



Factors Contributing to Truancy among Students: A Correlation between Predictors

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration between both authors. Author ZI conceptualized and designed the study. Author LSF supervised the work. Both authors contributed in data collection and statistical analysis. Both authors involved in generating findings of the study. The final manuscript was written and approved by both authors.

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ABSTRACT

Truancy has been a universal unresolved educational problem in countries that made schooling a compulsory routine for children age seven years and older. The objective of this study is to identify the contributory factors of truancy and the correlation between the factors among secondary school students. The sample comprised 472 truants from Malaysia who have been routinely absent from school for 10 days to more than 40 days per year. Results demonstrated that teacher's personality, students' attitudes toward school, environment in school, school administration, teachers' teaching, and environment outside school, peers and family are significant contributory factors of truancy. Significant positive correlations between all the factors causing truancy were found. Correlation between teachers' teaching and teachers' personality was the highest whereas the lowest correlation was revealed between school administration and family.

Keywords: Truancy; teacher personality; peers; school and family.

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1. INTRODUCTION

School is a place that nurtures the potential of individuals and the entrance to academic excellence of our next generation. Thus, staying in school has been made into a law of the education system in most countries where children are mandated to attend school for at least eleven years in their life. However, some students do not abide by the law because of some internal and external undesired factors, therefore leading to the prevalence of truancy from primary to tertiary levels in our education system.

Truancy remains an issue which has drawn the concern of parents, society and the government as it is the forerunner to many social and discipline problems among students. When students start to play truant, it implies that school has lost its importance and failed to attract students to stay in school. Truanting behaviour also indicates the beginning of exposing students to life problems because the unsupervised time of the truants may stimulate students to initiate and commit high risk activities. Truancy is related to dropout [1,2], substance use [3,4,5], academic problems [6,7] and delinquency [8,9].

Defined as the practice of staying away from school without permission [10], truancy in Malaysia has been classified as the second top discipline problem. The Ministry of Education reports that in 2010, out of 111, 484 discipline problem cases, 19,545 cases involved truancy. In 2011, out of the 108, 650 discipline problem cases, 18,550 involved truanting behaviour. The Ministry of Education in Malaysia has implemented the system of warning letter in battling truancy. The school administration is authorised to assign three types of warning letter to students who play truant. Type one warning letter will be given to truants who skip school for more than ten days. Students absent from school unexcused for more than twenty days will receive the type two warning letter; type three warning letter will be issued to those playing truant for more than forty days. Students will be expelled from school if they continue to play truant. However, parents and guardians can apply for them to be re-registered in the school.

Many contributory factors to truancy have been identified through literature. The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention [11] reports that four factors usually associated with truanting behaviour are family, school, economic

status and students themselves. Substantial research literature has documented the relationships between the predictors of truancy. Teacher personality is associated with teaching process effectiveness [12]. Gordon and Yocke [13] assert that sensing-intuition temperament type is the best predictor of teaching effectiveness. Besides that, Hamilton [14] reports that characteristics of teacher personality can predict teachers' attitudes and practices toward family-school partnerships. Relationship between school environment and students' attitude toward school was reported by Ferreira [15] and Proshansky [16]. Stockard and Mayberry [17] highlighted that quality of school physical environment is related to better attitudes toward schools. Christopher [18] revealed that pleasant surroundings will make people feel better about themselves. Students will develop a sense of belonging to school and be less involved in attitude problems if they feel the school environment is caring and supportive [5,17]. Likewise, teachers' attitudes are also directly influenced by the school environment [19,20]. Teachers' autonomy and principal leadership in the school will influence teachers' satisfaction in teaching [21,22].

The personality competence of the teacher can contribute positively to study motivation and student discipline [23]. Tope [19] has found that the teachers' personality can have impact on school discipline. On the other hand, Demanet and Van Houtte [24] explained that low levels of support by teachers as perceived by students can lead to high rates of school misconduct. Awopetu [25] stated that students' perception of their teachers' personality can determine interest in physical education. Students' perception on teacher's classroom management, in-class and out-of-class attitudes, teaching methods and strategies can influence students' academic success and participation in the lesson positively or negatively [13]. Sabitu and Nuradeen [22] pointed out that teachers' attributes such as content knowledge, communication skills, interest in teaching and emotional stability can affect students' academic performance. Akinsola and Olowojaiye [26] confirmed that teachers' teaching method during the lesson is vital in changing students' attitudes and habits in learning mathematics.

In the Malaysia context, Mohamed Sharif and Hazni [27] in their study on secondary school students revealed that students' relationship with family, teachers, peers and the facilities provided

in school can contribute to truancy. Adding to that, Azizi Yahaya, Shahrin Hashim, Yusof Boon and How Lee Chan [28] explained that truancy among students can be caused by teachers, environment in school, mass media, peers, student's attitude and family. The findings of Azizi Yahaya et al. [28] were supported by Kamalia Nor [29] who reported that besides the teachers and school facilities, peers play the most important role in instigating students to play truant. Based on a study by Johari and Nik Selma [30] teachers are the most significant factors in resulting truancy, followed by students' attitude, peers and parents. In contrast, teachers pointed out that laziness among students is the main reason for them to skip school. Student living environment is another factor found to be related to truancy as highlighted by Manivannan [31] and Mat Kilau [32]. Reviews of the literature have concluded that factors contributing to truancy are universal, namely students, teachers, peers and family.

The major objective of the present study is to identify the contributory factors of truancy among the secondary school students in Malaysia. Besides that, it is aimed at gaining a comprehensive understanding of the correlation between the contributory factors of truancy.

2. METHODOLOGY

Respondents for this study were students aged between 13 to 16 years old from public secondary schools which have been identified as schools with high rates of truancy by the Ministry of Education in Malaysia. Respondents have been given either warning letter type one, two or three by the school administration. From the total of 472 students, 322 are male and 150 female. The respondents are 346 Malay, 64 Chinese and 62 Indian. Samples were selected based on purposive and random sampling procedures. Fifteen schools from the list of schools with high rates of truancy provided by the Ministry of Education of Malaysia were selected. The selected school had to prepare name list of the truants who have been given warning letters of three types. All the truants in the name list are classified as the sample. Data were collected using a survey based on a self-administered questionnaire.

The instrument of this study has been developed by a team of researchers based on educational theory and literature review. The questionnaire consists of two sections, one on respondents'

background information and the other on predictors for truancy. A pilot study had been conducted to validate the instrument.

3. RESULTS OF RESEARCH

The instrument reliability was assessed using estimates of internal consistency (Cronbach alpha). The cut-off value for Cronbach alpha is .70 and above [33]. Data were analysed based on SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) to generate the descriptive statistics of the respondents and to achieve the objectives of this study. The instrument has achieved acceptable reliability as the value of Cronbach alpha is .79 [33].

Table 1 reports the mean and standard deviation for the eight constructs which are predictors of truancy. Construct personality of teachers has the highest mean ($M = 44.47$, $SD = 9.05$) whereas peers have the lowest mean ($M = 25.82$, $SD = 5.74$). The second highest mean came from construct environment in school ($M = 40.46$, $SD = 8.33$) followed by environment outside school ($M=38.85$, $SD=8.93$), administration of school ($M = 35.32$, $SD = 8.21$), family ($M = 34.56$, $SD = 9.45$), students' attitude towards school ($M = 31.67$, $SD = 6.35$) and teachers' teaching ($M = 31.41$, $SD = 6.60$).

Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient is conducted to evaluate the correlation between all the predictors to truancy. Table 2 reveals the values of correlation coefficient between all the predictors are positive and significant at the .01 (2 tailed) level. The highest correlation is between teachers' teaching and teachers' personality ($r = .684$, $n = 472$, $p < .05$). This implied that there is a strong, positive relationship of .684 between teachers' teaching and teachers' personality.

Teachers' teaching and teachers' personality tend to influence each other. On the other hand, the correlation between administration of school and family is the lowest ($r = .182$, $n = 472$, $p < .05$) which indicates a weak, positive relationship of .182 between administration of school and family.

From Table 2, it is also found that students' attitude toward school has a strong, positive relationship with environment in school ($r = .597$, $n = 472$, $p < .05$), teachers' personality ($r = .595$, $n = 472$, $p < .05$) and teachers' teaching ($r = .576$, $n = 472$, $p < .05$). Students' attitudes

towards school, environment in school, teachers' personality and teachers teaching are related to each other.

Teachers' teaching correlates positively with environment in school ($r = .648, n = 472, p < .05$), teachers' teaching and administration of school ($r = .616, n = 472, p < .05$) and students' attitudes towards school ($r = .576, n = 472, p < .05$). There are significant strong relationships between the way the teacher teaches with environment in school, administration in school and students' attitudes toward school.

A significant positive association is found between teachers' personality and administration of school ($r = .665, n = 472, p < .05$) and environment in school ($r = .596, n = 472, p < .05$). Besides that, peers and environment outside the school also correlate positively ($r = .555, n = 472, p < .05$). Systems applied by the administrator of school produce significant positive impact in creating the environment in school ($r = .549, n = 472, p < .05$).

4. DISCUSSION

Analysis of the findings suggests that students, teachers, school and parents have a vital role to play in combating truancy among students. Teachers are the main force attracting students to stay in school [30]. Teachers who are too

serious, academic oriented, like to nag at students and difficult to communicate with will discourage students from staying in school [1,34,29,35]. Besides that, atmosphere inside the school which is associated with the administration and culture of the school can influence students' interest in being in the school, too. As highlighted by Manivannan [31] and Mat Kilau [32] living environment can impact truancy. Students from schools surrounded by entertainment centres or shopping complexes are more prone to commit truancy [36]. Inharmonious family with busy parents who emphasise academic achievement can contribute to truanting behaviour.

The findings of this study also reveal that there are positive correlations between all the predictors of truancy. The importance of teachers' personality is highlighted in this study as it is related to the effectiveness of teachers' teaching [12,25]. Teachers who possess a personality favoured by students will be able to produce teaching and learning processes liked by the students and are able to interact effectively with them to make them stay in school. Gordon and Yocke [13] reported that sensing-intuition temperament can contribute to effective teaching. This means teachers' personality and teachers' teaching are two important factors resulting in truancy among

Table 1. Mean and standard deviation of predictors for truancy

Constructs	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard deviation
Teachers' personality	21	70	44.47	9.05
Environment in school	13	61	40.46	8.33
Environment outside school	13	65	38.85	8.93
Administration of school	13	55	35.32	8.21
Family	14	70	34.56	9.45
Students' attitude toward school	16	50	31.67	6.35
Teachers' teaching	10	50	31.41	6.60
Peers	9	42	25.82	5.74

Table 2. Correlation between the constructs

	SPTS	PDDS	PG	PSG	PS	RS	PDLS	K
SPTS	-							
PDDS	.597**	-						
PG	.576**	.648**	-					
PSG	.595**	.596**	.684**	-				
PS	.497**	.549**	.616**	.665**	-			
RS	.392**	.444**	.453**	.501**	.447**	-		
PDLS	.390**	.429**	.403**	.463**	.382**	.555**	-	
K	.234**	.293**	.279**	.338**	.182**	.378**	.304**	-

** $p < .001$ (2-tailed); SPTS : Students' attitude towards school; PDDS : Environment in school; PG : Teachers' teaching; PSG : Teachers' personality; PS : Administration of school; RS : Peers, PDLS : Environment outside school; K : Family

students as reported in this study. Teachers' personality plays an important role in creating the environment in the school.

Teachers who are friendly, open-minded, caring and supportive are able to produce an environment that attracts students to stay in school [24].

On the other hand, students' attitudes toward school is also found positively associated with the school environment [15-17], teachers' personality and teachers' teaching [37,19,24]. The school environment should be conducive physically and psychologically to retain students in school. Hawkins et al. [38] and Battistich and Hom [39] state that a caring and supportive atmosphere can result in the sense of belonging in students. The school environment also can influence teachers' personality and teachers' teaching. This is because pleasant surroundings can make people feel better [18]. Administration of school has been shown to relate to the environment in the school as the administrators of a school are responsible in creating the school culture and atmosphere. Besides that, teachers' teaching is also reported to influence students' behaviour toward school. Teacher's teaching that is too academic and examination orientated will discourage students from attending school as truants usually are weak in school work [10,25, 40-43]. Planning fun and enjoyable classroom activities is one of the approaches to motivate students to attend school. Students' perception on teachers' personality can influence their attitudes toward school [20].

The study further illustrates that the quality of teacher teaching in a school is strongly related to the environment and administration of the school beside attitudes demonstrated by students. A supportive school environment and administration can promote better quality of teaching and thus encourage students to attend school. This is because facilities such as IT equipment can enhance teaching and learning and a pleasant setting can make people feel better [18]. The environment outside the school is related to the peers. Truants like to spend time with peers as their psychological needs can be fulfilled by peers [32,35,43-46].

Findings of this study suggest that teachers and the school administration can make significant contribution in combating truancy among students. Teachers ought to be able to create an

enjoyable, less academic oriented and stress-free learning environment. At the same time, the teaching process should emphasise developing individual students' multiple intelligences and cater for their individual differences. Teachers have to build a close and friendly relationship with students by being open-minded, caring, supportive and engaging in two-way interaction with students. The school administration has to be responsible in creating a school atmosphere that can attract truants to school and at the same time sustain student interest to be in school. The school administrators should be aware that the school environment can affect the students' attitudes toward school, the quality of teacher's teaching and the teachers' personality.

The findings of this study have reported that predictors of truancy are correlated. Teachers play an important role in preventing truancy. They need to make efforts to attract students to class by organizing interesting lessons. The school administration must create a physically and psychologically conducive environment for teachers and students. Teachers and school management must acknowledge the individual differences among students; thus remedial and enrichment activities ought to be planned to cater to their needs. The Ministry of Education can also consider the suggestion of giving students the freedom to select subjects of their interest. The study has highlighted that students are not the only factor resulting in truancy. The roles of teachers and schools need to be considered in resolving truancy.

5. CONCLUSION

The study has enriched the literature in education by exploring the correlation between the factors contributing to truancy among Malaysian secondary school students. The findings have demonstrated that students, teachers, school, family and peers are significant factors contributing to secondary school students' truant behaviour. However, in the effort to combat truancy, the correlation between the factors needs to be scrutinised to generate effective recommendations in solving the problems. In this study, significant positive correlations were found between all the factors influencing truancy. The highest correlation was found between teachers' teaching and teachers' personality. The lowest correlation was found between administration of school and family.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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