

Motivational Strategies to Reduce Truancy Among Basic Four Pupils at Nyamekrom Ma Basic School

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ABSTRACT

Basic education provides children with essential skills in literacy, numeracy, and critical thinking, which are essential for higher education and professional development. However, truancy among learners in Ghana's basic schools disrupts this process, resulting in significant gaps in their knowledge and skills. This study sought to address truancy among basic four pupils at Nyamekrom MA Basic School in the New Juaben South Municipality in the Eastern Region of Ghana, using motivational strategies. The research design employed for the study was action research. Purposive sampling technique was employed to select four pupils exhibiting truant behaviour. Data collection instruments included observation, interviews, and tests. The data collected were analyzed using frequencies and percentages. The results revealed that lack of parental care was a major cause of truancy among the pupils. Additionally, it was found that the pupils' academic performance suffered due to their truancy. The study also showed that motivational strategies encouraged the pupils' regular school attendance, which in turn improved their academic performance. Based on the findings, it was concluded that since truancy is a serious threat to school children, it can affect their academic progress in future. It was therefore recommended among other things that parents, teachers and policy makers should work together to sustain pupils' interest in school to ensure regular attendance and better academic performance.

Keywords: Truancy, Motivational Strategies, Academic Performance, Moral Education

INTRODUCTION

All over the world, truancy is considered as a hindrance and obstruction for pupils in their educational career (Adeyemi, 2011). It is an evolving and emergent problem which is a delinquent act of pupils to miss one or more classes intentionally. Stakeholders such as educational authorities, parents and teachers' attention has been drawn to this development because the child's ability to perform well at school depends on his or her regular attendance to school to participate in the teaching and learning process.

Truancy is being viewed and defined differently by the researchers. According to Gyimah (2000), truancy is considered as an unlawful and illegal absence from compulsory schooling. He observes that a truant child is someone who absents him or herself persistently from school and often roams about the street to join friends of his or her own to engage in undesirable forms of behaviour. With this particular child, the behaviour does not occur occasionally but a number of times throughout the term. Kee (2001) also argues that truancy is intentional, premeditated and planned absence of learners from school without their parents' permission or without any reasonable justifications.

Truancy is a significant problem for schools, families and children in Ghana. On any given day, a large number of children skip school without permission. However, missing out from school can seriously affect

the future life chances of learners such as school dropout, teenage pregnancy, criminal behaviour, among others.

At Nyamekrom MA basic school in the New Juaben South of the Eastern Region of Ghana, the researcher observed that four particular pupils in basic four could not understand anything that they were thought, leading to poor performance in all class exercises. An investigation through the class register and an interview with the class teacher showed a sporadic absenteeism of the pupils understudy. It was against this background that this study was carried out to investigate into the problem in order to find appropriate means to address it.

Objectives of the Study

1. To investigate the causes of truancy of basic four pupils at Nyamekrom MA basic school.
2. Examine the effects of truancy on the academic performance of the basic four pupils at Nyamekrom MA basic school.
3. Assess the effectiveness of motivational strategies in addressing the problem of truancy of basic four pupils at Nyamekrom MA basic school.

Research Questions

1. What are the causes of truancy of basic four pupils at Nyamekrom MA basic school?
2. What are effects of truancy on the academic performance of basic four pupils at Nyamekrom MA basic school?
3. How effective are motivational strategies in reducing truancy among basic four pupils at Nyamekrom MA Basic School?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Concept of Truancy

Truancy, commonly defined as a students' unlawful absence from school without parental knowledge or consent, has been identified as a serious social issue in need of increased attention for many years (Bazemore, 2004). Dondieu (2000) defines truancy as a child who absents him or herself persistently from school. According to Haight (2014), if children stay away from school without the knowledge of their parents, it is an act of truancy. He went further to say that a child who plays truancy could be out for several hours each day during which the school and the home may think that the child is safe at home or in school. This implies that the child leaves home on the pretext of going to school but never reaches. His absence in the school also makes the teacher believes that he or she is with the parents at home, but the child may be at somewhere else.

Baker, Sigmon and Nugent (2001) report that hundreds of thousands of American students absent from school without permissible excuses each day, and this issue is ranked among the top ten problems facing schools across the country. Smith (1996) argues that not all unauthorized absence from school can be regarded as truancy if the parents purposely keep the learner at home, and more so, not all truancy is likely to be recognized as unlawful absence if the learner quits lessons after roll call or registration in the morning.

From the foregoing, it is imperative to note that despite the different views of truancy, they all focus around the action by learners who choose not to participate in the school day.

Causes of Truancy

Rothman (2001) observes that peer influence has been identified as one of the major factors influencing a child's truant's behaviour. According to him, a child would rather prefer to spend most of his days in the midst of his peers where he would be happier and more relaxed which eventually gives him room for undue peer influence particularly in antisocial behaviours like truancy. Owodunni (2006) opines that it is easier for students to yield to the pressure from their colleagues than to obey the teacher and the school authority, and according to him, peers have influential role to play in providing the necessary support for learning of new skills and that they act as reinforcing agents of socialization. In a study conducted by Osarenren (2008), it was reported that regardless of whether children's attitudes and conducts were approved by parents or other adults, adolescents attempt to model their behaviour according to what represents the standard of their peer group.

Adebisi (2011) also gives a critical analytical influence of peer group as a strong factor that causes truancy. The type of friends a student keeps plays an important role. For example, a student from a well behaved home may become truant or absence from school as a result of mixing with bad students who are not disciplined at home. This shows that the home is a powerful determinant factor in the behaviour of children. Adebisi (2011) further argues that children who are not adequately monitored by their parents may show a variety of unhealthy symptoms in behaviours. He identified broken homes as a factor that causes truancy in children because in most broken homes, there is no proper care for the child. According to Erickson and Curl (2006), some parents show no interest in their children development in terms of academic support and others, therefore in most cases, a child turns truant because parents do not show any interest in their academic progress, therefore such children may be easily lured into truant behaviour.

Effects of Truancy on Learners' Academic Performance

Student dropout from school is the most obvious result of chronic absenteeism. According to Rodriguez and Conchas (2009), truancy and dropout rates are concentrated and worsening in racially segregated central cities in primarily large high schools attended by mostly low-income youth of color. Drop out rates in these areas are at twice the national average, nearly 20%, and exceed 50-60% in some areas of the United States. In these areas, more students are dropping out than graduating. A study conducted in the United State also revealed that the continuous absence from school by a pupil has negative impact on his life (Clyne, 2006). He argues that in the United States, school attendance is compulsory by law and absence may invoke penalties against the parents and the child. Guilty parents are made to pay fines while truant children are brought before the juvenile court and put in special schools for reformation.

Akrofi (2006) argues that a child who stays away from school grows up to become an illiterate who knows nothing pertaining to education and so he performs poorly in class. According to him, such a child lacks knowledge and skills to develop himself. In his book, "Meeting Children's Emotional Needs, a Guide for Teacher, Katherine (2007:4) identified two effects of truancy namely, social isolation and Educational failure. With social isolation, Katherine argued that the truant child cannot mix with his or her peers and as such, he or she isolates himself or herself from social activities where intelligence is displayed. With regard to educational failure as an effect of truancy, Katherine said that a child who plays truant behaviour does not attain any height in education.

Addressing Truancy through Motivation

Monitoring

According to Haight (2014), providing academic support builds confidence in school children which eventually increases their attendance in school. He asserts that monitoring truant students needs someone like a counselor, a teacher or a mentor to keep them accountable by meeting them occasionally to advise

them on the need to attend school regularly and the consequences for failure to attend school regularly. Marvul (2012) also argues that having frequent personal connection with students of truant behaviours results in higher attendance rates and increases academic achievement. He contends that when students have someone other than family members counting on them, they have an intrinsic motivation to perform well in class. This shows that when school children are monitored, they refrain from truant behaviours.

Positive Reinforcements

In a study conducted by Marvul (2012) among urban male high school in America, it was revealed that a competitive sports programme was enough of an incentive for students to come to school regularly to engage in academic activities. This positive reinforcement helped students in their school pursuits. Marvul argued that through motivational theory, reinforcements such as incentives can be utilized to increase students' attendance and improve academic performance in the school setting.

Moral Education

Research has shown that negative peer relationships greatly affect students' willingness to attend school. In Gastic's (2008) research, students who are victims of bullying are at a 58 percent increased risk for being truant. In addition, Gastic noted that students who are victims also suffer from poor academic performance. In order to combat the effects of bullying, Gastic advised that schools should look to the root cause in order to extinguish the undesired behaviours. Adding topics of moral education to the curriculum, including social media training, behaviour modification, bullying prevention and character education would support a positive school climate so that all students would want to attend school and develop positive peer interactions (Gastic, 2008).

Marvul (2012) argues that schools should explore interventions that focus on behaviour modification of known bullies as well as addressing bully victimization with all students. Teaching students how to be internet responsible will reduce the instances when students are bullied online, thus decreasing the number of absences from bully victimization (Gastic, 2008). In conjunction with bullying prevention and Internet responsibility programs, Gastic opines that character education programs have shown promise in reducing negative behavior in schools which in turn has a positive effect on peer relationships. In Marvul's (2012) research at an urban high school that used character education to address attendance, an inverse relationship existed between absenteeism and optimistic attitudes towards educational engagement.

School Support to Families

Communication with families is vital to success in all avenues of a child's education. Epstein (2004) therefore proposes that schools can develop strong relationships with parents in many ways, including parent workshops, home visits, daily communication, regular weekly meetings and the like. Epstein believes that students' high absenteeism rates are a direct result of limited family involvement. Much like weekly monitoring with the students, Epstein suggests that the school should enact daily communication through email or phone to the family when a child is absent. He reported that there was an increase in attendance when phone calls were made to the home when students were absent. Daily communication will increase parents' involvement, leading to an increase in academic success starting with higher attendance rates. Communication should begin as early as Kindergarten in order to reinforce the importance of attendance and positive family relationships before truancy becomes an irreversible chronic problem. When schools employ a home-school visit as an intervention for those chronically absent, it bridges the gap for families who cannot be reached via the usual phone and email (Sheldon, 2002).

Emphasizing on school support to the family to combat truancy, Sheldon (2002) argues that the school can offer workshops to parents in order to inform them of attendance policies, procedures, consequences for

absences and resources available to assist with getting the child to school. The effectiveness of these workshops is dependent upon the topic as well as the background of the families participating. The school needs to know the families and the surrounding community in order to develop the most effective workshops.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2005), action research is the spot procedure designed to deal with a perceived problem located in an immediate environment which needs immediate solution. Relative to classroom, action research is a task or problem which has been identified by a teacher in the classroom in the course of teaching and learning and that requires immediate solution to the problem.

Population

The target population for the study was basic four pupils at Nyamekrom MA basic school. The class size was 52 pupils, made up of 30 boys and 22 girls.

Sample and sampling procedure

Purposive sampling technique was used to select a sample size of four (4) pupils for the study. In using purposive sampling technique, the researcher selects the cases (pupils) to become his or her sample size on the basis of their knowledge about the issue or the problem under study (Nsowoa-Nuama, 2005). In this study, the researcher chose the four pupils based on their known truant behaviour, ensuring that the sample was directly relevant to the issue under investigation.

Research Instruments

Three main instruments were used to collect the data for the study. These were observation, interview and test. The researcher observed the pupils' learning habits at school to understand their attitudes towards schooling and how these attitudes impact their academic performance, aiming to identify solutions to improve their outcomes. Furthermore, the researcher interviewed the pupils to find out the causes of their truant behaviour to enable him to use appropriate intervention to address their problem. Apart from the observation and the interview, a test was conducted in English Language and Religious and Moral Education to find out the effects of truancy on the pupils' academic performance in the school. The test was administered to the pupils to find out their weaknesses in order to design appropriate intervention to address their problem.

Data Collection Procedure

Pre-Intervention

The pre-intervention stage was meant to collect baseline information about the truant pupils before the intervention. During this stage, observation checklist was adopted by the researcher to monitor the pupils' level of attendance to school. The researcher used three weeks for this exercise and the results indicated abysmal absenteeism of the pupils because none of them was present at school for more than two days for the three weeks under review. In the case of the interview, the researcher interviewed the pupils to find out the causes of their truant behaviour. Again, a test was conducted in English Language and Religious and Moral Education and the results of the test confirmed the academic weakness of the pupils as a result of truancy. The results of the observation, the interview and the test confirmed that there was the need to

develop interventional strategies to address the truant's behaviour of the pupils.

Intervention

Having discovered the baseline information about the truant pupils, the researcher developed some motivational strategies to overcome the problem of truancy among the pupils. He used guidance and counseling, positive reinforcement, moral education and school support system as motivational strategies to help solve the problem of truancy among the pupils. The researcher used four weeks for the intervention process, where every week was allocated to an interventional strategy.

Week One: Guidance and Counseling

The researcher employed guidance and counseling as a technique to encourage the pupils to attend school regularly. He emphasized that success is achieved through determination and hard work, advising the pupils to endure hardships, focus on their studies, and be punctual so they could participate in all class activities. Additionally, the pupils were advised to avoid bad influences, as negative peer pressure could lead them into harmful behaviours such as drunkenness, smoking, and stealing. The researcher had this to say, *'aspiring to become scholars in the future requires diligent study and strong performance in exams, and this can be achieved through attending school regularly'*. By the end of the first week, there was a significant improvement in the pupils' regular attendance at school.

Week Two: Reinforcement Techniques

The second week was devoted for reinforcement techniques as a way to increase a desire response from the pupils. The researcher ensured that any truant pupil who was present at school for all the five days was given incentives such as books, pens and money to motivate them to attend school regularly. Also, the pupils were clapped for anytime they attempted to answer a question in class. The researcher also assigned certain duties in the class to the truant pupils so as to equip them to be in school always. Based on this, the truants were given roles such as class prefects, chalkboard cleaners, cupboard caretakers and bell caretakers on rotational basis. The second week also saw some remarkable improvements as far as regular class attendance was concerned.

Week Three: Moral Education

The third week was meant to educate the pupils on moral issues. They were educated on the need to obey rules and regulations in the school. He told them that punctuality, doing homework and staying school before closing are all part of school rules that they should obey. The researcher also educated the pupils to develop positive attitude towards their friends and stop bullying them so that they would attend school regularly. The pupils were told to take good friends and shun away with bad friends because of their truant behaviours. The pupils were taught that regular school attendance will help them to perform well in academic work. The pupils were therefore taught to develop good attitude towards class attendance. The pupils started developing positive attitude towards class attendance after being educated on moral issues.

Week Four: School Support to Families

During the fourth week of the intervention process, the researcher took upon himself to embark on two exercises, namely home visits and daily communication with parents. The researcher realizing that involving parents could help to reduce absenteeism, he visited the truants parents occasionally to find out why their wards were absent from school. He took the visit as an opportunity to let the parents know the consequences of truancy and the need to encourage their wards to be punctual to school. Apart from the visit, the researcher communicated daily with the truants parents when any of them was absent. There was a

tremendous increase in class attendance of the truants pupils when the regular visits and daily communication were employed to address the truancy syndrome among the pupils understudied.

Post – Intervention

After the intervention, another observation checklist was adopted by the researcher for three weeks to monitor the pupils’ level of attendance to school. The researcher observed that the truant’ pupils attended school regularly except in exceptional cases where one may absent him or herself from school due to ill-health. Again, after the intervention, the researcher conducted a test on the same subjects used for the pre-intervention, namely English Language and Religious and Moral Education. The results showed a very remarkable improvement in the pupils’ performance, a proof that the intervention had worked.

Data Analysis

The data collected from observation, interview and test were analysed statistically with the use of frequencies and percentages.

FINDINGS

Truant behaviour of pupils before intervention

The truant behaviour of the pupils before the intervention as shown in table 1.

Table 1: Observation Check List for Three Weeks before Intervention

PUPILS	1st week					Total	2nd Week					Total	3rd Week					Total
	M	T	W	Th	F		M	T	W	Th	F		M	T	W	Th	F	
Pupil A	0	1	1	0	0	2	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	2
Pupil B	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	1	0	1
Pupil C	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	2
Pupil D	0	0	1	0	1	2	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0

Source: Field Study (2023)

Table 1 presents the results of the attendance of the four truant pupils at Nyamekrom M.A. basic School. To confirm the nature of truancy among the pupils, three weeks’ observation check list was developed to track their attendance to school. It was realized that out of the 15 days of the three weeks, pupil A attended school for 5 days, whilst pupils B, C and D attended school for only 3 days each. The results proved that the truant level of the pupils was very high.

To ascertain from the pupils why they absent themselves from school, each of them admitted that they absent themselves from school due to pressure from their friends. Pupil A remarked, ‘*I absent myself from school because my friends have been encouraging me to skip school and hang out with them.*’ The findings are in line with studies conducted by Rothman (2001) who argued that peer influence has been identified as a major factor influencing a child’s truancy behaviour.

Pre-Test before Intervention

Pre-Test for pupils before intervention as shown in table 2.

Table 2: Pre-Test Results before Intervention

PUPILS	SUBJECTS			
	English	RME	Total mark	Percentage
	Out of 10	Out of 10	Out of 20	100
Pupil A	2	0	2	10
Pupil B	3	4	7	35
Pupil C	3	2	5	25
Pupil D	1	2	3	15

Source: Field Study (2023)

Table 2 presents the results of a test conducted during the pre-intervention stage. The purpose of the test was to find out the effect of truant behaviour of the pupils on their academic performance. The scores obtained in the two subjects clearly showed that all the four truant children were academically weak because of their truant behaviour. The proof to this was that in all the two subjects, pupil A scored 10%, pupil B scored 35%, Pupil C scored 25% and pupil D scored 15%. The finding affirms what Akrofi (2006) said that a child who stays away from educational activities in the school grows up to become an illiterate who knows nothing pertaining to education and so he performs poorly in class.

Truant Behaviour of Pupils after Intervention

The truant behaviour of the pupils after the intervention as shown in table 3.

Table 3: Observation Checklist for Three Weeks after the Intervention

PUPILS	1st week					Total	2nd Week					Total	3rd Week					Total
	M	T	W	Th	F		M	T	W	Th	F		M	T	W	Th	F	
Pupil A	1	1	0	1	1	4	1	1	1	1	1	5	1	1	1	1	1	5
Pupil B	1	1	1	1	1	5	1	1	1	1	1	5	1	1	1	1	1	5
Pupil C	0	1	1	1	1	4	1	1	1	1	1	5	1	1	1	1	1	4
Pupil D	1	0	1	1	0	3	1	1	1	1	1	5	1	1	1	1	1	5

Source: Field Study (2023)

Table 3 shows that the four truant children’s attendance was encouraging after the intervention. As indicated by the table, out of the 15 days of the three weeks, Pupil A attended school for 14 days, Pupil B was present for all the 15 days, Pupil C attended school for 13 days and pupil D also attended school for 13 days. A proof that the pupils’ truancy levels had reduced drastically as a result of the motivational strategies put in place. To compare the attendances of the pupils for the two observation checklists for the three weeks before and after intervention, it clearly showed that, there was much improvement in their attendance. This shows that the motivational strategies had yielded a good result. This attests to the fact that monitoring, reinforcement, moral education and school support system as suggested by Haight (2014), Marvul (2012), Gastics (2008) and Epstein (2004) respectively are effective tools for addressing pupils with truant behaviours in the basic schools of which pupils at Nyamekrom M.A. basic school are no exception.

Post-Test after Intervention

Post-Test for pupils after intervention as shown in table 4

Table 4: Post-Test Results after Intervention

PUPILS	SUBJECTS			
	English	RME	Total mark	Percentage
	Out of 10	Out of 10	Out of 20	100
Pupil A	10	10	20	100
Pupil B	6	8	14	70
Pupil C	10	8	18	90
Pupil D	8	10	18	90

Source: Field Study (2023)

Table 4 presents the result of the post- test conducted after the intervention. This was done to ascertain the effectiveness of the intervention on the pupils' performance. The result showed that out of the total marks of 20 for the English Language and the Religious and Moral Education, pupil A had 20(100%) marks, followed by 14(70%) marks, 18(90%) marks and 18(9%) marks for pupils B, C and D respectively. The marks obtained in the two subjects attest to the fact that, the motivational strategies introduced by the researcher to address truancy among the pupils worked enormously. This shows that the truant pupils' academic problem was solved due to the motivational strategies put in place by the researcher which made them become regular to school. This finding similarly supports Haight (2014), Marvul (2012), Gastics (2008) and Epstein's (2004) assertion that monitoring, reinforcement, moral education and school support system are effective tools for addressing truancy in basic schools.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study investigated the effectiveness of motivation in encouraging regular attendance among truant pupils at Nyamekrom MA Basic Four. The findings revealed that truancy levels among the four pupils understudy were significantly high before the intervention. Additionally, the academic performance of these truant pupils was very poor due to their irregular attendance to school. The study identified several effective intervention strategies, including monitoring, reinforcement, moral education, and providing school support to families, all of which contributed to reducing truancy among the pupils.

Based on the findings, it was concluded among other things that lack of motivation may cause pupils to absent themselves from school. Additionally, if parents fail to provide their children's school needs, the children may absent themselves from school. It was therefore recommended among other things that teachers and parents should adopt motivational strategies to encourage pupils to be regular at school.

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