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The Impacts of Truancy on Students' Academic Performance In Public Secondary Schools. A Case Study of Morogoro Municipality

Anna J Godfrey

Dr. Henry C. Umeodum

***Corresponding Author**

ANNA J GODFREY

ABSTRACT

This study assessed the impacts of truancy on students' academic performance in public secondary Schools in Morogoro municipality. Three secondary schools, 21 Students, 21 Teachers, 3 head of schools, 3 academic masters, 3 discipline masters, 3 WEO and 1 DEO within Morogoro Municipality were selected. The data was collected through interviews and focus group discussion and document review to determine the impacts of truancy on students' academic performance. The study used quantitative approach which employed the case study in addressing the impacts of truancy on students' academic performance in public secondary schools. Qualitative data were analyzed through thematic narration. The study found that Poor Academic Performance, Failure to Accomplish Academic Assignments, Disruption of Classroom Dynamic and Repetition of Classes were the impacts of truancy on students' academic performance in Public Secondary Schools in Morogoro municipality.

Key Words: *Impacts of Truancy; Students; Academic Performance; Secondary Schools; Morogoro Municipality.*

INTRODUCTION

The significance of education today has greater value than before in the development of any country. It is a fact that no society can develop without quality education. The entry point to a development society is education; hence education is a precious tool for development. It is at school where the students acquire knowledge and skills to lead a full, meaningful and productive future.

School truancy is a problem of paramount importance to be endlessly discussed within the educational and teaching sector. Truancy is synonymously characterized by features like absenteeism, nonattendance, and playing truant from school (Eliamin, 2014). The phenomena of truancy about school access to education has been preventing the enrolled pupils as well as academic performance of students in both primary and secondary school levels internationally to accomplish their school cycles as expected.

Truancy affects many schools in urban areas and has been considered as a social problem associated with school dropout, misuse of substance, gang and criminal activities. The problem of truancy becomes more intense as the children grow older (Rivers, 2010). Research also indicates that the behavior can occur over a period of time before it can be identified (Eastman et al. 2007). These studies observe that there are many reasons why a student might skip school even when they know there would be repercussions. The reasons might be personal such as a soared relationship with another student or fear of being bullied. It may be academic such as conflict with a teacher or fear of failing a test (Dembo and Gull Edge, 2009). Whether the reason may be, skipping a school day increases the risk of missing that one critical class that will make a difference in a student's grades. Once a student starts to fall behind, it becomes easier to miss more classes, producing a pattern that is detrimental to success.

Truancy raises the rate of examination misconduct and outcomes from both internal and external examinations. It is also a factor that has created joblessness and underemployment of the majority of people today simply because they engaged in truancy throughout their school years (Shelton, 2010). Nonetheless, the purpose of this work is to examine the actual actions, causes, and impact of truancy in secondary schools, specifically in relation to its influence on the academic achievement in the performance of these truants.

In Tanzania truancy has remained one of the challenges facing education sector since Tanzania gained independence in 1963. Recent report show that the problem is wide spread experience in various regions of Tanzania especially in

Tabora, Geita, Shinyanga, Mtwara, Morogoro, Singida, and Rukwa, as having the highest rates of absenteeism and dropout (Kiango, 2018). Ever since the Tanzania government through a number of policies, regulations and programs has worked towards ensuring that all school-aged children not only go to school but also complete their education with successful performance. The example is cited referring to the University Primary Education Policy of (UPE) Whereby the government obliged all parents to ensure that they let all school-aged children join primary schools. Recently, from the year 2015, the government declared that basic education from primary to secondary education until the level of form four should be compulsory and free. Thus, it is not surprising that beginning from the year 2015 several ordinary and new erected secondary schools enrolled a growing number of students countrywide.

The Tanzania Development Vision (2025) seeks to produce well-educated, knowledge and skilled Tanzanians to competitively cope with political, social, economic and technological development challenges at national and international levels (URT, 2016). In connection with this, government has made concerted efforts towards improving quality in education sector including instituting a number of programs that seek to reduce students' truancy. However, despite the efforts made by government and other education stakeholders, truancy has remained a serious challenge affecting performance in Tanzania education system particularly in government institutions at the basic, secondary and upper secondary levels. This largely has accounted for the prevailing experience of poor performance in secondary schools in the country. Several coordinated efforts made towards improving performance has not yielded the expected results (Nkonongwa, 2021; Sanga, 2013; Tshabangu and Msafiri, 2013; Sumra and Katabaro, 2014; Istoroyekti, 2016; Nyamubi, 2016; Ndulila et al., 2017). And so it is required that research be conducted to assess the impacts of school truancy on academic performance. Therefore, this study aims at investigating the impacts of truancy on students' academic performances in public secondary schools in Morogoro municipality.

1.3 Theoretical Literature Review

A theory is a set of statements or principles devised to explain a group of facts or phenomena, especially one that has been repeatedly tested and can be used to make predictions. This section discusses the theory that is used in this study.

1.3.1 Social Control Theory

This study is guided by Social Control Theory (SCT) developed by Travis Hirschi in 1969. Hirschi argues that misbehavior and crime will be reduced for individuals with strong attachment to others, greater commitment to traditional values and more involvement and beliefs in law-abiding behavior. The theory intends to discourage traditional values that help to create ability to make norms more effective within the society.

On the other hand, students who are lacking guidance and strong supervision are likely to engage in truancy, in such they do not have a person to guide them and they engage in indiscipline behaviors including criminal acts such as drug abuse, love affairs, and not attending school at all (Alkers, 2001). Thus, parents are responsible in discouraging misbehavior among their children like truancy behavior so that to encourage them to attend school every day. It is possible when parents provide direct control to their children's behavior in order to discipline them and become good members within the society.

Furthermore, Genitty (2008) contends that students with less attachment are more likely to engage in indiscipline and violate school rules and regulations by absenting themselves from school due to failure to assignments and work, thus violating laws, values, and school policies. As a result, students who have developed a sense of attachment are less likely to violate school rules by attending school on a regular basis. Hirschi adds that people who have a low level of commitment to traditional values are more likely to commit crimes. As a result, developing students' commitment helps them to invest time, energy and personal resources into school. Therefore, committed students are less likely to engage in truancy and other similar behaviors.

The theory is relevant to this study because it provides parents and the community with a foundation and references for guiding and controlling students' discipline through strong attachment and involvement in matters concerning their behaviors. Thus, by so doing, the findings of the study will be helpful in discouraging misconduct and other related behaviors such as school truancy among secondary school students in Morogoro and other parts of Tanzania.

Research Methodology

This study was carried out in Morogoro Municipality. The study employed case study research design and a qualitative research approach. The sample size of the study was 46 respondents that included DEO 1, WEO 3, Head teachers 3, Academic masters 3, Discipline masters 3, Teachers 12, Students 21. And total 46. Purposive sampling technique was used in selecting a sample. Data were collected by interview field, observation, focus group discussion and documents review. The data collected (qualitative data) were analyzed through descriptive analysis.

3.FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1The impacts of Students' Truancy on Academic Performance in secondary Schools

This section focuses on presenting the results of the research on the impacts of truancy on students' academic performance in public secondary schools in Morogoro Municipality. The findings of the study show that there are several impacts that have arisen concerning truancy among public school students which are; poor academic performance, failure to accomplish academic assignments, disruption of classroom dynamic, and repetition of classes.

3.1.1 Poor Academic Performance

Findings from the study show that truancy leads students to performance poorly in academic activities. When students miss classes, they also miss some essential lessons and instructions that can affect their understanding of a subject. It seems that, students' irregular attendance at school makes them to fail to participate actively in various academic activities which are being arranged by the school. This can ultimately result in lower grades.

From the field, respondent stated that

Truancy can have a significant impact on a students' academic performance when students are absent from school frequently, they miss out on valuable instruction time and may struggle to keep up with their coursework. This can lead to a lack of understanding of important concepts and skills, which can ultimately result in poor academic.

View by the respondent (WEO) concurs with Burke and Beegle (2004) who claimed that, students who miss more than 10% of the school year are at risk for academic failure. This is because when students are absent from school frequently, they do miss valuable instruction time and may struggle to keep up with their coursework. This can lead to lack of understanding of important concepts and skills, which can ultimately result in poor academic performance. Therefore, Parents should help the school management in making sure that children do not remain at home for unnecessary reasons.

Another respondent stated that:

When students are absent, they may miss important assessments, such as tests and quizzes, which can impact their grades. If a student misses a test or quiz, they may struggle to catch up and may not perform well on continuous assessment (FG 5).

Moreover, another respondent that:

When students who have been absent from school return to the classroom, they may struggle to catch up with their classmates. This can lead to frustration and a lack of confidence, which can further impact their academic performance (FG 2).

The finding of the respondent (FG2) is supported by Lyimo (2003) who postulated that, truancy is associated with lower levels of engagement in school, lower academic achievement, and a greater likelihood of dropping out of school. When students are frequently absent, they may feel disconnected from their school community and may not see the value in attending school regularly. This can lead to a lack of interest in learning and a lack of effort in completing assignments, which can also result in poor academic performance. Therefore, by encouraging school attendance among students can result into good academic performance in secondary schools as well.

3.1.2 Failure to Accomplish Academic Assignments

In the area under this study, it was observed that, students who are frequently absent from school may fall behind their peers and become disconnected from their academic pursuits. Students who do not attend school regularly fail to complete several academic assignments which are being given to them by teachers (Sekiwu, D.2013). This takes them back in academic achievement comparing to their fellow students who attend school regularly.

During interview, a respondent contributed that:

When students are absent from school frequently, they may fall behind in their assignment and struggle to keep up with their classmates. This can lead to feelings of frustration and disengagement, and some students may decide to drop out of school altogether (FG2).

These research findings agree with Oghuvbu (2008) who contended that, students who were truants were more likely to fail to do well in academic assignments which they were given at school than those who attended school regularly. It can thus be claimed that, truancy was indicative of other underlying problems, such as poor academic performance, and disengagement from school, which could ultimately lead poor academic development of many students at school. Truancy sets back ability of students to do well in academic as most of truant students become subjected to failure of completing academic activities they are given by teachers.

Likewise, a respondent pointed out that,

When a student becomes unfit to attend school regularly, can also become unfit to meet some academic requirement and hence fail to be academically committed. This can spring students' poor academic achievement as well (WEO).

The views presented by the respondent (WEO) is in agreement with Reid (2002) who argued that truancy was not just a school issue but could also have negative impacts on a student's future education and carrier prospects. Generally, truant students were more likely to engage in some non-academic activities. This takes much of their time on disadvantage of their fellows who regularly attend school. Truancy as a result intensifies students' likelihood of performing poorly in academic affairs. Therefore, when students return home after lessons, parents and guardians have to cross-check their notebooks if there is any academic work given to be done at home. In doing so, time for such assignments should be given also to the students before they carry out other house chores.

3.1.3 Disruption of Classroom Dynamic

From the field, it was observed that truancy from school can have a significant impact on the classroom dynamics in secondary schools. When students are frequently absent, they can disrupt the flow of instructions, create disruption for other students and cause teachers to have to modify their lesson plans. This can pave the way to many students perform low in academic works at school.

During interview a respondent reported that: -

when students are frequently absent from school, it can be challenging for teachers to maintain a consistent learning environment. In addition, students who are frequently absent may miss important instructions, assignments and discussions that are necessary for their learning that can be difficult to close, leading to poor academic performance (FG 3).

Findings from the study indicate that, students who are frequently absent are more likely to have lower grades and lower academic achievement than their peers who attend school regularly. This can create a negative impact on classroom dynamics, as students who are struggling to keep up with the material may become discouraged and disengaged (Reid, 2005). Truancy therefore diminishes the morale and participation of students in academic activities, hence lower performance comes into existence. In order to work this problem out, teachers have to separate those who miss classes frequently from those who attend in order to offer lessons that can boost their understanding at their purse and avoid disruption.

3.1.4 Repetition of Classes

The results from the study indicate that because of the consequences of truancy like poor attendance and lack of punctuality among students, some of them repeat classes after failing examination especially Form Two National Examinations. In this context, such students feel ashamed to repeat classes due to negative attitude. Examples of such attitudes are; failing again and being laughed by their fellow students and thus tend to lose confidence when they see other students advance to Form Three and feel inferior which results in poor academic performance. These findings were supported by one respondent who added the following: -

After repeating class due to failure in National Examination, most of students drop out because they lose interest and confidence in continuing with their studies in community secondary schools (FG 1)

Another respondent said,

A student who repeats class after failing in exams feels shame due to poor performance, thinking that the last results will happen again (FG2).

The results revealed that truancy among the secondary school make the students repeat the same class for many years. This is due to the fact that they perform poor academically since their attendance of classes is in minimal frequencies. They have no time for private studies, group discussions and the time for doing homework and examination preparations. They end up performing poorly their final examinations and repeating the same class for many years. The student who is late cannot participate in school surrounding cleanness that leads to few of students who come on time to do extra work concerning school cleanness (Attwood and Croll, 2006). Thus, for them to become absent from school, they become unable to perform well in academics because they lack much time to do class exercises which are related to academic. This also affect both cleanness of school environment and academic achievement, thus they can even repeat classes.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussions presented, the study concludes that truancy is a reality in the education sector that is complex in nature, having both social and psychological roots. This requires that interventions that aim at addressing the problem of truancy be multisectoral and multifaceted in approach. Further, it is also concluded that the negative effects of truancy on students' academic performance is broad and extensive. It does not only affect truant students, but through disruption of flow of teaching affects the entire learning process. It is then important that a reflection on the costs of school truancy is extensively flexible accommodating the entire educational systems it affects.

Based on the findings and conclusion the study recommends that as truancy has been found to be complex in nature having both social and psychological dimensions. It is important that efforts aiming at eradicating school truancy be multisectoral in approach. In this regard, involving all educational stakeholders in the issue of school truancy is crucial in addressing the problem. Measures that are solely student- centered and school- based may not be prolific as far as expected outcomes. Interventions to improve the overall educational outcomes should consider as priority the incorporation of measures to reduce or eradicate school truancy. As the effects of truancy have been found to be extensive, going beyond affecting the performance of the truant students to disruption of the entire learning process, improvement processes in the education systems that do not incorporate measures to address the problem of school truancy may fail to entrench the expected changes and improvements in the education sector.

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