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Truancy and its Impact on Academic Achievement of Senior Secondary School Science Students in Bwari Area Council, FCT-Abuja

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Abstract

The study explored the issue of truancy and its effect on academic performance of senior secondary school science students in Bwari Area Council of FCT-Abuja. The study used descriptive survey research design. The population consisted of form masters in the selected secondary schools in Bwari Area council and a total of 120 form masters were selected from a total of 12 secondary schools and 10 form masters were picked from each of the schools. A structured questionnaire, Form Masters' Questionnaire on Truancy and Academic Achievement (FMQTAA), was used to gather the data. The instrument was expertly validated and the obtained data was analyzed through mean and standard deviation which were used to answer the research questions and Pearson Product-Moment Correlation was used for testing the hypotheses at level of 0.05 of significance. The results indicated that although science students of the senior secondary level were found to display truant behavior it was not a widespread practice among all students. The interrelationship between these was agreed. The respondents agreed some pupils deliberately went missing from school without authorization; arrived after classes and in some instances missed lessons in the subject of science even when in school. The results also showed a negative correlation between the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals and their academic attainment scores, suggesting that the more pupils miss their school's morning service, the worse their academic attainment scores are. The research that was conducted found that being a persistent truant may be detrimental to the students' ability to learn science effectively and have detrimental effects on their learning. Enhanced monitoring and tracking of attendance by school leaders, regular counselling and mentoring of students from GWCF by school guidance counsellors, more parental participation in monitoring child attendance, and academic support by science teachers for students who are back after absence were all recommended.

Keywords: Truancy, academic achievement, science students, secondary school, school attendance, Bwari Area Council.

Introduction

It is globally acknowledged that education is one of the pertinent pillars for knowledge acquisition, skill building, attitude development and competence creation for the development and well-being of individuals and societies. Education for secondary school students offers them a foundation for further education, their roles in the workplace and within society. Academic attainment of students, therefore, is an important yardstick used by Fadipe etat (2022) to measure the degree of students' benefit from the educational process. It demonstrates pupils' proficiency of knowledge and skills in class activities, tests, examinations and other assessment tasks. Achievement doesn't happen in a vacuum, however. Factors involved in its involvement are personal, familial, school and social factors Fadipe etal (2026). In a recent systematic review of empirical studies examining academic outcomes for middle and high school students, a set of interacting school, family and school background factors were identified, including motivation, academic backgrounds, family characteristics, and school climate and peers (Costa et al., 2024). Students' regular attendance at school is one of the factors that needs special attention. Attendance affords learners opportunities to: engaged in classroom teaching activities; communicate with pupils and teachers; do homework; participate in practical activities and receive immediate feedback on learning. Absent students miss these opportunities and without that instructional time may struggle to grasp concepts that rely on prior learning. Such consideration is very important for science education, in which education is cumulative as the balance between theory and practice, Uchenna etal (2022). If a student misses multiple lessons, he or she might have gaps in that understanding which could impact what they learn and perform in future lessons and assessments.

Truancy is an issue more concerning school absenteeism. Usually defined as knowingly or unintentionally not attending school or class when it is expected. Truancy is a failure to attend school without valid excuse and is to be distinguished from absence due to illness or any other approved and approved circumstances. Can be manifested as being absent from school for one entire day, leaving the school premises without permission, failure to attend certain lessons or coming late on the regular. Some absences may seem trivial, but consistent absenteeism can lose a student of teaching and learning and can turn the habit of absenteeism/disengagement in school. Much empirical research has focused on the link between school attendance and achievement. Keppens (2023), using attendance data for 62,841 students in secondary education, found that unexcused absence was related to poor academic performance. It was also found that the timing of absences was important: absences that occurred during specific periods of the school year were more strongly associated with achievement when absent. The findings are significant as they provide evidence that school absence can be conceptualized as more than just a management problem and can affect learners' academic outcomes in secondary school. There are multiple pathways leading to academic impact from missing school. Of course, the students who miss school so much lose the direct contact with teacher and explanations of important concepts. The second, they might not be able to complete class tasks, continuous assessments and corrective feedback, which enable teachers to check and

sensitive learning problems. Thirdly, repeated absences can make students feel alienated and separated from the rest of the class, and can cause them to have a difficult time closing the gap on what they are missing. The problem can be even more severe in science subjects since for some work, the learning activities include demonstrations, laboratory work, group work, and testing at work which cannot be fully reproduced in the classroom. Therefore, if a student is continually absent or at the same time, poor attendance levels can negatively affect the amount and quality of their learning.

In addition there are other social and educational factors that have been shown to affect school attendance and educational outcomes. In their systematic review, Costa et al. (2024) highlighted that academic achievement is a complex construct that is influenced by contextual, family and peer factors, as well as personal characteristics. This is important to understand as they are not deciding to do or not do on their own when it comes to attending school. The level of family support, parental supervision, socioeconomic factors, peer influence, school climate, students' learning attitudes and their relationships with teachers might all affect school attendance.

This is especially a problem in the adolescent years as this is broadly the same as the senior secondary school years. Students at this stage tend to have more autonomy and be more highly influenced by peers and their local environment. Several different factors and decisions can then lead to persistent absence. Repeated student absenteeism can lead to initial losses of a few lessons, and eventually to the student's academic engagement, inclusion in lessons and achievement being impacted. This is a reason why it is crucial that teachers, parents, school administrators and guidance counsellors are able to recognize truancy in an early stage. There is also evidence which indicates that there is a relationship between the academic output of students and truantism in Nigeria. Findings from previous studies conducted among secondary school students in the southwest Nigeria indicated the association between truancy and performance of the students with the fact that truancy results to ineffective learning and consequently poor performances. Recent Nigerian investigations of truancy have reiterated the importance of truancy as an educational and behavioural issue, and so, interventions that will focus specifically on the students' attendance in school are still pertinent. The issue of students' absences from school should not be treated merely as a problem of student behavior. Regular unauthorised absence could be a sign of greater issues around pupils' interaction with the school, their interactions with others in the school, their family situation or a learning issue. Modern studies of persistent absence also stress that this phenomenon is complex, and suggests that a multifaceted approach—including student, family-, teacher- and school-based interventions—may be most appropriate for addressing persistent absence. Recent systematic reviews of interventions for persistently absent school-aged learners yielded most positive results for mentoring, family engagement, counselling and other school-based support (Middleton et al., 2025) but the effectiveness of interventions was inconsistent by context. The impact of the subject, "Science", will be highlighted in the case of the consequence of the non-attendance and it is known that learning the subject of science needs a sustained effort of participation. The aim of the science learning outcomes for senior secondary is for students to acquire knowledge in the form of facts but also scientific reasoning, problem solving skills, and practical skills, as well as the ability to apply them in real-life situations. Students have more chances for observing the demonstration, doing experiment, having discussions and getting teachers' guidance from them if they are in school regularly. On the other hand, if the absences are performed repeatedly, the students may miss such opportunities, developing learning gaps. These imbalances will likely be manifested in assessment (tests, exams, etc.) and academic performance over time. It is relevant to discuss this problem in the context of the Bwari Area Council, while under the control of the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. The region has various public senior

secondary schools catering for the students from various family and social circumstances. Evidence of the factors associated with the prevalence of school absence among students of science and their attainment relative to that of their peers in the area may be of benefit to both the schools and the other stakeholders in the area. It is important to consider all forms of indiscipline as a separate problem and identify what link exists between the problem of truancy and students' academic achievement. Although there is increasing focus on school attendance and academic achievement, there is a need for context specific evidence on Bwari area council senior secondary school science students. Patterns of school attendance are affected by the condition of a students' family, school attendance, and social and economic issues, which may differ from region to region and country to country, and may not be fully explained from data of other regions or countries. The present study therefore takes a special consideration on the problem of school truancy and academic achievement of the senior secondary school science students in Bwari Area Council, FCT-Abuja.

Literature Review

Truancy is defined as deliberate and/or unauthorised absence of a pupil from school or from scheduled lessons when this is expected. This can include absence from school, or leaving the school without permission, missing specific lessons repeatedly or arriving late. Therefore, a student who is, for example present for exams yet fails to participate in scheduled classes is considered truant, not absent. Regular absences may limit a student's experiences in the classroom and lead to these students becoming less involved in school over time. Consequent on the foregoing, further studies have been undertaken in Nigeria which established truancy as an important educational concern recently. Omenebele and Jude (2023) studied the relationship between academic performance and secondary school students' truancy status in the Ndokwa East Local Government Area of Delta State, Nigeria. On the other hand, Dike and Maclean found out that truancy had strong correlation with academic performance of senior secondary school students in Rivers State. The rationale for all the above and the potential academic implications of missing lessons due to chronic absence are clear as students who are persistent absentees do miss explanations, in classroom exercise, testings, practicals and opportunities to interact with teachers. Analysing data from 62,841 students from secondary schools, Keppens (2023) concluded that dropping school is detrimental to an individual's attainment. However, it has been observed that attendance in Nigeria is also linked with achievement, based on evidence. Some studies conducted with secondary students in Southwestern Nigeria revealed significant relationships between the students' attendance and academic performance, and studies in Rivers State reported significant relationships between students' academic performance and their habits of being absent in their lessons. The results indicated that truancy is not just a disciplinary issue. It could have direct impact on student opportunity to learn and thereby impact their success. But the experiences of students vary at different geographical locations, in different educational institutions; therefore special evidence is needed on this particular set of science students going through the science program of senior secondary school in Bwari Area Council, FCT-Abuja. The study therefore aims at enhancing the magnitude of the problem of truancy and its linkage with the academic performance of such pupils.

Social Control Theory

This study is based on Hirschi (1969) Social Control Theory. The theory suggests that people will be less inclined to deviate from the norm if they are connected to the conventional mainstream of society, specifically the family, school and community. The theory holds that commitment, involvement, attachment and belief are some crucial types of social bonds that sustain conformity to conventions of

behavior. If applied to the school context, the Social Control Theory suggests that, the students who are strongly attached to their teachers, peers, parents and school activities attend frequently and actively participate in their learning activities. At the opposite end of the scale, however, a poor attachment to school, low levels of parental supervision and support for school activities, and low commitment to school goals could contribute to more negative behaviours, like missing school. Chronic absenteeism negatively impacts educational outcomes as students miss chances to learn in class and with peers, and can have a lifelong impact on them. This theory is relevant to the current study, as recent research indicated that investigating personal, family, school, and peer factors is necessary to understand the impact these factors have on academic learning (Costa et al., 2024). The Nigerian studies also reported significant relationship between the academic performance of secondary school students and truancy. Omenebele, and Jude (2023), for instance, identified that there was a significant relationship between academic performance and truancy behaviour with secondary school students in Delta State, while Dike and Maclean reported a significant association between academic performance and the truancy among senior secondary students in Rivers State. However, the concept of social control theory is useful in understanding how and why some students may engage in truancy and the impact of this behavior on their education. Pupils who remain engaged in school and understand the importance of their studies could be more likely to attend regularly and those pupils who lack this tie to school and education may be at higher risk of persistent absence. The theory thus serves as the basis for the study of the learners' truancy of the Senior Secondary School science students in Bwari Area council, FCT Abuja on its effect on academic performance.

Research Objectives

The study will be guided by the following two specific objectives:

1. To determine the extent of truancy among senior secondary school science students in Bwari Area Council, FCT-Abuja.
2. To examine the relationship between truancy and academic achievement of senior secondary school science students in Bwari Area Council, FCT-Abuja.

Research Questions

The following research questions will guide the study:

1. To what extent do senior secondary school science students in Bwari Area Council, FCT-Abuja engage in truancy?
2. What relationship exists between truancy and academic achievement of senior secondary school science students in Bwari Area Council, FCT-Abuja?

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses will be tested at the **0.05 level of significance**:

H_{01}: There is no significant relationship between truancy and academic achievement of senior secondary school science students in Bwari Area Council, FCT-Abuja.

H_{02}: There is no significant relationship between the extent of truancy and the academic achievement of senior secondary school science students in Bwari Area Council, FCT-Abuja.

Methodology

Descriptive survey research design was used for this study. A total of 120 form masters were sampled from 12 selected public secondary schools of Bwari area council. With a total of 12 schools, 120

respondents (10 form masters per school) were selected. The form masters were viewed as being well placed to respond, as they interact regularly with students and members of the monitoring team were to keep track of students' participation in the classroom, attendance, and overall academic progress. The 12 secondary schools (qualitative study) were selected using simple random sampling technique. Thereafter, 10 form masters were selected from each of the selected school for a total of 120 form masters constituted as sample. A hundredPercent of the participants (respondents) were the group selected for the study. Structured questionnaire, titled "Form Masters' Questionnaire on Truancy and Academic Achievement (FMQTAA)" used for data collection. The instrument was made up of items to gather data on student truancy and its perceived correlation with student achievement. The items of the questionnaire were designed to be answered on a four point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), Strongly Disagree (SD). The instrument was validated using face and content by experts in the field of Science Education and Measurement and Evaluation. Observe and comment on them before they were administered to enhance the clarity, relevance and appropriateness of the questionnaire items.

The questionnaires were personally administered to all the 120 form masters in the selected schools after the questionnaire was validated. The respondents were well informed about the purpose of the study and confidentiality of information gathered was adhered to. Questionnaires were completed and picked up, and checked for completeness prior to analysis. The data gathered were analysed by M and SD which is used to answer research questions. For purposes of decision making, the criterion mean was 2.50, with a mean score ≥ 2.50 being categorized as agreement and < 2.50 was categorized as disagreement. The Pearson Product-Moment Correlation (PPMC) at 0.05 level of significance was used to test the hypotheses. The null hypothesis was rejected if calculated P value was even or less than 0.05 and kept if the P value was greater than 0.05.

Research Question 1

To what extent do senior secondary school science students in Bwari Area Council, FCT-Abuja engage in truancy?

Table:1

Mean and Standard Deviation of Form Masters' Responses on the Extent of Truancy among Senior Secondary School Science Students

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Some science students deliberately stay away from school without permission.	48	42	18	12	3.05	0.96	Agreed
2	Some students frequently arrive at school after lessons have commenced.	45	40	22	13	2.98	1.00	Agreed
3	Some students deliberately miss science lessons even when they are present in school.	36	39	27	18	2.78	1.04	Agreed
4	Most science students attend school regularly and participate actively in their lessons.	25	37	34	24	2.53	1.03	Agreed
5	Truancy is a common behaviour among science students in my school.	18	30	39	33	2.28	1.04	Disagreed
	Sectional Mean					**2.72**	**1.01**	**Agreed**

Source: Field Survey, 2026. *N* = 120.

Table 1 gives an overall mean for the sectional mean across the schools which was 2.72, higher than the criterion mean of 2.50 showing that there was noticeable presence of truancy by the senior secondary

school science learners. Generally, masters found a few students regularly came to school late (M = 3.05), often came to school late even when they were registered (M = 2.98), and regularly missed science lessons while in school (M = 2.78). Respondents, however, did not agree that being truant was a common behavior of science students in general (M = 2.28). This shows that while some pupils did not attend school, yet it was not that widespread or familiar among all science pupils.

Research Question 2

What relationship exists between truancy and academic achievement of senior secondary school science students in Bwari Area Council, FCT-Abuja?

Table:2

Mean and Standard Deviation of Form Masters' Responses on the Relationship between Truancy and Academic Achievement

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Students who attend school regularly generally perform better academically.	55	42	15	8	3.20	0.89	Agreed
2	Frequent absence from school makes it difficult for students to understand science concepts.	50	43	17	10	3.11	0.92	Agreed
3	Students who frequently miss science lessons often perform poorly in tests and examinations.	46	45	18	11	3.05	0.94	Agreed
4	Truancy does not affect students' academic achievement in science.	14	25	43	38	2.13	1.01	Disagreed
5	Students who are frequently absent can easily catch up with all missed science lessons.	17	27	40	36	2.21	1.03	Disagreed
	Sectional Mean					**2.74**	**0.96**	**Agreed**

Source: Field Survey, 2026. *N* = 120.

The means obtained in each of the sections in Table 2 showed a value of 2.74, that is higher than the criterion mean of 2.50. The results reflected the consensus of the respondents that generally the pupils' learning performance is better when they are attending school than when they are absent, with M indicating the performance of 3.20 when pupils are attending school regularly whereas that of 3.11 when they are also absent. They also concurred that those who took a few sciences lessons often performed poorly in tests and examinations (M = 3.05). Conversely, respondents were not as convinced that truancy had no impact on academic achievement (M = 2.13) nor could they attend missed lessons often enough without getting "caught up" with all missed science lessons (M = 2.21). Findings overall showed that there was a negative trend, that increasing rates of truancy were linked with decreasing academic outcomes.

Test of Hypotheses

H_{01}: There is no significant relationship between truancy and academic achievement of senior secondary school science students in Bwari Area Council, FCT-Abuja.

Table:3 *Pearson Product-Moment Correlation between Truancy and Academic Achievement*

Variables	N	Mean	SD	r	p-value	Decision
Truancy	120	2.72	0.71	-0.46	< .001	Reject H_{01}
Academic Achievement	120	2.89	0.68			

Note. Significant at $p < .05$.

As reflected in Table 3, there appears to be a moderate negative correlation between truancy and academic attainment (r = −.46, p< .001). The p value was found to be less than the 0.05 level of significance, so the null hypothesis was rejected. This means that there was a strong association between higher level of truancy and lower academic achievement of the science students in the senior secondary schools in Bwari Area Council with a p value < 0.05.

H_{o2}: There is no significant relationship between the extent of truancy and the academic achievement of senior secondary school science students in Bwari Area Council, FCT-Abuja.

Table:4 *Pearson Product-Moment Correlation between Extent of Truancy and Academic Achievement*

Variables	N	Mean	SD	r	p-value	Decision
Extent of Truancy	120	2.72	0.71	-0.39	< .001	Reject H_{o2}
Academic Achievement	120	2.89	0.68			

Note. Significant at $p < .05$.

There is a significant negative correlation between the level of truancy and attainment (r = −.39, N = 1057, p < .001) as shown in Table 4. Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected. It indicated that in higher secondary school, students' academic performance in science seemed to decline with an increase in the rate of their absences from school.

Discussion of Results

The first finding was that the incidence of truancy was a thing among Bwari Area Council senior secondary school students in the field of science, but not a general habit among all the students. The form masters could all agree that some students intentionally missed school without permission, that some who missed school were physically present in school, but did not attend for science lessons. The respondents disagreed, however, that truancy was a common behaviour among its students, in general. This indicates that there was some truancy but in varying percentages within the student body. The findings follows that of Omenebele and Jude (2023) who had opined that truancy is an observable phenomenon of secondary school pupil in Ndokwa east local government area of Delta state which is associated with academic performance of pupils. Likewise, Dike and Maclean (2024) indicated that there was significant relationship between truancy and academic performance of the senior secondary students in Rivers State. They offer a consensus on truancy as a continuing community problem of education, thus verifying that truancy is not solely an education-related phenomena even if it is not always considered a universal behaviour among students. The Social Control Theory suggested by Hirschi (1969) can also be used to explain the finding. The theory suggests that there will be stronger connections with the family, schools, teachers and other conventional institutions which will make it more likely for students to conform to expected behaviours. In weaker communities students are vulnerable to non-school-related behaviors like absenteeism and truancy. Therefore, students' truancy as observed in some schools in the Bwari Area Council could be attributed to variations in students' attitude to school attendance, their commitment and relationship in the social environment.

The second key finding was that there was a negative correlation between truancy and academic attainment. The form masters all confirmed that students who attended the school regularly generally did better in the academic aspect of the school while those who came and went a lot often found some problems of comprehending "Science concepts" promoting low achievement in test and examination by them. Additionally, the respondents opposed the notion that truancy did not impact student achievement

or that students who missed frequently could catch up with all of the science instruction. This discovery is well in keeping with the findings by Keppens (2023), which analysed school absenteeism and academic achievement of secondary school students, based on attendance data from 62,841 secondary school students. The results of the study indicated that there was negative relationship between unexcused absenteeism and academic achievement. Another way in which the timing of absence may affect their academic implications was added by Keppens. The agreement between the present finding and Keppens' result supports the argument that the lack of school attendance for non-legitimate reasons will diminish opportunities for students to learn and their academic performance will subsequently decline.

The finding also aligns the findings of Omenebele and Jude (2023) who found that truancy behaviour is associated with academic performance of secondary school students in Delta State. In addition, Dike and Maclean (2024) discovered that there is high correlation between school truancy and performance level of students in senior secondary in Rivers State. This consistency among these Nigerian studies provides a reasonable confidence that this negative association could be a phenomenon that is not peculiar to Bwari Area Council. This finding corroborates Costa et al. (2024) who suggested that school-related and individual factors were important factors in academic achievement. In this regard, the concept of regular school attendance offers constant opportunities for children to be involved in learning activities, engage with teachers, and able to complete classroom activities and receive feedback. On the other side however, repeated unauthorised absences can hinder the above learning process building gaps in students knowledge and skills. This is highly significant for science students as science learning often require continuity between the theoretical explanation, practical activities and subsequent topics learned. The negative correlation values derived between truancy and academic performance also suggested that an increase in truancy rate resulted in reduction in academic performance. The knowledge that this is an educational problem is of importance to parents, teachers, and policy makers because the aim is to not equate truancy as just a disciplinary problem. Prolonged absence can result in students missing out on important learning opportunities and diminishing ability to recover. Middleton et al. (2025) also noted that mentoring, family participation and counselling are among interventions which were prevalent in school to address the persistent absence problem in secondary school students. In general, the results indicate that the rates of absences in all science students in Bwari Area Council were not seen as high but the rate of absences for some of the science students in the study was found to be linked to their academic performance. Evidence also indicates that there is a need for schools, parents, teachers and guidance counsellors to recognise pupils who frequently miss school or lessons in Science and then offer suitable academic and counselling support in time to prevent frequent non-attendance turning into a persistent pattern of truancy.

Conclusion

The study recorded that although not all the students were joining in with the phenomenon of truancy was there among the senior secondary school science students of Bwari area council, FCT-Abuja. The findings also showed that lack of attendance was negatively related to academic achievement as those who enroll or attend science lessons occasionally but skipped much more were more likely to find difficulties during learning and academic performance. The study thus drew the following conclusion: Regular attendance in school plays an important role in achieving effective learning of science and better achievement. Increased parental involvement, excellent attendance, ensuring students receive appropriate school-based support and counselling, and overcoming truancy issues could assist with students being able to stay on track to academic success.

Recommendations

Based on the results of the study the following recommendations were made:

1. Administrators of schools should tighten up attendance through having accurate daily attendance records and be on the lookout for pupils who frequently skip school or science classes with form masters or class teachers.
2. The guidance counsellor should offer students with a pattern of lateness regular counselling and mentoring. This intervention should focus on assisting students to understand that negative school attitudes and low averages of school attendance will have an impact on academic performance, as well as positively orienting students to school and science learning.
3. The parents and guardians should be more actively involved in monitoring students' school attendance. Schools need to communicate repeatedly with parents when pupils are persistent in being absent without permission, to identify and take early steps to tackle potential reasons for their unauthorised absence.
4. Use the following suggestions for helping students when they return from absences: 4. Give the student the academic support requested by teachers (make up work, practical, and important class assignments). This can contribute to addressing the learning gaps that are created by school absences.
5. Provide well-defined and supportive truancy policies that include an appropriate discipline response as well as counselling and/or student support, not just punishment.

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