

INVESTIGATION INTO THE TRUANT BEHAVIOURS AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS IN EMOHUA LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF RIVERS STATE: THE COUNSELLING IMPLICATIONS

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ABSTRACT: *Truancy among secondary school teachers in Emohua Local Government Area has reached alarming proportion with disastrous consequences. This descriptive study investigated truant behaviours among secondary school teachers in Emohua Local Government Area of Rivers State. Three research questions were answered and two hypotheses tested at 0.05. Teachers' attendance data were obtained from attendance registers provided in the schools. The results of the study show that overall rate of teacher absenteeism in Emohua Local Government Area was 38.62%. Rate of absenteeism among female teachers was found to be significantly higher than that of the male teachers, while the rate of absenteeism among married teachers was significantly higher than that of the single teachers. This rate of teacher absenteeism as found in this study is an indication that there is counselling failure among the counsellors in public secondary schools in Emohua Local Government Area. Therefore, counsellors must intensify their efforts using various programmes including individual or group counselling, seminar, workshops and conferences to enlighten the teachers on the need to be dedicated in their duties. The counsellors must also impress on the teachers the importance of doing their work diligently for social economic, technological and political development of the nation.*

KEYWORDS: Truancy, absenteeism, education, national development, salary, facilities.

INTRODUCTION

Education is the activity of preserving, developing and transmitting the culture of a people from one generation to another (Oko, 1998). It was defined by Achuonye and Ajoku (2003) as the leading out of the in-born powers and potentialities of the individuals in the society and the acquisition of skills, aptitudes and competencies necessary for self-realization and coping with life problems. Scientific, technological, economic, social and political development of a nation is guaranteed through education. Education produces individuals of worthwhile personality with relevant skills and aptitudes needed for national development.

At the centre of education are students and teachers who should come together in the classroom for learning to take place under formal setting. The teacher is especially important in education as he is the facilitator of learning, a curriculum interpreter and implementer. The laudable aims of education will be a mere mirage if the contributions of teachers are discarded.

As stated earlier, for learning to take place, teachers have to be brought face to face with the students in a place called school under formal setting. When teachers play truant in the school only minimal learning can take place in self-motivated students especially at low level of education as in primary and secondary school levels of Nigerian education. Truancy, a term synonymous with absenteeism was defined as by Ivatts (2010) as the failure of employees to report for or to remain at work as scheduled. Specifically, teacher truancy was defined as the condition whereby the teachers are not present in school when they ought to be. Some researchers insisted that definition of teacher absenteeism should be extended to include failure of teachers to come to school as well as failure of teachers to teach in the class even when they are present in the school (Abadzi 2009, Pitkoff, 2003). Hence, teacher absenteeism was also defined by Castrol, Duthilleul and Callods (2007) as the inability of teachers to attend school or being in school but fail to visit the class to teach or being in unfit condition to teach the children effectively.

A personal observation of the researcher shows that some teachers in public schools from time to time are absent from school, come to school late and go early. Some teachers may be present in school but not teaching and some do private business during working hours. These shoddy practices make it very difficult for the school to realize its noble goal of transmitting information to the students. Schools with high rate of teacher absenteeism hardly cover the contents of the syllabus, make students bankrupt in knowledge and undermine students' academic ability and achievement.

Available records as presented by Komni (2015) and Murnane and Willett (2010) show that in 2009/2010 academic session, rate of teacher absenteeism in Rhodes (2010) was 50%, in Maryland, it was 36% while in Hawaii, it was 26%. The cost of high rate of teacher absenteeism can be staggering. Available data show that in USA, in 2000, national cost of teacher absenteeism was 25.2 billion dollars and in England, in 1999, it was estimated as 300 million pounds (Pitkoff, 2003).

Several factors have been suggested to influence the rate of truancy among teachers. These range from economic, social, health to environmental factors. Employers of teachers are obliged to pay teachers' salaries and allowance as at when due. Promotion, pension and gratuity should also come as at when due. Inability of employers of teachers to keep their own side of the contractual agreement between them and teachers compel the teachers to abandon their duty post to seek for alternative sources of income. Security of life is paramount in the lives of individuals. If the community in which the school is situated is enmeshed in violence arising from cult-related activities, communal/land dispute, chieftaincy tussle, etc, students as well as teachers may try to protect their lives by avoiding conflict areas including the schools. Sickness of teachers and their relatives,

enrolment in further studies, lack of attendance registers or inability of the supervisors and principals to scrutinize the attendance registers with a view to punishing defaulting teachers to serve as a deterrent to others all contribute to teacher absenteeism. Similarly, lack of standard facilities such as seats and chairs with sound ergonomic considerations, electricity supply, air-conditioned staffrooms, toilets, etc, make teachers uncomfortable in the school and less enthusiastic to go to school. Ivatts (2010) reported that teachers' gender, seniority, professional commitment, weak monitoring systems, incentives and sanctions, health, quality of school infrastructure, distance to school and community economic status are major factors that influence teacher absenteeism. A study by Chandhury et al. (2006) found that personal illness, relative sickness, lack of job satisfaction, lack of effective supervision and inspection of teachers, bad weather condition influenced truancy among teachers.

Statement of the problem

Teacher absenteeism is an evil wind that blows no good to anyone. When the teachers are absent, students lose learning opportunities leading to students' poor academic ability and achievement. Also absenteeism among teachers is capable of disrupting the school routine as well as reducing teachers' morale (Murnane & Willett, 2010). Teacher absenteeism has to be reduced to the barest minimum for any meaningful learning to take place in the school. Otherwise, the quest to attain greatness by our nation will be fruitless. Therefore, this study seeks to investigate the rate of absenteeism among secondary school teachers in Emohua Local Government Area of Rivers State with the roles of gender and marital status of teachers as demographic variables that influence the rate of absenteeism among the teachers.

Research questions and hypotheses

To give direction to this study, three research questions and two hypotheses were formulated. They include

RQ1. What is the average rate of teacher absenteeism among public secondary school teachers in Emohua Local Government Area of River State?

RQ2. What is the average rate of male and female teachers' absenteeism among public secondary school teachers in Emohua Local Government Area of River State?

RQ3. What is the average rate of teacher absenteeism among public secondary school teachers in Emohua Local Government Area of River State based on marital status?

H₀₁: There is no significant difference in the average rate of male and female teachers' absenteeism among public secondary school teachers in Emohua Local Government Area of River State

H₀₂: There is no significant difference in the average rate of teacher absenteeism among public secondary school teachers in Emohua Local Government Area of River State based on marital status

METHOD

Methods of simple random sampling technique and cluster sampling technique were adopted to compose a sample of 218 teachers from a population of secondary school

teachers in Emohua Local Government Area of River State. From 14 existing public secondary school in the local government area with a population of 572 teachers (Office of the Education Secretary, Emohua Local Government Council, Emohua, November, 2016), five secondary schools were selected for study using simple random sampling technique. Then, all the 218 teachers in the five selected secondary schools were used as sample of the study.

The attendance registers of the schools for 2015/2016 academic session were collected and studied. After deductions were made for public holidays, there were 178 working days in the first, second and third terms that make up the session. So percentage rate of absenteeism for a teacher was computed based on the number of days each teacher was absent from the school for that period. Number of days absent divided by 178 days multiplied by 100% gives the rate of absenteeism for each teacher. The average rate of teacher absenteeism was obtained by adding the rates of absenteeism for each teacher and dividing by the number of teachers (218). Then the data obtained from the rates of absenteeism for each teacher were analyzed against their gender and marital status.

RESULTS

RQ1. What is the average rate of teacher absenteeism among public secondary school teachers in Emohua Local Government Area of River State?

To answer this research question, the data were subjected to analysis using percentage as a statistical tool. The results are shown in table 1

Table 1: Average rate (in percent) of absenteeism among teachers in Emohua

	N	Mean (%)	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Percentage days absent	218	38.62	7.99	20.40	52.82

The table shows that for the 218 teachers sampled, the mean percentage rate of absenteeism among the teachers is 38.64%. The standard deviation is 7.99. The minimum percentage rate of absenteeism is 20.40% while the maximum is 52.82%.

RQ2: What is the average rate of male and female teachers' absenteeism among public secondary school teachers in Emohua Local Government Area of River State?

Research question 2 was answered using means and standard deviation. The results are presented in table 2

Table 2: Mean rate (%) of absenteeism among male and female teachers

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Percentage rate of absenteeism	Male	145	36.39	7.28
	Female	73	43.03	7.53

Table 2 shows that the average rate of absenteeism among 145 male teachers is 36.39% with a standard deviation of 7.28 while 73 female teachers had average rate of absenteeism of 43.03% with a standard deviation of 7.53. The values of the means show that average rate of absenteeism among female teachers is higher than that of the male teachers by 6.64%.

H₀₁: There is no significant difference in the average rate of male and female teachers' absenteeism among public secondary school teachers in Emohua Local Government Area of River State

To test this hypothesis, the data were subjected to analysis using independent sample t-test at 0.05 probability level. The results obtained are shown in table 3.

Table 3: t-test results of the rate of absenteeism among male and female teachers

Gender	N	Mean	Std. deviation	Df	T _{cal}	Sig	Decision
Male	145	36.39	7.28	216	6.21	0.00	Reject
Female	73	43.03	7.53				

Table 3 shows that the calculated t-value is 6.21. The degree of freedom is 216. The calculated t-value is significant at 0.00 and therefore significant at 0.05. Hence, the null hypothesis was rejected. This implies that there is a significant difference in the average rates of male and female teachers' absenteeism among public secondary school teachers in Emohua Local Government Area of River State.

R_{Q3}. What is the average rate of teacher absenteeism among public secondary school teachers in Emohua Local Government Area of River State based on marital status?

This research question was answered using mean and standard deviation. The results obtained are shown in table 4.

Table 4: Mean rate (%) of absenteeism among single and married teachers

	Marital status	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Percentage rate of absenteeism	Single	31	33.24	8.39
	Married	187	39.51	7.58

From table 4, it can be seen that 31 single teachers had a mean rate of absenteeism of 33.24 and a standard deviation of 8.39. Similarly, 187 married teachers had a mean rate of absenteeism of 39.51 and a standard deviation of 7.58. From the mean values of the percentage rates of absenteeism for the single teachers and married teachers, it can be observed that percentage rate of absenteeism for the married teachers is greater than that of the single teachers up to the tune of 6.27%.

H₀₂: There is no significant difference in the average rate of teacher absenteeism among public secondary school teachers in Emohua Local Government Area of River State based on marital status. The data for this hypothesis were subjected to analysis using the independent sample t-test at 0.05 probability level. The results obtained are shown in table 3.

Table 4: t-test results of the rate of absenteeism among single and married teachers

Marital status	N	Mean	Std. deviation	Df	T _{cal}	Sig	Decision
Single	31	33.24	8.39	216	3.90	0.00	Reject
Married	187	39.51	7.58				

Table 4 shows that the calculated t-value is 3.90 with a degree of freedom of 216. The calculated t-value is significant at 0.00 and also significant at 0.05. Hence, the null hypothesis was rejected. This implies that there is a significant difference in the average rate of teacher absenteeism among married and single public secondary school teachers in Emohua Local Government Area of River State.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

In this study, it was found that the average rate of teacher absenteeism in Emohua Local Government Area of Rivers State is high up to the tune of 38.62%. This value is comparable to the rate of teacher absenteeism of 36% in Maryland in 2009/2010 academic year as reported by Komoni (2015). This result of high rate of teacher absenteeism is expected. This is because, public secondary school teachers especially those at Emohua Local Government Area hardly derive maximum job satisfaction in terms of salary, pension and gratuity, facilities in the school and incentives for attendance to teachers in remote areas. These problems are compounded by the activities of the cultists who kill, rape, maim, and destroy. Fear of insecurity in rural areas as in Emohua Local Government Area has made teachers reduce the number of days they go to school in a week as most teachers live in Portharcourt City where lives are relatively secure.

It was also found that female teachers had a higher rate of teacher absenteeism than the male teachers. This finding is in line with the findings of Tao (2013) and Chauhury et al. (2006) which revealed that female teachers in Bangladesh, Ecuador, India, Indonesia, Peru, Tanzania and Uganda had a greater percentage of absenteeism than the male teachers. Gender stereotype roles tilt the balance against the women especially in Africa where women are expected to combine domestic work with official duty. This implies that women are constrained by patriarchal division of labour and expectations to be primary caregivers and housekeepers. Therefore, overload of work does not permit the female teachers to attend school as much as their male counterparts.

Furthermore, it was found that married teachers had a higher rate of teacher absenteeism than the single teachers. This finding is similar to the finding of Wahab (2014) which revealed a significant higher rate of absenteeism among married teachers in comparison to single teachers. Married teachers especially those with large family size tend to have a greater appetite for money for basic needs compared to single teachers who have less need for money. The married teachers seek to supplement their salaries from other sources. Hence, attending to other businesses during the school hours increases their chance of being absent from the school.

Counselling implications of the findings

The rate of teacher absenteeism as found in this study is sufficiently high to be a source of concern to stakeholders in education sector. This rate of teacher absenteeism is an indication that there is counselling failure among the counsellors in public secondary schools in Emohua Local Government Area. High rate of absenteeism among teachers is a manifestation of maladjustment in teachers. Persistently high rate of teacher

absenteeism smacks of deviant behaviour among the concerned teachers. The counsellors must intensify their efforts using various programmes including individual or group counselling, seminars, workshops and conferences to enlighten the teachers on the need to be dedicated in their duties. Teachers must be made to understand that justifying their remunerations through their professional services is important in developing the potentials of the students. Teachers must also be more conscientious downplaying the inaptitude of government officials, making sacrifices where necessary and putting the interests of the students at heart. The counsellors must impress on the teachers the importance of doing their work diligently for social economic, technological and political development of the nation.

CONCLUSION

The rate of absenteeism among teachers is sufficiently high in Emohua Local Government Area. Rate of absenteeism among female teachers was found to be significantly higher than that of the male teachers. Similarly, rate of absenteeism among married teachers was significantly higher than that of the single teachers. Hence, the two demographic variables investigated including gender and marital status significantly influenced the rate of absenteeism among teachers in Emohua Local Government Area.

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