the inquiry, data on pupils' truancy and academic scores were collected directly from the pupils and their teachers. This was achieved with the aid of closed-ended questionnaire design. The analytical technique was anchored by a mix of frequency counts, percentages and logistic regression. Findings revealed that the sampled pupils were characterised by truant behaviours, as majority of them were deliberately absent from class, or morning assembly or school altogether. More importantly, it was revealed that habitual truancy can explain about 39.2% variation in the pupils' poor academic scores, occasional truancy 28.7% and casual truancy 22.4%. By implication, it is recommended that the school authorities should implement stricter penalties for truant behaviours such that the pupils' eligibility to participate in the terminal examinations is tied to their satisfactory report on school and class attendance. This will help consolidate the learning outcomes and enhance the pupils' academic performance.*

**Keywords:** truancy, academic performance, primary school pupils, logistic regression, Nigeria

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## **I. Introduction**

Truancy is a bane to the educational aspirations of the pupils, schools and the society (Akomolafe and Ajayi, 2019). When pupils skip schools for unjustifiable cause, they have limited their benefits from a stream of learning outcomes (Ayinde and Olasehinde-Williams, 2020). More importantly, the absence of pupils from lessons prevent them from imbibing the sociological and philosophical footprints of the instructional programme (Fareo, 2019; Musa, 2014). In the end, the pupils lack the learning and skills needed to help them understand the acceptable culture of the society and contribute to its development. Given these unwanted consequences of truancy, the Nigerian society cannot afford to see truanting as a tradition among the school learners (Federal Ministry of Education, 2013).

Pupils' wilful absenteeism from school (or truancy) is an important correlate of pupils' academic achievement because it negatively affects the pupils' attitude and attention (Bajon, 2022). As the pupils stay off schools, they lack the intrinsic motivation to respect school values and instructions. This builds their non-educational attitude as they give less attention to their instructional materials (Bajon, 2022). In the end, the pupils become uninterested in academic activities, leading to their drop out from schools. Nevertheless, while the pupil's decision may not generate instant impact on their life's trajectories, an educational institution shall immediately recognize the long-term consequences of such decision in the society (Ampofo et al., 2022). As a result, all efforts are geared towards reversing truanting behaviors among the pupils (Ampofo et al., 2022).

This study contextualizes the impact of truancy on the academic performance of primary school pupils. This was aimed at bringing into limelight the incidence of truancy among the pupils and the need to correct the abnormal behavior owing to its impact on the pupils' learning outcomes and their achievement scores. A descriptive survey design was adopted for the research and the major finding supported the common narrative in the literature. Specifically, it was found that pupils' truancy was a critical disease that has been ravaging the schools included in the study. This was further projected by pupils' persistent failure in their terminal

examinations. The next section reviews the pieces of evidence in the literature on the nexus between truancy and students' academic achievement. After this, the design and methods adopted in the study are discussed. Then, there is a presentation and discussion of empirical results. The findings are then pieced together before the paper is concluded.

## **II. A Brief Tour Of The Literature**

Using a survey research design, Musa (2014) investigated the role of truancy and absenteeism on the academic performance of five secondary school students in Ogun State, Nigeria. The author administered a Non-School Attendance Assessment Scale as a measure of truancy. This was combined with students' examination scores in their previous terminal examinations. The collected data were analysed using a mix of percentage counts and weighted averages. Findings showed that truanting is a significant determinant of the students' learning outcomes. In addition, truancy redirects the students' focus away from learning activities, culminating in their poor performance at the end of a programme of instruction (Musa, 2014). Similarly, Fagbenle and Elegbeleye (2014) inquired on the position of students' truancy and indiscipline among sixty-one state-owned secondary school students in Osun State, Nigeria. Fagbenle and Elegbeleye (2014) reported that truancy precedes students' indiscipline which is a major harbinger of poor academic performance of the students.

Oladejo et al. (2015) surveyed the prevalence and consequences of truancy among primary school students of Delta State, Nigeria. Using a simple random sampling technique, the authors selected 2,545 pupils from 30 public and private primary schools to participate in the administration of 34-item questionnaire. The focus of the research was on estimating the significant differences in the performance of truant students and non-truant students. The statistical significance of the students was analysed using the Chi-square tool. Findings pointed that truancy creates a significant difference between examination scores of the students. It was further noted that truancy does not respect gender, as both male and female students were prone to poor academic achievement due to their truant behaviours.

Adika (2016) randomly selected a group of 200 adolescents from five secondary schools in Oyo State, Nigeria. The researcher self-designed and applied Adolescent Truancy Scale (ATS) to measure the elements of truancy among the students. The ATS also contained constructs, measuring the behavioural patterns of the students. The quantitative analysis of the data was conducted using descriptive statistics and t-test. It was found that truancy impedes the behavioural development of the students, predisposing them to choosing non-academic over academic behaviours. In another sense, Adika (2016) projected the view that truancy has a direct impact on the behavioural composition of the students, but an indirect impact on their academic performance.

Sambe et al. (2017) analysed the effects of truant behaviour on academic achievement of secondary school students in Ukum Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria. Qualitative data on the dispositions of students to truancy were collected using a questionnaire design, while quantitative data on academic performance were collected using the students' scores in their terminal examinations. A Chi-square approach was used as a non-parametric tool in measuring significance in the students' opinions vis-à-vis their achievement scores. Findings demonstrated that truancy had not only worsened the failure rate of the students, it is a main factor responsible for increasing drop-out rate among the students.

Akubuilu et al. (2020) determined the intelligence quotient (IQ) and academic performance of primary school children in Enugu State, Nigeria. The researchers included truancy, family size and socio-economic background as the intervening variables in the quantitative analysis. For robustness purpose, they classified academic performance into high, average and low categories using past records of students' class assessment. Also, intelligence quotient was measured with an application of the Raven's Standard Progressive Matrices (RSPM) and was grouped into two categories (optimal and suboptimal). Akubuilu et al. (2020) reported that truancy, low socio-economic status and large family size impact negatively on the students' IQ and academic performance. It follows that efforts to promote the students' IQ and academic achievement should be directed at reversing the trends in the three intervening variables, especially truancy.

Brew et al. (2021) conducted a review of studies which had examined the role of truancy in affecting the performance of senior high school students in Ghana. The authors applied a narrative technique to dissect the literature on the truancy-students' performance nexus. Findings indicated that truancy determines students' exposure to learning activities. The exposure in turn influences the expected performance of the students in given achievement tests. The authors further reiterated that the common knowledge that truancy is a home-based factor is erroneous. Rather, students' propensities to attend schools irregularly are explained by school factors. For example, a school with ineffective teachers, insufficient learning materials, and poor infrastructure is un conducive to support students' learning. This may ignite the thoughts of absenteeism in the students (Brew et al., 2021).

## **III. Methods And Methodology**

This study is designed with descriptive focus of explaining the relationship between truancy and academic performance of pupils. This was exemplified by estimating the odds of poor academic performance of

the pupils, given the evidence of truant behaviors among them. To achieve this, insights were taken from a logistic regression technique which is popularly used to measure the probability that an event occurs, following a variation in an observable parameter. To this end, the following logit model was specified:

$$Y = a + bX + e$$

Where Y is a binary dependent variable being 1 if there is poor academic performance of pupils and 0 if otherwise. X is an independent variable measuring truancy in students. Three forms of truant behaviors were considered in this study (habitual, occasional and casual), so X is a vector of three elements, not a scalar. b is a vector of parameters measuring the odds of students' truancy leading to poor academic performance. Being a probability value, the value of b ranges from 0 to 1. a is the constant term of the model. e is the stochastic error term which is distributed with constant variance but zero mean. These properties of e are important so that the regression estimates are unbiased and efficient. The properties of all the terms of the logit model are defined as follows:

$$Y = \begin{cases} 1 & \text{if there is poor academic performance of pupils} \\ 0 & \text{if there is good academic performance of pupils} \end{cases}$$

$$a > 0$$

$$0 < b < 1$$

$$X = \begin{pmatrix} X_1 \\ X_2 \\ X_3 \end{pmatrix}$$

$$e \sim (0, \sigma)$$

Where  $X_1$  is habitual truancy (pupil's absence from school for at least 3 times per week),  $X_2$  is occasional truancy (pupil's absence from school for 2 times per week) and  $X_3$  is casual truancy (pupil's absence from school for only 1 time per week). Having specified the model, efforts were made to determine the degree of truancy among the students. This involved designing a questionnaire to capture the perceptions of students on the occurrence of truancy in them. As a result, four primary schools were randomly selected in Ibadan South-west Local Government Area of Oyo State, Nigeria. In each school, 35 pupils were selected using a simple random sampling technique, totaling 140 pupils who participated in the study. The participating students responded immediately the questionnaires were presented to them, thanks to the volunteer efforts of their teachers in explaining the research purpose to them on behalf of the researcher.

As a check on the pupils' responses, another version of the questionnaire was administered among the teachers. The teachers were simply asked to state the average attendance (presence and lateness) of the participating pupils in the morning assembly, the class and the school altogether. On the questionnaire, there were 5 questions asked on each of the three forms of truancy that this study addresses. Also, the researcher requested the results of the pupils in their last terminal examination. The results of only the students who participated in the study were collected from their teachers' records. Having administered the research instrument and obtained the students' scores, the qualitative responses of the students were converted to their quantitative forms, using the codes attached to the questionnaire items. This was done in Excel spreadsheets. Then the data were transferred into the Stata software for the estimation of the logit model. The interpretation of the estimates was done at 5% and 10% levels of significance, implying that the statistical values of the estimates should be in excess of 2 for them to be significant. In addition, the regression results contained the elasticity of means so that the odds of response of pupils' academic performance to the forms of truancy are determined. Beyond the estimates, there were post-estimation diagnostic checks including the R-squared, F-statistic, and Chi-square statistic.

### **Empirical analysis**

The analysis began with a discussion of demographic features of the sampled pupils. Of the 140 pupils, 72% are male while 28% are female. The disproportionate representation of the pupils' gender occurred entirely by chance. Nevertheless, according to the official school records, the male enrolment ratio in the selected schools was higher than the female enrolment ratio (58:42). The average age of the students was 11 years, suggesting that majorly of the pupil participants are in the upper basic classes. Indeed, the model age group was 10-11 years, representing 56% of the students. There is evidence by Akubuilu et al. (2020) that the parental status is a determinant of truant behaviors in the pupils. Therefore, when about 60% of sampled students reported that their parents were not living together, the researcher got the initial idea that truancy might be a common phenomenon among the pupils. This was attested to by a number of teachers in the sampled schools – they informed the researcher that their experience suggested the primary source of truancy is the lack of parental skills to manage the pupils' behaviors at home. Pupils were also asked of the occupation status of their parents. While 44% claimed that their parents were artisans, 26% were into trade and business and the remaining 30% were civil servants. Giving that most artisans are not educated beyond secondary school, it follows that majority of the pupils' parents did not have long formal education. This might contribute to their low skills and unimpressive stance in preventing or curbing truant behaviors in their children.

Next in the analysis is the responses of pupils and teachers regarding the prevalence of different types of truancy in the school settings. The analysis was accomplished by individual and group analysis of the pupils' responses, as provided on the questionnaires. The pupils' responses are summarized in Table 1 where it is noted that about 39% of the pupils were being affected by habitual truancy (those with the truancy indicators of 3-4 times per week), 15% by occasional truancy (those with the truancy indicators of only 2 times per week) and around 16% by casual truancy (those with the truancy indicators of only 1 time per week). It is noteworthy that 30% of the pupils reported no indicator of truancy. There are overlapping responses across different indicators of truancy, so the average response was computed for each number of time that an indicator is assumed to have occurred. In all, the group mean response is large enough to indicate that truancy behavior is characteristic of the sampled schools. Comparing the pupils' responses with those provided by their teachers (Table 2), it was affirmed that both sets of responses were complementary. The average responses of the two categories of respondents were not particularly distant from each other. This occurred despite that the teachers filled the questionnaires at different time from the pupils. During the instrument administration, some teachers opted to narrate their experiences of truant behaviors among the pupils, even without the researcher's request. This consolidated the report of high degree of truancy among the pupils.

**Table 1: Prevalence of truancy (opinions of pupils)**

S/N	Indicator of truancy	Number of times in a week					Total
		1	2	3	4	0	
1.	Absence from school	23	21	34	25	37	140
2.	Lateness to school	25	18	29	22	46	140
3.	Absence from assembly	18	21	27	24	50	140
4.	Lateness to assembly	26	28	38	29	19	140
5.	Absence from class	15	16	21	24	64	140
6.	Lateness to class	24	20	21	35	40	140
	Average truancy (count)	21.83	20.67	28.33	26.5	42.67	140
	Average truancy (rate)	15.6%	14.76%	20.24%	18.93%	30.48%	100%

Notes:

(1) average truancy (count) =  $\frac{\text{Sum of truancy counts in each column}}{6}$

(2) average truancy (rate) =  $\frac{\text{Average truancy (count)}}{140} \times 100\%$

**Table 2: Prevalence of truancy (opinions of teachers)**

S/N	Indicator of truancy	Number of times in a week					Total
		1	2	3	4	0	
1.	Absence from school	22	24	30	24	40	140
2.	Lateness to school	25	23	25	25	42	140
3.	Absence from assembly	25	21	28	27	39	140
4.	Lateness to assembly	26	26	36	24	28	140
5.	Absence from class	16	16	25	22	61	140
6.	Lateness to class	21	21	26	31	41	140
	Average truancy (count)	22.50	21.83	28.33	25.50	41.83	140
	Average truancy (rate)	16.07%	15.60%	20.24%	18.21%	29.88%	100%

The impact of truancy on the pupils' academic performance (proxied by their achievement scores in their previous terminal examinations) was then brought into limelight. This was anchored by estimating the logit model specified above. In particular, the odds of the different forms of truancy having impact on the pupils' scores were estimated and compared. The regression estimates are presented in Table 3. It was revealed that habitual truancy has about 39.2% chance of explaining poor academic achievement of the pupils, occasional truancy 28.7% and casual truancy 22.4%. This finding is pro-intuitive because habitual truancy takes pupils away from the school and class for a long period during the academic session. Naturally, a pupil that is serially absent from school for up to 3-4 times per week cannot maximize the learning outcomes. This explains why habitual truancy has the highest odds of explaining the pupils' academic achievement, followed by occasional truancy and then casual truancy. The constant term (5.4%) indicates that there is a likelihood of poor academic performance even if the pupils demonstrate zero truancy. This is because the factors affecting pupils' academic performance transcend beyond truant behaviors. The t-statistics of the coefficient estimates are all statistically significant at 5% except for casual truancy which is significant at 10%. The Chi-square statistic (32.33) shows that the differences in the categories of truancy are significant, meaning that there are clear differences between the impact of each category on the pupils' academic performance. The F-statistic (21.94) points all the forms of truancy are jointly significant as a qualitative determinant of the academic outcomes. Finally, the R (76.7%) signals that truancy can explain

about 77% variation in the mean academic scores of the pupils. Apparently, there might be other determinants of academic performance which this study has not addressed.

**Table 3: Odds of truancy having impact on pupils' academic performance (the logit estimates)**

	Coefficient estimate	Standard error	Asymptotic t-statistic	Elasticity of means
Constant	0.0535	0.0032	1.9825**	0.001
Habitual truancy	0.3915	0.3845	3.2284**	0.105
Occasional truancy	0.2872	0.4338	2.8975**	0.124
Casual truancy	0.2239	0.3399	1.9233*	0.055
Chi-square: 32.33*      F-stat: 21.94**      Cox and Snell R <sup>2</sup> = 0.767*				

\* indicates that the coefficient is significant at 10% while

\*\* indicates that the coefficient is significant at 10%

Source: Analysis of fieldwork data

#### IV. Conclusions

This study empirically investigated the relationship between pupils' truancy and their academic performance. The research efforts were motivated by the need to update the literature on the role of deliberate absenteeism from school and class activities on the pupils' achievement scores. The forms of truancy captured include the unapproved pupils' absenteeism from class, from morning assembly and from school altogether. Evidence from this study pointed that truancy is a common misnomer among the sampled primary pupils. More importantly, it was revealed that there is a negative consequential impact of truancy on the pupils' achievement scores. These findings have provided empirical evidence to the narratives of teachers and school heads that a primary driver of the dwindling performance of the primary-school pupils is truancy. According to the sampled school authorities, despite the sanctions and penalties melted towards truant behaviors, the pupils have not exhibited a significant turnaround in such behaviors. In consequence, the pupils' academic achievement has been worryingly unimpressive. Given these findings, a number of policy implications may emerge. The schools need to be stricter with pupils' attendance in school. This can be achieved by connecting the school attendance with the students' eligibility to sit for the terminal exams which in turn determine the students' progression to the next class. When this mechanism is in place, the pupils and their parents will realize that truancy has bad consequences on learning outcomes, which the school cannot afford to keep up with.

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