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# Training teachers to manage truancy at Savelugu West Circuit of education in Northern Ghana

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The aim of the research was to investigate why many pupils in the Savelugu West Circuit of Education in Ghana, frequently missed classes and to equip teachers to manage the situation. Action research was employed as the research design of the study. Data collection instruments used include, observation, interviews and questionnaires. In all, ninety (90) pupils and fifteen (15) teachers with a total of one hundred and five (105) participants took part in the study. Purposive sampling was used to select 5 teachers each from the three schools of the study and stratified random sampling to select 30 students each from the three schools. The first stage of sampling of students was to get information from sources, such as school attendance registers from all the classes. The data collected was analyzed using tables and charts to find answers to the research questions related to truancy of pupils in the study area. A two - day workshop for teachers on strategies to make classrooms more conducive and involving to sustain the interest of truants was organized. The study revealed that the schools' environment, methods of teaching, punishment and parents' apathy towards their children's education promoted truant behaviours. The study recommended that teachers should improve their teaching methods, provide counseling, reduce punishment, make environments conducive for learning and parents should provide for their wards' school needs and monitor their progress in school. In addition, both parents and students should be sensitized on the importance of education. The study contributes in existing literature and knowledge in matters related to truancy in schools.

**Key words:** Pupils, truancy, school attendance, teachers, parents, basic schools.

## INTRODUCTION

The act of pupils leaving the classroom when the school is in session without the knowledge of the classroom teacher or the school authority is referred to as truancy and the person who indulges in such act is referred to as a truant (Reid, 1999). Truancy, or habitual act of being absent from school without permission is a major issue affecting the overall success of schools. Truancy may be identified differently between different groups of people however, consecutive unexcused absences from school is the most common and acceptable definition. According to Harnett

(2007) absenting from school without permission is truancy whilst chronic truancy is not that there is no excuse provided but rather the excuse is not a valid one.

Baker and Nugent (2001) reported that hundreds of thousands of American students are absent from school without permission each day and this issue is ranked among the top ten problems facing schools across the country (Desocio et al., 2007). It contributes significantly towards the undermining of educational systems. Truancy prevention is an area of great concern for educators, as well

as parents. Students, who are truants dropped out of school or engaged in high risk behaviours that consequently entangled them in juvenile crimes. The effect of this practice on the academic performance of pupils cannot be over-emphasized.

### **Profile of the Study Area**

Savelugu West Circuit is a circuit in Savelugu/Nanton Municipality located in the Northern Region of Ghana. The Circuit is one of the nine circuits in the municipality and endowed with a lot of shea nut trees, dawadawa trees and dams for vegetable farming. The circuit begins from a community called Kanshegu which is about one kilometer (1 km) away from the Tamale International Airport Junction towards the North on the Bolgatanga-Tamale route. The people in the area are mostly Dagombas and a Muslim dominated community. The major occupation of the people in the area is farming and trading. There are very few educated people in the area, who see formal education as a waste of time and resources and that the only way to make money was through trading. Since the community is endowed with a lot of shea nut trees, Dawadawa and mango trees, women in Kanshegu community are mostly involved in the trade of making and selling of local shea nut butter (oil). As a result of high level of poverty in the community, some parents allowed their children to support themselves financially by picking and selling shea nuts and other fruits along the Tamale-Bolgatanga road. This takes place during instructional hours. Some parents who trade this commodity also involved children in gathering the shea nut seeds for processing into oil for sale. This practice in the study area promoted truancy, which affects the academic performance of the pupils as well.

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### **Theories of motivation**

Motivation is complex, multi-facet activity that leaves enough room for subjectivity among researchers and practitioners. According to Armstrong (2006), motivation theory explains why people at work behave in the way they do in terms of their efforts and the directions they are taking. It describes what organizations can do to encourage people to apply their efforts and abilities in ways that will further the achievement of the organization's goals as well as satisfy their own needs. Branson (2002) explained that motivation theory is concerned with job satisfaction, the factors that create it and its impact on performance that they perceived as important (Cole, 2003).

According to Gareth et al. (2000) content theories of motivation focus on factors internal to the individual that energize and direct behaviour. Such theories regard motivation as the product of internal drive that compels an individual to act toward the satisfaction of his or her needs. The leading content theories deal essentially with what appears to motivate people. One of such content theories of

motivation is Maslow's hierarchy of needs, which states that, when a need occurs, motivational tension develops and is directed towards satisfaction of the felt need. The intensity of the effort is a function of how strong the need is. For example, physical needs are the primary needs for food, shelter and clothing that can be directly satisfied by compensation.

Fredrick (2011) stated that motivation is the desire within a person causing him or her to act. Robbins and Judge (2011) also believed that motivation is concerned with the strength and direction of behaviour and the factors that influence people to behave in certain ways. Parley (2008) explained further that the term 'motivation' can refer variously to the goals individuals have, the ways in which individuals choose their goals and the ways in which others try to change their behaviour.

According to Robbins et al., (2003), "Motivation is one's willingness to exert efforts towards the accomplishment of a goal. The basic elements included in the process are motives, goals and behaviour". Almost all human behaviour is motivated. Motives are generally directed towards goals. The series of activities undertaken to achieve a goal is behaviour. The activity a truant undertakes to be absent from school is a behaviour. Gyan (2007) stated that in order to motivate a student to be punctual or regular at school, teachers must first of all know the motivational factors that influence the behaviour of persons. The pupils of the study were influenced or motivated by certain factors to behave the way they did.

### **Problem Statement**

A long term observation of pupils in Savelugu West Circuit of northern Ghana depicted that majority of the pupils frequently stayed away from classes and loitered around the community. A study of class attendance registers of a primary school in the study area over a period of 3 months revealed that about forty-five percent (45%) of the pupils were absent from school for more than three times a week (Attendance Register, 2017). The act of absence from school was more pronounced on market days which took place every six (6) days of the week. Classrooms were virtually empty on every market day. The phenomenon gave rise to the need to probe into the situation through research.

The main objective of the study was to determine the factors that contributed to truancy in the study area and how to address the situation.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of the study are:

1. To find out the causes of truancy among pupils of Savelugu West Circuit of northern Ghana.
2. To assess the effects of truancy on the academic performance of the pupils in the Circuit.
3. To equip teachers with knowledge and skills on how to minimize the problem of truancy of pupils in the

study area.

### Research Questions

1. What are the causes of truancy among pupils of Savelugu West Circuit of northern Ghana?
2. What are the effects of truancy on the academic performance of pupils?
3. What strategies could be used by teachers to minimize the problem of truancy of pupils in the study area?

### Significance of the Study

The study contributes in existing literature and knowledge in matters related to truancy in schools. It also creates awareness for students, teachers, parents and the general public on the negative impact of truancy. In addition, it serves as a reference for governments and other educational agencies in decision-making and policy formulation on matters related to truancy in schools. Moreover, teachers could develop skills and knowledge on how to handle truant issues in their schools.

### Literature review

Raid (2006) explicitly identified attendance as the single most critical variable in measuring students' achievement levels, thus, it is imperative that corrective action and measures be taken against chronic absenteeism or truancy. In order to eliminate or decrease truancy the causes of the behaviour ought to be identified. The strategies to decrease, prevent and eliminate the behaviour should be acknowledged as well.

### Truancy and Absenteeism

Schools in Ghana accept some excusable reasons for absence. They include illness, injury, medical appointment, death in the family and religious holiday. In most cases, the schools required an excusable note from a parent that explains the reason for the child's absence. According to Harnett (2007), unexcused absences fall into three main categories: failure to submit a note or documentation of the reason for an absence, submitting a note for an absence that does not constitute an excusable reason for an absence, and presence on school environs but failure to attend assigned class. According to Harnett (2007), "It is important to note that the primary issue of truancy is not that there is not excuse provided but rather the excuse is not a valid one" (p. 39).

Parrish (2015) stated that, different schools acknowledge excused and unexcused absences differently and accept a range of reasons for absences. Although excused absences have an effect on learning, it is believed that unexcused absences have a greater negative effect on learning than excused absences. Unexcused absences have been linked to lower grades than excused absences (Finlay, 2006), as well

as lower standardized test scores (Gottfried, 2009). According to Gottfried (2010), the effect of absence type on standardized achievement scores remains evident even when controlling for previous achievement. This is important because prior achievement is a significant indicator of a child's current GPA or standardized test performance (Gottfried, 2010). A study conducted by the Georgia Department of Education (2011) indicated that as few as five absences in a school year can have an effect on a student's learning. The study revealed that unexcused absences resulted in a decrease in students' performance and achievements. According to Eaton et al. (2008), students with a high number of unexcused absences have been shown to have lower motivation levels resulting in greater risk for school disengagement.

### Reasons for Truancy

Parrish (2015) stated that students play truancy for a variety of reasons of which some are considered excusable and some are not. According to Balfanz and Byrnes (2012), reasons for truancy may be put into three main categories. This include students who cannot attend school due to illness, family responsibilities, house instability, the need to work, or involvement with juvenile justice system; students who will not attend school to avoid bullying, unsafe conditions, harassment and embarrassment and; students who do not attend school because they or their parents do not value education, they have something else they would rather do. Sheppard (2010) disclosed that majority of students' truancy occurred with the knowledge of the parents and that some parents simply allowed their children to stay home to have a day off. According to Sparks (2011) older students are sometimes permitted to stay home and supervise younger siblings who are sick and the parents cannot stay home from work. The degree to which a student who is unexcused is absent may be a reflection of the parents' attitude towards the child's school and toward the value of education in general (Sheppard, 2010). Henry (2007) believed that the attitude of parents have a crucial role in determining whether a truant behaviour will continue or persist. When unexcused absences are tolerated by parents, they send messages to the child that the family does not value education (Sheldon, 2007). Parent's model values and attitudes toward education to significantly influence the child's value system as well. The attitude a child develops toward school plays an important role in how successful the child will be in school (Sheldon, 2007).

Regardless of the reasons truants missed out on learning opportunities, that often placed them at risk for academic failure, disengagement from school and eventually dropping out (Finlay, 2006; Gottfried, 2009). Eaton et al. (2008) stated that students who were frequently absent, regardless of whether they had parents' permission or not to miss school, were more likely to engage in risk behaviours than students with no absences. Henry (2007) discovered that students who resided in single parent

households, with failing grades, did not believe that they would graduate and be employed were most likely to have skipped school. According to Railsback (2004) and Henry (2007), incidences of truancy increased during the middle school years, thus early interventions are needed for schools to be successful in combating truancy.

### **Various factors that influence truancy**

According to Heilbrunn (2007) there is no single risk factor that leads to truancy but rather a variety of individual, school, family and community factors. Parrish (2015) suggested categories such as the family, school, economic and student influences:

#### **Family Influence**

The family factors that may cause truant behaviour include, but not limited to parents' level of education, parental supervision and household income. In a recent study on eighth and tenth grade students' absenteeism, Henry (2007) stated that the lower the father's education, the more likely the child is to commit truancy. The likelihood that the child would be a truant was even higher if the mother was a high school dropout. Additionally, Henry's work proves that the longer a child is unsupervised after school, the more likely that child is to become a truant. Zhang et al (2007) linked truancy to household income by establishing the fact that minors who were first referred to juvenile justice system tend to have belonged to financially impoverished families.

Factors in the family domain, include poverty, inconsistent discipline, ineffective parenting skills, low family social support and high family mobility, parental emotional disorders, child abuse or neglect, single parent homes, large family size, transportation problems, family conflict and domestic violence. Such factors have been identified as having major impact on truancy (Epstein and Sheldon, 2002; McCluskey et al., 2004; Teasley, 2004). In addition, Baker et al. (2001) cited problematic family dynamics and parental marital discord as triggers for school refusal behaviour by students. Oftentimes families' inability to meet the basic needs of their children may contribute factor to children's truancy. Families where parents do not insist children attend school, or notice absenteeism, properly supervise their children or emphasize the importance of school attendance students are more likely to become truants (USDOE, 2007).

Furthermore, Teasley (2004) observed that family or home dynamics such as crowded living conditions, frequent relocation and weak parent-child relationship have a negative impact on attendance as well. Teasley (2004) said that truant students are more likely to come from single parent homes rather than two parent homes. It is because both parents are likely able to keep track of what is going on since responsibility is shared and not reliant upon one parent. Parenting styles that foster communication between children and parents and strong parent-child

relationships are closely associated with good attendance (Bell et al., 1994; Kleine, 1994; McNeal 1999). Rohrman (1993) stated that permissive parenting styles allow children more autonomy in decision making and resulted in higher absenteeism. Moreover, weak parent-child relationships as well as low parent-school involvement also increase truancy risks.

#### **School Influence**

School factors that may influence truant behaviour include but not limited to school climate, class size, attitudes, ability to meet each student's needs and the school's discipline policy regarding truancy. According to Wilkins (2008) students, who attend large schools may feel isolated or alienated and so become uncomfortable, unwanted, not valued, unaccepted or insecure in their school setting and may not like to attend. They lack a connection to a trustworthy person in the school. It is obvious that in an oversized classroom, the diverse needs of students could not be met, thus student-teacher relationships could not be developed. Henry (2007) solicits that 23% of truants choose to skip school because they do not feel safe in their school environment. Moreover, if a student does not feel comfortable, secure or safe may logically decide to skip school because other locations may be safer than the school.

In general, absentees have been found to have less satisfaction in their relations with school personnel, have less satisfaction with school and often dislike teachers (Corville - Smith et al., 1998; Malcolm et al., 2003). Poor relationships between teachers and students put students at risk for school truancy (Baker et al., 2001; Dougherty, 1999). Other teacher related risk factors for truancy include unsupportive teachers, differences in teaching and learning styles and lack of control by teachers in the classroom (Ehrenberg et al., 1991). The curriculum or content of lessons may also contribute to truancy rates. Many truant students feel bored in class due to unchallenging class and homework assignments and the content and delivery of the curriculum (Malcolm et al., 2003). Kim and Streeter (2006) believed that students were more likely to skip school if they perceive it as boring, chaotic or not intellectually challenging.

Sheldon (2007) said that several characteristics of schools posed attendance problems. These include, poor leadership, low drive for improvement, inexperienced persons in positions of responsibility, high staff turnover, low-levels of expectations among staff and students and inappropriate policies. Principals often used out of school suspension as a disciplinary measure for truant students. Nonetheless, research indicated that such practice often leads to student disengagement and eventually school dropout (Kronick and Hargis, 1998). Tobin (2009) pointed out that imposing more serious punishment has worsened truant behaviour. Meaning punishment can be counter-productive in the fight against absenteeism.

### **Economic Influence**

Economic influences that may cause truant behaviour include, but not limited to living conditions and student employment. Henry (2007) discerned in his study that 33.5% of high school truants did not live with their mother or father, 27.6% lived with their father only, 19.8% lived with their mother only and 14.4% lived with both parents. Therefore, the likelihood that a student would commit truancy when the student lives with only one parent increased everywhere from 5.9% to 13.7%. As far as employment was concern, Henry (2007) stated that students, who worked more than 20 hours per week, increased their chances of being truants.

### **Individual Influence**

Individual attributes of a student such as values, attitudes and behaviours contribute to decisions to either attend or not attend school. Student variables that may influence truant behaviour include, but not limited to physical and mental health problems, substance abuse, drug use, perception of self and detachment from school. DeSocio et al. (2007) claimed that truancy coexist with student and family mental health disorders and may be an indicator for an existing or emerging mental health disorder, including post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, depression and or substance abuse. Henry (2007) explained that students who used alcohol one or more times a month as 26.5% more likely to skip school than peers who do not use alcohol. Of equal importance, students that held lower perceptions about themselves were more likely to skip school than students who held higher perceptions of themselves. DeSocio et al. (2007) indicated, that as many as 30% of the youth who are absent on a given school day are representative of school disengagement, or detachment. According to Henry (2007), students who exhibit school disengagement, lack commitment to the school, are poor achievers and hold low aspirations for their future.

### **Community Influence**

Community factors often played a significant role in truant behaviour. Communities with high poverty rates and lack of community support often have higher rates of school truancy (Baker et al., 2001; USDOE, 2007). For example, students, who see little opportunities for careers or employment in their community often do not value the importance of formal education, because they do not believe it would impact their future. Community safety issues affect truancy rate due to the fact that in some communities children fear violence that may occur near home or between home and school therefore choosing to stay at home for safety (NCSE, 2006).

Another community issue that affects truancy rates includes the availability of drugs or alcohol within the community. If drugs and alcohol are readily available within a student's community, the student will be at risk of

using some which may lead to truancy. Finally, the low SES communities which cannot provide extracurricular activities to engage their students may promote truancy. Truant behaviour may be costly to communities and society as a whole, because they often lead to school dropout. It has a direct financial impact on communities through lost income taxes due to unemployment and lower salaries, higher social service expenditures, criminal justice costs and the loss of federal and state education funding (Baker et al., 2001; Heilbrunn, 2007).

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

Creswell (2003) described research design as a mental plan of the research that highlights basic strategies applied to obtain relevant data for the research. This clearly defines how the researcher is going to put the phenomenon to test, measure and observe the aspects of the phenomenon that are of interest with the view of understanding and interpreting the facts.

The research design used for the study was action research. Action research deals with a specified problem in a particular setting, for example in a single classroom situation. In action research, the researcher works collaboratively with other people to solve perceived problems or improve upon a situation. Lehman and Mehrens (1971) pointed out that action research is a type of applied or decision oriented research where the researcher is the practitioner who will make and live with the decision. Action research is therefore applied research conducted by teachers, supervisors or school administrators in order to deal with classroom or school problems and improve upon practices. The procedure include, conceptualizing the problem, moving through several interventions and evaluation strategies to arrive at conclusion.

The design was chosen because of the strengths indicated as follows:

It deals with the problems which hinder classroom teaching and learning processes and helps teachers to understand what actually goes on in the teaching and learning situations. It encourages teachers to be aware of their own practices, be critical of those practices and be prepared to change.

Furthermore, action research provides teachers with the opportunity to better understand all aspects of their own practices, be it in relation to subject, content, the curriculum or the methods appropriate to the level of the pupils in a particular class. It provides in-service training to participating field workers such as teachers.

In addition, action research is participatory and collaborative because it involves the researcher in inquiry. It also involves other people in the process. The value of action research allows both the researcher and participants of the study learn experientially about the research process.

Moreover, action research generates new knowledge to develop appropriate intervention strategies aimed at finding solutions to problems identified in the field of study.

Notwithstanding the above discussed strengths of action research, it has weaknesses as well. Action research is often remedial in problems identified instead of preventing the problems from happening.

### **Population of the Study**

Kombo and Tromp (2006) described population as the group of individuals, objects or items from which a sample is taken for measurement. This implies a group of individuals, persons, objects, or items that have common characteristics from which samples are taken for the purposes of research studies. Target population on the other hand, comprises of the population of the study that consists of all possible respondents the researcher is interested in studying. The participants for the study comprised of the representation of all students of Savelugu West Circuit. The Circuit has thirteen (13) Junior High School and Primary Schools. The Circuit is represented by three (3) Junior High Schools (JHS) and two (2) primary schools. The JHS were Kanshegu M/A Junior High School which had a population of One Hundred and forty (140) pupils, Nyoglo Primary School had a population of two hundred and eighty (280) pupils and Kanshegu Primary school had a population of two hundred and twelve (212) pupils.

### **Sample and Sampling Techniques**

A sample is a set of respondents selected from a population for survey purpose. The Merriam Webster dictionary (2017) considers sampling as the act, techniques or process of obtaining a representative part of a population for the purpose of getting an outcome or drawing a conclusion about the whole population.

Purposive sampling was used to select four (4) core subject teachers in Mathematics, English Language, Integrated Science, Social Studies and one (1) guidance and counseling teacher from each school. So far five (5) teachers each were selected from each of the three schools chosen. The sample was selected because it was convenient and possessed ample knowledge about truancy. In all fifteen (15) teachers were sampled from three schools to represent the population. The pupils were selected through a stratified random sampling. The first stage of sampling was to get information from inadvertent sources, in the name of school registers from all the forms or classes. A list of pupils had been sorted out, considering that it was not possible for the entire population of students to take part in the study. The researchers identified those who were truants and placed them according to streams. That is boys' stream and girls' stream. From each stream, students were randomly selected (Simple random sampling) that is, fifteen (15) from boys' stream and fifteen (15) from the girls' stream making it thirty (30) pupils from each school,

totaling ninety (90) pupils from the three schools under study.

### **Data Collection Instruments**

The collection of data is the basic task at the outset of any research activity. This portion highlights on the instruments used in collecting data and the procedure used in the data collection process. The data collection instruments for the study were observation, interviews and questionnaires. The researchers used observation and interview to identify most of the problems pertaining to truancy in the study area. There were interactions with pupils in a friendly manner anytime they absented themselves from school or refused to return to classes after break. The responses given were noted down. This was done under cover in order to get accurate information for their behaviours.

Giri and Banerjee (2002) stated that the term 'questionnaire' means a list of certain systematically arranged questions pertaining to the subject of enquiry. It is an instrument with structured questions meant to elicit response from respondents regarding a particular issue. Questionnaires were administered to ninety (90) pupils and fifteen (15) teachers. In all, one hundred and five (105) questionnaires were administered before the intervention process.

### **Data Collection Procedure**

#### **Pre-Intervention**

The researchers observed that some of the pupils did not stay in class for the whole instructional hours. It became a habit for that set of pupils especially during market days. In the process of discussions in a class, the researchers asked some truants questions based on the previous lessons and they could not answer. The researchers again gave some class exercises to test pupils' understanding on a topic taught, and the researchers observed that pupils' performance was not up to expectation as well. In the process of marking pupils' attendance register, the researchers observed that, some columns recorded a lot of zeros. These same pupils did not have marks recorded in their continuous assessment books. That prompted the researchers to find out who those pupils were.

#### **Intervention Stage**

This section explored measures to be taken to minimize truancy with the help of data drawn from respondents such as teachers, pupils (truants) and literature that was related to truancy in schools. A two-day workshop was organized for teachers on strategies to minimize truancy.

Six strategies were employed to equip teachers with knowledge and skills to minimize truancy. They include the following:

1. Improving School Ethos and Facility: Activity clubs such as: drama club, quiz club and debating clubs were organized to encourage pupils especially truants and poor attendees come to school.

2. Building Good Relationships with Parents: The administrative head of the schools were encouraged to ensure that form mistresses or masters visit the families of truants or pupils in their classes who usually ran away from school without permission in order to ascertain the reasons behind such behaviours. Parents were then invited to participate on school and community committees that addressed the issue of truancy.

3. Group Competitions: Established awards for punctuality and staying in school up to the closing time. Each class with a higher number of attendance and punctuality became the winning class. The winning class received awards that include, being recognized at school assemblies or giving tangible prizes.

4. Group Work: The truants were attached to various groups in classes for studies. These group members lived in the same area with the pupils understudy. The researchers normally gave the group homework so that they stay with their group members. Each member of the groups was supposed to contribute in other to make the work complete. The researchers continued to observe the attendance of pupils understudy while they remained associated with punctual classmates who were from the same area.

5. Counseling: The handling of truant cases through counseling was encouraged instead of punishment. Issues of truancy were referred to the school counselor to make students develop a clear understanding of how attendance impacts grades. The schools' guidance and counseling personnel were therefore acting as support team for the research study.

6. Soliciting Support from Other Educational Agencies: In order to help minimize the problem, the researchers solicited aid from a Non-Governmental Organization known as Discovery Learning Alliance (DLA), which supported schools with teaching/learning materials to help improve teaching and learning. DLA gave the schools in the study area two flat screen televisions and two video decks. The teachers strategically combined them with other teaching and learning materials to deliver active student-centered lessons that engaged students.

### **Data Analysis and Presentation**

The pre intervention data and post intervention data collected using the research instruments was analyzed and presented using Microsoft Office Excel as a statistical tool.

### **Data Quality and Ethical Issues**

In a social survey, ethics is considered the responsibilities that researchers have or should have towards those who participate in the research. They assure the participants of the research about their intention to protect their identity.

The researchers considered ethical treatment during the research process to reinforce sanity of the study. The names of pupils and teachers understudy were coded with numbers that linked with the data collected hence their names were not used in reporting the findings of the study. Pupils' demographic data were kept confidential. All potentially identifiable data were destroyed after the conclusion of the study. Issues of ethical concern on privacy and confidentiality were covered because all the participants were assured of anonymity of their given information. Number checking was also used to enhance validity. The researchers asked the participants to cross check on their responses to ensure that the information shared was right.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

The analysis of data obtained from the field work yielded causal factors or factors accountable to truancy. They include, the home, school, parents, peers and the community.

### **Demographic Characteristics of Respondents**

#### **Students' responses**

In Table 1 above, majority of the pupils were within the ages of 10 to 12 and the age group was mostly found in the upper primary. Twenty-seven (27) pupils representing 30% were 10 years, 23 (25.55%) were 11 years, 10 (11.11%) being 12 years, 8 pupils representing 8.88% were 13 years, 10% (9) were 14 years, 11(12.22%) were 15 years and finally 2 pupils (2.22%) were 16 years.

In Table 2 seven (7) pupils representing 7.78% said they were staying with their fathers meaning their mothers were no more staying with their fathers. Seventeen (17) representing 18.89% were staying with their mothers, 26 (28.89%) were staying with both parents (mother and father) and 40 (44.44%) were staying with guardians which could be any member of the extended family or family friends.

Table 3 shows the level of education of parents. It indicates that most of the parents 26 (57.77%) were illiterates and that may suggest the reason why they did not show interest in their wards education, thus promoting truancy among their children. Those who had little education such as JHS were 9 (20%), Middle school 7 (15.55%), Secondary/Post Secondary 3 (6.66%) also had some of their children being truants. However, there was an indication that as the education of parents climbed higher, the chances of their children being truants became slimmer.

Table 4 comprises the occupation of parents of the children understudy. It confirmed that farming (44.44%) was really the dominant occupation in the study area followed by trading (37.77), driving (4.44), etc.

In Table 5, pupils were asked whether their needs were provided by parents or guardians. Seventy-nine (79)

**Table 1.** Age Distributions

Age	Number	Percentage (%)
10	27	30.00
11	23	25.55
12	10	11.11
13	8	8.88
14	9	10.00
15	11	12.22
16	2	2.22
TOTAL	90	100.00

Source: Field Data (2017)

**Table 2.** Who do you stay with?

RESPONSES	Number	Percentage (%)
Father Only	7	7.78
Mother Only	17	18.89
Both Parents	26	28.89
Guardian	40	44.44
TOTAL	90	100.00

Source: Field Data (2017)

**Table 3.** What is the level of your parents' education?

Responses	Number	Percentage (%)
Illiterate	26	57.77
JHS	9	20.00
Middle school	7	15.55
Secondary/Post-Secondary	3	6.66
Graduate/HND	0	0.00
TOTAL	45	100.00

Source: Field Data (2017)

**Table 4.** What is your parents' occupation?

Responses	Number	Percentage (%)
Farming	20	44.44
Driving	2	4.44
Trading	17	37.77
Government Worker	0	0.00
Unemployed	4	8.88
Others	2	4.44
TOTAL	45	100.00

Source: Field Data (2017)

**Table 5.** Do your parents/guardians provide your needs?

Responses	Number	Percentage (%)
Yes	79	87.77
No	11	12.22
TOTAL	90	100.00

Source: Field Data (2017)

representing 87.77% responded affirmatively whilst 11 (12.22%) said their needs were not provided.

In Table 6, some of the pupils claimed that their parents were aware that they played truancy. For example, 49

**Table 6.** Do your parents know you play truancy?

Responses	Number	Percentage (%)
Yes	49	54.44
No	41	45.55
TOTAL	90	100.00

Source: Field Data (2017)

**Table 7.** Why do you stay out of classes?

Responses	Number	Percentage (%)
Go to farm	37	41.11
Go home	13	14.44
Go to trade	28	31.11
Loiter	7	7.77
Others	5	5.55
TOTAL	90	100.00

Source: Field Data (2017)

(54.44%) responded that their parents were aware of their behaviour but 41 (45.55%) said their parents were not aware of their behaviour.

Table 7 revealed that 37 (41.11%) skipped classes to go to farm, 13 (14.44%) ran away from classes to go home and complete some assignment or work provided by parents or guardians, 28 (31.11%) went to sell and buy or hunt for dawadawa seeds or shea nuts fruits to sell, 7 (7.77%) loitered around market places, uncompleted building or with colleague truants, 5 pupils answered others which may mean they did not want to show where they go to or their answer is not part of the possible answers(Figure 1).

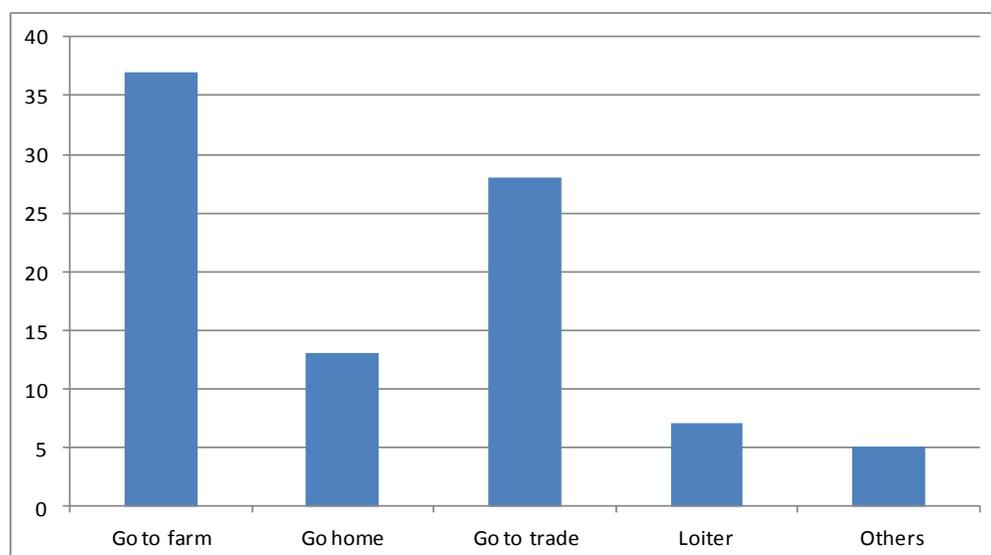
Table 8 indicated that 55 pupils (61.11%) said they were punished when they skipped classes. Seventeen (17) representing 18.88% said they were counseled and 18 (20.00%) said otherwise, which could mean their answers were not found in the possible answers or they really did not want to comment on that.

Table 9 indicated what pupils disliked about their schools. The responses were that 8, 15, 18, 33, 10, and 6 that matched with teacher's attitude, teaching methods, subject difficulties, punishment, lack of play activities and others respectively. It was clear that punishment was the main thing that most truants did not like about their schools. The next were teaching methods and subject difficulties.

Table 10 showed whether some of the truants' friends were also truants. It is commonly said "show me your friend and I will tell you your character". Forty (40) representing 44.44% of truants said their friends were truants as well, but 50 (55.55%) attested that their friends were not truants.

**Teachers' responses**

Table 11, teachers were asked whether they used appropriate TLMs in teaching. Six (6) teachers responded to the affirmative that represented 40% and 9 teachers



**Figure 1:** Why truants stay out of classes

Source: Researchers' Construct (2017)

**Table 8.** How do your teachers address truancy problem?

Responses	Number	Percentage (%)
Punishment	55	61.11
Counseling	17	18.88
Others	18	20.00
TOTAL	90	100.00

Source: Field Data (2017)

**Table 9.** What do you dislike most about the school?

Responses	Number	Percentage (%)
Teachers' attitude	8	8.88
Teaching methods	15	16.66
Subjects Difficulties	18	20.00
Punishment	33	36.66
Lack of Play activities	10	11.11
Others	6	6.66
TOTAL	90	100.00

Source: Field Data (2017)

**Table 10.** Do some of your friends play truancy?

Responses	Number	Percentage (%)
Yes	40	44.44
No	50	55.55
TOTAL	90	100.00

Source: Field Data (2017)

**Table 11.** Do you use appropriate TLMs in teaching?

Responses	Number	Percentage (%)
Yes	6	40.00
No	9	60.00
TOTAL	15	100.00

Source: Field Data (2017)

(60%) responded in the negative. An oral interview suggested that, teachers were not motivated to use TLMs in teaching due to class sizes, cost of materials among many reasons.

## FINDINGS

The main goal of the study was to find out the possible causes of truancy and how it could be minimized to improve upon the academic performance of pupils in the West Circuit of Savelugu - Nanton Municipality in northern Ghana. In view of the problem of truancy, literature related to truancy issues in schools was reviewed and some of the writers attributed the problem to societal, irresponsible parents, peer influences and hostile relationship between teachers and pupils among others. In order to address the situation, research instruments such as observation, questionnaires and interviews were employed to collect data to investigate the problem.

The responses provided by the participants of the study revealed that the causes of truancy in the study area were of three dimensional factors – pupils, parents and teachers. It confirmed research that there is no single risk factor that leads to truancy but rather a variety of individual, school, family and community factors (Heilbrunn, 2007).

Some of the truants claimed that they ran away from classes during instructional hours because they disliked certain subjects or teachers. They said that teachers' attitudes or relationships with them were not favourable enough to sustain their interest in school. However, teachers also, claimed that the schools did not have adequate teaching and learning materials to be used to deliver lessons. These made courses difficult for the students to grasp concepts or contents. Thus, it discouraged students from participating in classes and turned out to play truancy. These findings reinforced previous works that poor relationships between teachers and students put students at risk for school truancy (Baker, et al., 2001; Dougherty, 1999) and unsupportive teachers, differences in teaching and learning styles and lack of control by teachers in the classroom as well (Ehrenberg, Rees & Ehrenberg, 1991). Furthermore, the curriculum, content and delivery, unchallenging classes and homework assignments contribute to truancy rates (Malcolm et al., 2003). Kim and Streeter (2006) believed that students are more likely to skip school if they perceive it as boring, chaotic or not intellectually challenging.

Furthermore, the study revealed that about 44.44% of the truants under study had truant friends as well. It is likely that they influenced each other to stay away from school for fun, safety or get involved in menial jobs such as plucking and selling shea nuts, dawadawa fruits, pomade etc. to make money. Henry (2007) solicits that 23% of truants choose to skip school because they do not feel safe in their school environment. Moreover, if a student does not feel comfortable, secure or safe may logically decide to skip school because other locations may be safer than the

school. According to Balfanz and Byrnes (2012), reasons for truancy may include avoidance of bullying, unsafe conditions, harassment and embarrassment, students or parents do not value education, they have something else they would rather do.

The study revealed that some parents shirked their responsibilities of providing basic needs for their children. Hence children played truancy by engaging in businesses to support themselves financially. Moreover, parents seemed not to value education in the study area, thus, did not pay much attention to their children's attendance and punctuality to school. The study confirmed research that oftentimes families that were unable to meet the basic needs of their children, expose their children to truancy. Lack of parental support for children's education is a significant risk factor for truancy (Baker et al., 2001). In addition, where families or parents do not insist children attend school, or notice absenteeism, do not properly supervise their children or emphasize the importance of school attendance, students are more likely to become truants (USDOE, 2007). Parents and guardians who do not value education or do not reinforce educational goals are more likely to have a truant child (Bell et al., 1994; NCSE, 2006).

Moreover, the study revealed that teachers resorted to excessive punishment rather than counseling as a means to curb truancy. Thus, many pupils escaped from classes to avoid being punished. Tobin (2009) pointed out that imposing more serious punishment has worsened truant behaviour. Meaning punishment can be counter-productive in the fight against chronic absenteeism.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the study revealed that teachers' attitudes toward truant pupils rather encouraged the behaviour rather than minimizing it. Thus, a two - day training workshop was organized for teachers on the strategies to make classrooms more conducive and interesting to arouse the interest of truants and encourage them to attend school regularly. Teachers applied the knowledge and skills gotten from the workshop. They also used appropriate teaching and learning materials such as the flat screen televisions and video decks provided by the NGO (Discovery Learning Alliance) to help them teach effectively. Teachers resorted to the counseling of truants and the creating of friendly school environments. Parents resolved to check on their wards' attendance, progress and performance in classes as well, which would help in minimizing truancy in the study area.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The study was able to lay bare some causes of truancy, its effects on the academic performance of pupils and some possible solutions for truancy in the study area.

The measures outlined below would help improve pupils' attendance to school, which would bring in its trail good academic performance as well. In addition, it would enhance the professional qualities of teachers in handling truant cases. Moreover, teachers would be equipped with knowledge and skills to involve parents in their children's education:

1. Teachers should assign roles such as "board cleaners", "office girls" to pupils who are found absenting themselves from school frequently.

2. It is also recommended that, school authorities should organize speech and prize giving days to reward pupils who excel academically as well as those who are regular and punctual to school. When this is done, it would encourage truants and habitual late comers to change their attitudes towards attendance to school.

3. In-service training should be continuously organized for teachers to update their competencies in teaching since this would inspire students to stay in school.

4. Teachers should endeavor to improvise teaching aids to bring about effective teaching and learning in their subject areas.

5. During PTA meetings, parents should be encouraged to monitor their wards' school attendance.

6. School heads and the circuit supervisors should intensify monitoring of teachers' performance in their schools.

7. Classroom interactions should be improved upon in order to motivate students to participate fully in classroom activities. This has the tendency of not only improving the confidence and learning ability of the students but also the tendency of decreasing truancy.

### Conflict of interests

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interests.

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