

# Teachers' Selected Factors on Truancy among Adolescents in Secondary Schools in Kenya

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**Abstract** The study investigated the contributions of teachers' factors on truancy among adolescents in secondary schools in Manyatta, Embu County, Kenya. A survey design was employed. The respondents were three hundred and twenty that were randomly selected from two thousand three hundred and eighty four. The instruments for data collection were student's questionnaire, deputy principal's questionnaire, record analysis and researcher's observations schedules. Data was analysed through descriptive statistics and Chi-square was used to test for the association between the teachers' factors and truancy. The findings revealed that some teachers were not involved in the discipline of the students. Further, the study observed that the teachers were administering harsh punishment and in most cases the punishments were not proportional to the offence committed. In addition, the guidance and counselling services were not effective in most schools. Moreover, the study observed that the teachers' factors were significantly associated with truancy among the students. Therefore, the study recommended that all teachers to be involved in matters of discipline in schools. The disciplinary measures to be modified in consultation with the students and teachers. The counselling services need to be activated and managed by trained teacher counsellors. Further, the study recommended peer counselling training to be offered to all students.

**Keywords:** adolescent, truancy, school, teacher, discipline, behaviour

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## 1. Introduction

Globally, truancy has been a major concern in the education system, because it affects performance and leads to wastage of time [1,2]. Truancy is a stepping stone for delinquent and criminal activities. This was supported by a report compiled by Los Angeles County Office of Education (1997) on factors contributing to juvenile delinquency. The study concluded that chronic absenteeism was the most powerful predictor of delinquent behaviour. In addition, [3] reported that truancy is associated with negative outcomes such as poor performance, school dropout as well as delinquent behaviours such as stealing, bullying and drug abuse. Reference [4] observed that students' involvement in truancy has been a major challenge to policy makers and burden to school authorities due to indiscipline which interferes with school processes, academic performance and interpersonal relationships. Further, characteristics of schools for example disciplinary practices, degrees to which schools emphasize academic success and higher education, as well as teachers' characteristics may contribute to adolescents' truancy [5,6]. Confirming this, a study by [7], found out that students who earned suspension were often more disruptive, threatening and

aggressive. Evidently, it can be concluded that truancy is an underlying principal factor for more grievous problems which manifest themselves in drug abuse and habitual disruptive behaviours [8]. In addition, [9] observed that truant students were at a high risk of engaging in drug abuse and stealing as well as not receiving optimum education to help them succeed in their future life. Further, [10] indicated that truancy is accelerated by inconsistent tracking and failure of reporting truant cases. In addition, the other predictors were low parental education, poor academic performance as well as unsupervised time after school. The study concluded that truancy was common among adolescents and can lead to disastrous effect. This was supported by [11], who studied widely on school influence and truancy among adolescents in Zimbabwe. The study observed that truant students were very vulnerable to alcohol consumption. Further, [12] found out that poor academic performance, indiscipline as well as lack of seriousness contributed to absenteeism and truancy among secondary school students.

Moreover, [13] highlighted that satisfaction of students in their individual schools has a particularly strong effect on students' level of school engagement. He also indicated that, teachers' support has a positive influence on students' perceived social support and trouble avoidance. Reference [2] observed that, schools with students who had higher general level of academic achievement and positive school

related behaviour tend to be well disciplined. In addition, [7] indicated that teachers' friendly characteristics were significantly predictive of students' attendance, trouble avoidance, and good academic performance. Reference [14] contradicted these findings by reporting that school climate variables such as students' interpersonal relationships and student-teacher relationships were inversely proportional to truancy. The study has established that healthy teacher's behaviour such as being responsible, administering disciplinary measures proportional to the offence, friendly disciplinary measures as well as offering effective counselling services and conducive environment reduced truancy cases. The study established that not all teachers, principals and deputy principals were involved in discipline in schools. This may explain the high rate of riots experienced in schools in Manyatta Embu County, Kenya. Thus, teachers need to change their attitude towards the discipline of students by being actively involved in discipline matters in school. In addition, the study observed that the students were punished through suspension, caning and expulsion. In such scenarios, exposing the students to punitive disciplinary measures do not help in modifying his or her behaviour. It is also advisable that before teachers apply the disciplinary measures, there is need to discuss with the students the reasons why they are being punished. This can be done by specifying and communicating the punishable behaviour to the students by means of classroom rules and regulations. Moreover, the students should be informed of alternative behaviours that they could adopt in order to avoid breaking the school rules. Thus, change is needed in the way in which teachers administer the disciplinary measures since the tendency to rush to punitive measures only worsens the situation. Thus, the students should be involved in the drawing of the school rules and they should be posted in all notice boards in the school for the students to read and understand them. Hence, teachers should use alternative measures such as guidance, counselling and behaviour modifications among others. In addition, the study established that effective counselling services are important in curbing truancy among adolescents in secondary schools. Thus, the schools need effective counselling services with trained and competent counsellors who are able to identify students' challenges and offer assistance.

### **1.1. Statement of the Problem**

Truancy is a big challenge to the Kenyan society. Secondary school adolescents' involvement in truancy has been of great concern to teachers, parents, school authorities and policy makers. It is also the cause of disruption of teaching and learning process, indiscipline and poor academic performance in schools. Health development of the adolescent depends on appropriate negotiations of developmental tasks in life. Healthy interactions results to good academic performance, discipline, healthy interpersonal relationships as well as attaining individual identity. In school the adolescents need to be provided with enabling environment in order to realise their potentials, abilities and talents. This will help them to become productive members of the society. The study has concentrated on the role played by teachers on

adolescent's behaviour. A school with harsh and irresponsible teachers create uncondusive environment for learning hence the students may engage in antisocial behaviours such absenteeism, stealing, aggression and truancy. Teachers factors associated with truancy may include punitive and harsh disciplinary measures as well as lack of effective guidance and counselling services. This study investigated the contributions of teachers' factors to truancy among adolescents in secondary school in Manyatta sub- county, Kenya. Adolescents engaging in truancy are likely to display limited social skills, unprepared to do school work, lack of motivation, poor performance and general indiscipline such as disrespecting of teachers, misuse of school fees and noise making.

### **1.2. Objectives of the Study**

The study investigated how teachers have contributed to truancy among adolescents in secondary schools by specifically investigating teachers responsible for discipline, disciplinary measures administered, ratings of disciplinary measures and counselling services.

- To establish the extent of truancy among adolescents in secondary schools in Manyatta, Embu County, Kenya
- To identify the teachers who contribute to the discipline of the students in secondary schools in Manyatta, Embu County, Kenya.
- To find out the disciplinary measures administered to the secondary schools students in Manyatta, Embu County, Kenya.
- To establish the rating of disciplinary measures administered to the secondary school students in Manyatta, Embu County, Kenya.
- To determine whether the counselling services are effective in secondary school in Manyatta, Embu County, Kenya.

#### **1.2.1. Erik Erikson's (1963) Psychosocial Theory**

This study was grounded on [15] psychosocial theory. The theory broadly explains the effect of the social environment on adolescents' behaviour. The theory has eight stages of human development in the life span of a human being. The study focused on the fifth stage, which explains that adolescents experience identity versus role confusion as they negotiate developmental tasks. The study considered the theory because it supports that resolution of adolescent developmental crisis depends on the interactions between the individual and whatever support is provided by the social environment [16]. The adolescent seeks to establish his or her identity as a separate individual while interacting with the teachers while in school. Search for identity could be overwhelming, disorienting and troubling. At this stage, adolescents might have problems with following the school rules. When the adolescents experience role confusion, they may react by missing lessons, stealing and disrespecting teachers [17]. Thus, this study was based on [15] psychosocial theory since it supports that adolescents explore their identities by interacting with the social environment such as teachers and school administration. The theory argues that every significant person such as teachers encountered in the cause of development helps to

shape the behaviour of adolescents. This then means that at this time, the adolescents need teachers who are good role models in order to acquire socially acceptable behaviour. On the other hand, if the teachers are punitive the adolescent may engage in antisocial behaviour such as missing lessons and going out of school compound [17]. This supported the study, in that the student could choose to be absent from lessons instead of interacting with teachers who are punitive.

**1.2.2. Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework of the study is based on the teacher factors that are necessary for the development of adolescents' behaviour. These include teachers responsible for discipline, disciplinary measures and counselling services. The teachers with the protective factors such as disciplinary measures which are proportional to offence, friendly disciplinary measures, conducive environment and effective counselling services are likely to help the students to abstain from truancy. The teachers who have no protective factors may have students with limited social skills, unprepared to do school work, indiscipline as well as poor performance. The study observed that when the teachers assure students of the protective factors the cases of truancy are minimised hence the adolescents' attain effective social skills which results to improved discipline. Further the adolescents are prepared to do school work which will improve the academic performance as well as increasing motivation to be in school.

**1.3. Conceptual Framework of the Study**

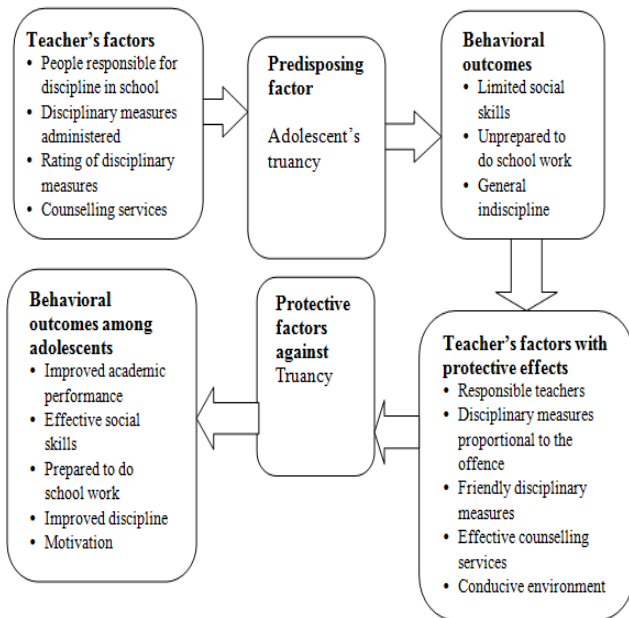


Figure 1. Interactions between teacher factors and truancy

**2. Research Methodology**

The study adopted descriptive survey research design to investigate the contributions of teacher factors on truancy. Survey research design used questionnaires, interview and observation schedule which involved a self-report on opinions and attitudes of the participants on the

contribution of teacher factors on truancy among the adolescents. The study was carried out in Manyatta sub- County in Embu County, Kenya. The population under study were form two students who were aged 15 to 19 years. The study used stratified sampling to obtain two girls' Boarding, two boys' Boarding and four co- education day categories. Simple random sampling was used to select 320 form two students who participated in the study. Further the study included deputy principals from each of the sampled schools, hence a total of eight. The sample consisted of 80 students from two girls' boarding schools and 80 students from two boys' boarding schools, and 160 students from four co- education day categories. The study involved 160 females and 160 males making a total of 320 respondents and eight deputy principals. The instruments for measuring truancy were adapted from Denise Juneau Superintendent Montana of Public Instruction, Vernderbilt University addiction Centre and Rigby and Slee (1993). The instruments were customised to this study.

**3. Findings of the Study**

This section presents the findings of the extent of truancy among adolescents, the people responsible for discipline in school, disciplinary measures administered, rating of disciplinary measures, counselling services to truancy among adolescents in secondary schools.

**3.1. To Establish the Extent of Truancy among Adolescents**

The study sought to establish the antisocial behaviours practised in schools. This was done by asking the deputy principals and students to list the antisocial behaviours they had observed in their respective schools. The findings showed that 38% (3) of the deputy principals reported that students practised truancy often, while 63% (5) of the deputy principals indicated that students rarely practiced truancy in schools. It is important to note that, all the deputy principals reported that at least truancy was being practised among the students. These findings were confirmed by the report from the black books which showed that truancy had the highest frequency as compared to bullying, stealing, disrespect to teachers, misuse of school fees, vandalism, chronic noise making and drug abuse. The class register showed that absenteeism was higher in co- educational day than boarding schools. These findings were also supported by the report from the students who indicated that 16% (51) of the students indicated that truancy was practised by the students in school. In conclusion, the findings from the deputy principals' responses showed that truancy was the most practised antisocial behaviour, followed by stealing, bullying and drug abuse respectively. The researcher confirmed the students' opinion by examining the black book to establish the number of times truancy cases were recorded. The class registers were used to confirm on absenteeism, which meant that the student did not attend the lessons. The current study observed that truancy might be the beginning of life time problems for students who routinely skipped school. This was because these students might lag behind in their school work and eventually drop

out of school. "Reference [18] explained that among the greatest risk were adolescents who engaged in some form of truancy". They increased their risk for involvement in the criminal justice system. Further, [12] observed that truancy problems in schools arose from other major issues such as health problems, poor performance in exams, emotional problems, peer pressure and lack of basic needs among others. These translated to problems in behaviours that are likely to affect their learning. In addition, the findings of this study showed that, communication breakdown between school and home was the second common truancy problem. In conclusion, schools must create an effective partnership by providing an open and communicative environment with parents and guardians. This will assist in forming a link between the classroom and the home as well as the school and the family.

### 3.2. People Responsible for Discipline in School

The study sought to find out the individuals responsible for discipline in school. The study conducted a cross tabulation between the people responsible for discipline in school and general indiscipline. General indiscipline constituted cheating, disrespecting teachers, noise making, lateness and misuse of school fees.

The findings showed that majority of the students, 70% (223), reported that the deputy principal was in charge, while only a small fraction of the students, 5% (17), reported that the prefects were in charge of discipline. On the other hand, 5% (14) of the students indicated that the principals were in charge of discipline, while 18% (56) of the students reported that all teachers were in charge of discipline. The findings showed that 71% (12) of the students who reported that prefects were in charge of discipline were noise makers and latecomers. This was an indication that the prefect - structure in Kenya was not as effective as it was meant to be. Majority, 92% (293), of the students who reported that the deputy principal, teachers and principal were in charge of discipline, were involved in general indiscipline. The study indicated that not all teachers, principals and deputy principals were involved in discipline in schools. This may explain the high rate of riots experienced in schools in Manyatta Embu County, Kenya. This was supported by [13] who pointed out that if teachers are not involved in the students' welfare and much more so insensitive to their grievances the students are likely to engage in antisocial behaviours. Thus, teachers need to change their attitude towards the discipline of students by being actively involved in discipline matters in school.

### 3.3. Disciplinary Measures Administered in Schools

The researcher sought to establish the common disciplinary actions in the secondary schools. This study conducted a cross tabulation between disciplinary measures administered in schools and general indiscipline. The findings demonstrated that 65% (209) of the students reported that cleaning the pavement was the most common disciplinary measure, while 18% (59) of the students reported that caning was the most common disciplinary

measure. On the other hand, few students, 3% (9), reported that expulsion was a common disciplinary measure, while 7% (22) reported that suspension was a common disciplinary measure. Therefore, the findings showed that caning as a mode of discipline-enhancer, was not as effective as suspension. This could be explained by the fact that when students go for suspension, they not only lose out on class work, but they also face punishment from parents as compared to caning, which is a onetime punishment. The findings supported the findings made by [19], who found out that alternative modes of punishment were more effective as compared to corporal punishment. Thus, caning was less effective as compared to other alternative methods such as behaviour contracting, token economy, positive and negative reinforcement among others. The reason for caning being minimal in schools was due to the ban of caning as a punishment, which was passed in Kenya [20]. Further, the study observed that the expulsion was minimal, this could be explained by the fact that the Ministry of Education in Kenya discouraged expulsion of students by putting strict measures to be adhered to when expelling students from schools. However, [21] noted that violence was a regular part of school experience as in teachers' use of caning, slapping and whipping to maintain discipline and punish students for poor academic performance. This was supported by the study which observed that the students were punished through suspension, caning, expulsion or cleaning.

Further, the study observed that majority of the students, 44% (139), were involved in noise making, while 29% (94) of the students were involved in lateness. Further, the study revealed that few students, 12% (37), were disrespecting teachers, while 12% (38) were involved in cheating. On the other hand, very few students, 7% (21), were involved in the misuse of school fees. This would be explained by the fact that most of the school fees was paid through the banks. The study indicated that punitive measures should be the last alternative. The findings supported the claim by [6] who reported that school safety is a significant predicative of school attendance and trouble avoidance. Thus, the schools' managers and teachers should ensure that the students have a friendly school environment for learning and behaviour modelling. Therefore, teachers should use alternative measures such as guidance, counselling and behaviour modifications among others. It is also advisable that before teachers apply the disciplinary measures, there is need to discuss with the students the reasons why they are being punished. This can be done by specifying and communicating the punishable behaviour to the students by means of classroom rules and regulations. Moreover, the students should be informed of alternative behaviours that they could adopt in order to avoid breaking the school rules. Thus, change is needed in the way in which teachers administer the disciplinary measures since the tendency to rush to punitive measures only worsens the situation.

### 3.4. Rating of Disciplinary Measures Administered in Schools

The study wanted to find out how the students rated the disciplinary measures in the school. The study conducted a cross tabulation between the rating of discipline and



truancy among the students. The findings showed 72% (229) of the students felt that the disciplinary measures were harsh, while 9% (29) of students reported that the disciplinary measures were not harsh. Scaggs (2009) explained in his study that the process of receiving school discipline may unintentionally impact how the students attach to the school. If the bonding is not very strong, it may work against the school and students. In fact, poor social ties to the institution may become severed and enable youth to engage in antisocial behaviours.

Further, the findings showed that 58% (67) of the students, who felt that the disciplinary measures at school were very harsh, reported that they engaged in truancy, while 68% (77) of the students, who felt that disciplinary measures were harsh indicated that they engaged truancy. Further, the study indicated that 69% (20) of the students who felt that the disciplinary measures were not harsh admitted that they do not practise truancy. From the study, it is clear that most students reported that the disciplinary measures were harsh, hence reported to practise truancy. It was also evident that where the disciplinary measures were friendly, the students reported that they did not practice truancy. Therefore, this showed that harshness of disciplinary measures had a negative effect on lesson attendance. This was supported by [2,22] who pointed that punitive measures may exacerbate truancy in adolescents. They might incorporate aggressive behaviour and other antisocial behaviours into an automatic script that does not require significant thought before enactment. Thus, the teachers need to adopt more friendly disciplinary measures.

However, [19] explained that the association between harsh disciplinary measures and truancy depends on whether the disciplinary measures were carried out in an emotionally charged manner. In addition, [5] reported that friendly disciplinary measures, degree to which the emphasis is put on discipline as well as encouraging teachers, contributed to general discipline. Further, [6] pointed out that school disciplinary policies have been met with public and political recoil, due to scant evidence bolstering their efficacy in reducing school misconduct. He explained that the students' perception of punishment was more crucial than the specific act of discipline. For instance, a student may have received out-of-school suspension but felt that the punishment was fair and deserved. This would promote the student's attachment to the school and belief in the fairness of the school rules. The change of attitude as well as behaviour would positively affect lesson attendance, as compared to where the student felt that the punishment was not fair. Thus, the students should be involved in the drawing of the school rules and they should be posted in all notice boards in the school for the students to read and understand them.

### 3.5. Effectiveness of Counselling Services

The study investigated how the students felt about the counselling departments in the schools. The researcher asked the students to explain whether the departments were effective or not. The researcher conducted a cross tabulation of the effectiveness of counselling services and

truancy. The findings showed that 56% (178) of the students felt that counselling services were not effective, while 44% (142) felt that the counselling services were effective. The study observed that teachers interact with the students most of the time within the calendar year compared to other members of the society. This implies that they have the best opportunity to elicit the appropriate behaviour. The Human Rights Watch Report (2007) explained that teachers could resolve to use guidance and counselling. The findings demonstrated that 80% (149) of the students who practised truancy did not have effective counselling services, while 20% (35) of the students who practised truancy had effective counselling services in the school. Further, the study reported that 40% (128) of the students who reported that the guidance and counselling was effective did not practise truancy. This demonstrated that effective counselling services are important in curbing truancy among adolescents in secondary schools. These findings were supported by [23] who explained that school counsellors provided counselling programs in behavioural change which helps the students to resolve their challenges and behavioural problems. Reference [2] concurred with these findings when he pointed out that students' involvement in antisocial behaviours was due to issues beyond their control, such as lack of basic needs, poor performance, peer pressure and indiscipline among others. In such scenarios, exposing the students to punitive disciplinary measures do not help in modifying his or her behaviour. Thus, the schools need effective counselling services with trained and competent counsellors who are able to identify students' challenges and offer assistance.

### 3.6. Associations of Teacher's Factors to Truancy among Adolescents in Secondary Schools

The findings demonstrated that all the classroom factors - academic performance ( $\chi^2=0.00$ ,  $df=4$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), person responsible for discipline ( $\chi^2=0.00$ ,  $df=4$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), ratings of disciplinary measures, ( $\chi^2=0.00$ ,  $df=4$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), counselling services ( $\chi^2=0.00$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) and disciplinary measures administered ( $\chi^2=0.00$ ,  $df=3$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) were significantly associated with truancy among secondary school students. The findings supported the claim by [6] who reported that school safety is a significant predicative of school attendance and trouble avoidance. Thus, the schools' managers and teachers should ensure that the students have a friendly school environment for learning and behaviour modelling.

## 4. Conclusion of the Study

In conclusion, the study established that truancy was being practised in schools. The findings showed that the most common causes of truancy among the students in secondary school were the presence of general indiscipline that interfered with the learning of students, and poor communication linkage between home and school. The study observed that not all teachers, principals and deputy

principals were involved in discipline in schools. The study observed that corporal punishment was used as a disciplinary measure. The findings demonstrated that caning was a very common disciplinary measure and especially in boys' schools while expulsion was least common. The study found out that even after the Ministry of Education had banned caning and expulsion, they were still practised in schools. The study observed that the disciplinary measures used in schools were harsh and the students reported that they affected their lesson attendance and academic performance. The study concluded that the students who felt that the disciplinary measures in their school were very harsh lacked motivation to learn and hence the study concluded that harshness of disciplinary measures in school had a negative effect on the motivation of students to learn. It was also evident that where the disciplinary measures were friendly, the students reported to have positive attitude toward school. Thus, this showed that harshness of disciplinary measures had a negative effect on academic performance. The study found out that all schools had counselling services but majority were not effective. Further, the study revealed that in schools where the guidance and counselling services was effective, students did not practise truancy. This showed that effective counselling services are important in curbing truancy among students in secondary schools.

## 5. Recommendations of the Study

Based on the findings as well as the conclusion drawn the study recommended that teachers to devise effective ways of dealing with truancy. Further, the study recommended that all teachers to be involved with students discipline. Therefore, teachers and the school administrators should use non-punitive disciplinary measures such as guidance and counselling, behaviour contracting, token economy and positive and negative reinforcements among others. Thus, the disciplinary measures to be modified in consultation with the students and teachers. In addition, the Teacher Service Commission needs to post trained and competent teacher counsellors to all public schools. In addition, the study recommended that since behaviour is dynamic among developing adolescents teacher counsellors need to attend seminars and workshop regularly. This will provide the opportunity for teachers to share their experiences and share current research in counselling. For this reason, peer counselling training in schools should be provided to all students.

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