



The Causes and Effects of Truancy in Chinyama Litapi Schools of Zambezi District

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ABSTRACT: Education is a touchstone and an essential requirement of human life. The purpose of this study was to identify causes of truancy, establish effects of truancy and find out ways of improving attendance in schools in Chinyama Litapi area. The study employed a mixed paradigm and descriptive design that sampled seven schools and 80 participants. In order to meet these objectives, the researcher used open ended and closed questionnaires, interviews and observation. The findings revealed that there was high level of truancy among school going children in Chinyama Litapi area that result from personal, home and school factors. The study recommended that, there is need to have a detailed government educational policy on truancy reflecting why, when and how the offenders would be punished. Further it should explain who is to receive stiffer punishment whether the child, parent or the teacher to avoid unnecessary truancy that make many pupils drop school.

KEY WORDS: Attendance, Causes, Effects, Truancy, Schools

INTRODUCTION

Chinyama Litapi is found in Zambezi District of North- Western Province. It is located on flood plains of Kashiji on the west bank of the Mighty Zambezi River and the nearest school is 85km and the furthest school is 165Km away from Zambezi Township. The area is named after His Royal Highness Chief Chinyama Litapi of the Luvale people and has five Sub Chiefs. The area is blessed with fish and domesticated animals due to the vast plains, perennial rivers and other bodies of water and nutritious grass.

Education is an imperative and a corner stone of every nation. It is so because the development of an individual, area or nation depends on it. A nation that is composed of highly educated citizens had sound economy and policies. Similarly, areas with residents who had undergone formal education and are highly qualified, perceived and did things in a civilised manner. Consequently, their area attain economic, social and political development in a shortest possible period of time. Pop News (2008) stated that education remains the only answer to most challenges of life. In this respect, all nations, Zambia inclusive, are working hard to improve the education sector by developing infrastructure and human resource.

Despite the government and the community putting up a number of Schools, there is a high level of truancy in all the schools in Chinyama Litapi area. The issue of school attendance was currently the great focus of intense activity in most of the schools in the world, Zambia inclusive. Hence, it was bothering most of the researchers so as to find remedy. Despite such efforts, pupils' absence from school remains a puzzle and a complex problem. Kinder et al (1995) and Malcolm et al (1996) conforms that "pupils' absence is a complex and perplexing issue".

Pupils in the area seemed to have negative attitude towards education. Therefore, this research was based on finding the causes and effects of truancy in Chinyama Litapi area of Zambezi District.

Statement of the problem

Chinyama Litapi is rural with an approximation area of 8400 square kilometres. It is sparsely populated and has isolated settlement pattern situated along and around the bodies of water near some patches of forest where subsistence farming is done. The area is one of the prominent places in the District because it is named after the Greatest Chief of the Luvale ethnic group of North Western Province who led the Luvale people from Zaire via Angola into Zambia. Since truancy is a major problem in Chinyama Litapi area, it is therefore of great prominence that the researcher investigated the causes and its effects.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to identify the causes and effects of truancy in Chinyama Litapi schools of Zambezi district.



Research Objectives

The objectives of this study were to:

1. identify causes of truancy.
2. establish effects of truancy.
3. find out ways of improving attendance in schools.

Significance of the Study

The purpose of carrying out this investigation mainly depended on the importance that education is paramount in all the angles of human life. There are so many factors that could hinder educational development in any society if not investigated and harmonised. Therefore, the study would reveal the causes and effects of absence from school among children in Chinyama Litapi area. The findings would be used in planning units by interested stakeholders at the district, provincial, national and international levels in order to harmonise the situation. Further, the findings would not only be used to solve problems in Chinyama Litapi area but also in other rural areas with similar conditions and situations.

Theoretical Framework

This study was based on the principles of social learning theory Albert Bandura (1986). Social learning theory, postulates that a child learns behaviour through social interaction in the form of observation and imitation of what other people in the society are doing. Learning is a process where behaviours are learnt or acquired from the environment. One way of learning is through social observation and imitation. This theory is advanced by Albert Bandura (1986). This theory explains delinquency as a behaviour learnt through the complex process of socialization. The theory postulates that the behaviour is reflective of people observing and imitating others and imagining the consequence of their own behaviour. The theory advocates that human behaviour is modified using learning principles to change behavior, Omulema (2000).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Vision 2030 (2006) expresses that education is critical in enhancing a country's social and economic development. Education takes place from school. Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines a school as a place where children go to be educated. Hence, education can either be in a positive direction or vice-versa. The negative direction of education can be as a result of many factors that include truancy. Truancy or absence from school has its impact on the development of school going children, school and the area. It is the subject currently bothering many researchers and concerned people in the world.

Truancy among students has become a growing problem. It is the act of deliberately missing one or more classes. Globally, truancy has been regarded as a cankerworm that has eaten deep into the fabrics of the educational programmes and has caused a lot of setbacks for secondary school students in their educational pursuits (Stoll, 1993; Gesinde, 2004; Adeyemi, 2006; Animasahun, 2007b). It leads to potential delinquent activity, social isolation, or educational failure via suspension, expulsion, or dropping out (Huizinga, Loeber, Thornberry & Cothorn, 2000; Huizinga, Loeber & Thornberry, 1994; Morris, Ehren & Lenz, 1991).

Baker, Sigmon, and Nugent (2001) report that hundreds of thousands of American students are absent from school without permissible excuses each day, and this issue is ranked among the top ten problems facing schools across the country (DeSocio, VanCura, Nelson, Hewitt, Kitzman, and Cole, 2007). Therefore, truancy extends nationally and contributes significantly towards the undermining of the American educational system. Moreover, 1.5%, 1.8%, 2.0%, and 2.4% of the entire student population of England, Wales, Scotland, and Ulster respectively miss class without authorization (Truancy rates worst in UK: Education, 2008), and one in five students are identified as committing truancy in Scotland each day (Grant, 2007), thereby expanding the matter globally.

Gabb (1997) is of the view that a truant student leaves home but does not get to school or escapes from school or class to engage in any other activities that catch up his imaginations. Indeed, it is a type of deviant behavior exhibited by some students in schools without formal permission from the school administration or authority governing the institution.

The Audit Commission (1999) spotted out that at least 40 000 of the 400 000 pupils absent from school are 'truanting or being kept off school by their parents without permission'. Furthermore, other researches explored by Kinder et al (1995), Harland et al (1995), and Hallam and Roaf (1997) suggested that direct and indirect family attitudes pay a part in keeping children from school.



Other studies show that there is still speculation as to whether primary schools are more accessible in rural or urban areas because situations differ depending on geographic location. In a study done examining the correlation between location and school attendance in Argentina and Panama, De Vos et al (2006) found that urban residence was positively correlated with school attendance, however, another study conducted by Moonie et al (2006) in a Louisiana school district found that schools with the lowest attendance rates were in metropolitan areas.

In fact, studies of dropouts conducted by Sheldon and Epstein (2004), and Chang and Romero (2008) reflect that leaving school is “merely the culminating act of a long withdrawal process from school, forecast by absenteeism in the early grades”. Chang and Romero, in the recent report from the National Centre for Children in Poverty, Present, Engaged, and Accounted for: The Critical Importance of Addressing Chronic Absence in the Early Grades state:

We intentionally use the term “chronic absence,” because the more frequently used term, “truancy,” only refers to unexcused absences and connotes inappropriate student behaviour requiring a punitive response. Rather than blaming children, we want to broaden awareness that missing extended periods of school could be an early sign of distress in school, community or home that could respond to appropriate early intervention. Moreover, when children are 5, 6 or 7 years of age, they are not likely to be absent from school without their parents’ knowledge. The 2006 New York State law (Chapter 543).

Reid (2006) explicitly identifies attendance as the single most critical variable in measuring students’ achievement levels; therefore, it is imperative that corrective action be taken against chronic absenteeism immediately. To eliminate, or at least decrease truant behaviour, possible causes for the behaviour must be identified. The possible short-term and long-term effects of unexcused school non-attendance are also of value in ascertaining the immediacy and importance of the issue.

There is also evidence in the region, indicating poor attendance in most rural schools. Some of which are as result of early marriages and being remote (2019, regional report during catch up strategies to improving poor performance in schools.), these then, prompted the researcher into carrying a research to find out the causes and effects in these schools of Zambezi district.

Research Design

The study adopted a mixed methods approach which is a combination of qualitative and quantitative data. Exploratory and descriptive designs were also used as they result in the formation of important principles of knowledge and solutions to significant problems (Kerlinger in Kombo and Trump, 2006).

Research Sites

The target population was the catchment area of His Royal Highness Chinyama Litapi in Zambezi. Mwansa (2011) stated that the area has the Population of 6310.

Population, Sample and Sampling Procedure

The study was carried out on 80 participants; these included 24 teachers, 26 pupils and 30 parents covering seven areas schools: Green, Blue, Yellow, Red, Brown, Pick, and White.

The study used both random sampling and purposive sampling in selecting the villages and individuals that were involved in the study of the problem among the study population. Random sampling was used to select parents (villages) and pupils while purposive sampling was used to select teachers following their hierarchy.

Data Analysis

The tools used to collect data under this research problem were questionnaires which had fixed wording sentences, both open ended and closed ended were used. Open ended questionnaires yielded adequate number of alternatives and closed questionnaires aimed at yielding single responses. Other tools used were interviews and observation. The report was mainly based on informants’ opinions through interviews that were conducted face to face in which the participants gave the needed information. It was so because nearly all the parents in the area were illiterate. Therefore, this enabled the researcher to go deeper into the issues which were studied. Observation was used to detect real-life situation occurrences in order to clarify and record the happenings in relation to the problem under study. Data generated from the interview guide was analysed manually and also Statistical Package for Social Sciences.



Ethical Issues

The researcher got permission from Chief Chinyama Litapi to interview members of the community and the District Education Board Secretary (DEBS), and school authorities to observe lessons, administering questionnaires to respondents. The respondents were assured of the confidentiality of the data collected as it would remain anonymous. The researcher also used pseudo names for the random sampling of objects.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The study findings showed that the area had many schools of which the first school was established in the colonial era. During this research, the total number of schools was 16 spread over Chinyama Litapi area of Zambezi District.

Importance of Good attendance in Schools

The study showed that, teachers (including administrators) linked good attendance to a number of things such as good performance during assessment because pupils learn effectively. They said that this would be as a result of moving at the same pace as a group and slow learners could easily be identified and provided with remedy by the teacher.

One head teacher said that both learners and teachers were motivated by the good number of pupils and teaching was done as planned because all the daily lesson plans would be fulfilled. The research also indicates that teachers' work would be made easier since there would be no repetition of lessons and topics, the syllabus could be finished within the stipulated time frame, there would be academic competition among learners and pupils pass with flying colours. The end result of this is to attain better future career. Teachers suggested that good attendance could encourage the community to ask for infrastructure development projects from the government such as building classrooms and staff accommodation. They further said that high enrolment or high population of pupils in the school could prompt the government through the Ministry of Education to expand the school.

Parents in the study believed that the importance of good attendance was that pupils would grasp all the taught concepts and have a wide scope of knowledge; hence, they would be bright, progress positively in education and complete school, and have a better living after school.

Pupils linked good attendance to learn effectively so as to be bright in class and move at the same pace with other pupils. Pupils further said that after school they would be off poverty but have good living and be in the position to help their parents.

However, despite the above mentioned importance of good attendance by the three groups; teachers, parents and pupils, the study indicated that learners do not go to school daily in Chinyama Litapi area. The teachers who were contacted to comment if all the children attend lessons daily from the opening day to the closing day, the feedback from all the respondents was that they do not attend classes daily due to various reasons. Equally, parents and pupils disputed the idea that learners attend classes daily from the beginning of the term to the end.

Causes of truancy

The causes of truancy were further sub-divided into personal, home and school factors.

Personal factors

Parents said that they normally sent their children to school and gave them all that were needed. Surprisingly, reports came that the children had not been reaching school. Commenting on the same, some children said that they were normally carried out by some activities on the way before reaching school as a result they returned home and either cheated their parents that there were no teachers or stated any other factor that convinced the parents.

Laziness to get out of the bed especially for children who went to school early in the morning and in doing school work was mentioned by parents and teachers respectively to be among personal factors. Parents said that children resist from waking up despite forcing them to. Teachers also said that children miss out school because they were lazy to perform class work and ran away from being laughed at by the friends.

Home factors

Home factors are those that make children miss out school for some hours, days, weeks or rather miss out completely. Teachers said that home factors were the major factors that made a big number of pupils abscond from lessons or school. Moreover, all the three groups pointed out the following as home factors that derailed pupils from attending school regularly. These included: illness,

funeral, poverty, ceremonies, fishing, rice farming, cattle herding, and putting low value to education by the community, early marriages, pregnancies, domestic chores and lack of role models in their respective families.

A finding from this study shows that poverty is a major disease among the community members in Chinyama Litapi area that causes truancy. Parents lack money to buy clothes, to pay school fees at upper basic classes since free education goes up to grade 7, and also lack money to buy other school materials for their children.

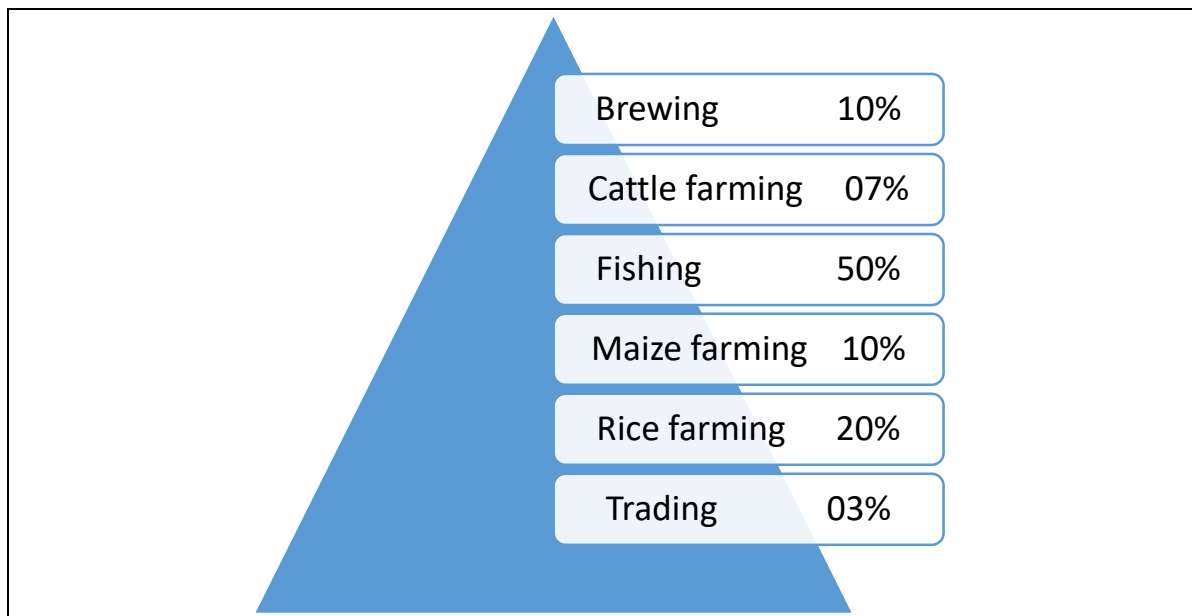


Figure 1. Economic activities of People in Chinyama Litapi

The study reviewed that fishing was the main economic activities of the people of Chinyama Litapi as tabulated in figure 1 above. 50% of the residents in the area depended on fishing, 20% of the people depended on rice farming, 10% depended on maize farming, 10% depended on beer brewing, 7% depended on cattle rearing and 3% depended on trading. The respondents said that the above mentioned economic activities were done on subsistence scale, only for consumption. Further they said that due to infertile soil and annual floods that led to crop growth failure resulting into poor yield, most of them exchanged fish for mealie-meal.

Teachers suggested that the above named economic activities greatly influenced pupils' attendance. They were normally caught up in these activities. Furthermore, teachers said that during rainy season, when plains were flooded, most of the children (especially boys) accompany their parents (fathers) to the fishing camps. One of the parents said that fishing took place in term one after 1st March of every year when the fish ban was uplifted by the government. Therefore, pupils missed out lessons for a good number of days or weeks as they go out for fishing. Most of the respondents believed that ceremonies were perceived to attract school going children and resulted into poor attendance. The ceremonies that were noted were mukanda and a ceremony for a newly born baby. Of late, the latter ceremony had been seen to be of more influence. As far as Mukanda is concerned, the boys were kept in seclusion for about a month or more than a month. During that period they did not go to school.

The study revealed that floods impede pupils from other sides of rivers to cross to attend lessons. Parents said they had no big canoes which their children could use when it was flooded. "Floods make our children miss out school from February to April," said one of the parents from Mwange area. Some parents said that even when there was a big canoe, they could not afford paying a paddler because they were poor. Teachers said that during the period when floods were severe, children from the other side of rivers miss school until floods recede.

School factors

The study found that the most common school factors which cause truancy were: under staffed, late reporting of teachers from school holidays, no proper learning, poor school infrastructure, poor relationship between pupils and teachers, punishments, sending pupils away to go and collect school fees, lack of entertainment in schools and long distances to schools.



EFFECTS OF TRUANCY

The common effects of truancy mentioned by teachers, pupils and parents were pupil based effects such as retardation in academic performance, failing class exercises/tests/examination, stopping school, early marriages, semi-literate, prostitution and theft, substance abuse, low level of education and failing to work in formal employment.

CONCLUSION

The main factors that caused truancy in Schools of Chinyama Litapi were grouped into three categories and these were pupil/personal factors, home factors and school factors. Among the three factors, home and school factors were the major factors because personal factors could easily be harmonised by the parents and teachers. Home factors related to how the family perceived school. Findings showed that the community in Chinyama Litapi attached little value to education because of the low level of education of the local people. Such aspects resulted into poor attendance among the children because parents did not monitor their attendance. Whether children went to school or not, parents saw both situations to be normal. At many occasions parents had been withdrawing pupils from school to involve them in home/house chores such as fishing, herding cattle, rice harvesting or send them elsewhere.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The government needs to consider constructing all-weather road connecting Chinyama Litapi to the district township to ease the transportation of teachers, educational authorities and educational material to reach within some few hours. This would attract many teachers to positively serve in the area and avoid late reporting among the teaching staff. School building projects would equally be completed within the stipulated time frame because any vehicle can touch the area at any hour of the day. This is the major point that needs to be taken seriously as it is retarding a lot of educational activities.

Under infrastructure development, the government should engage constructor-based project unlike the community-government based mode which had seen all the school buildings in the entire area incomplete. Where the latter mode is used, more money should be given to transport building materials because transport costs from Lusaka to Zambezi are less than those from Zambezi to Chinyama Litapi. When the area has adequate accommodation for pupils and teachers, it will be beautiful and attract both teachers and pupils.

There is need to implement the policy of rural electrification through providing solar power in the schools. Once there is power, pupils would be exposed to a lot of things through teaching and recreation, and move together with the whole world. As a result they would be attracted to school.

Schools need to provide incentives to pupils who attend lessons daily this can be done after fortnight, monthly, termly or at the end of the year.

Due to high levels of poverty among the residents that some pupils go to school hungry, the schools should work together with the government to find means on how pupils can be fed at school either on daily basis or on selected days. The school feeding programme once started, has to be consistent. Feeding in school would attract many children and minimise truancy.

As stated in item vi above on the poverty levels, as much as we appreciate the government's policy on free education from grade 1 to 7 where pupils are provided with learning materials, however, it has to be consistent and extended to the upper and senior classes. All the residents in Chinyama Litapi qualify to be vulnerable; hence, there should be ways of assisting them.

There is need for NGOs and private sector to work with the government to eradicate illiteracy by offering adult education to the parents in Chinyama Litapi.

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