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FACTORS AFFECTING TRUANCY PROBLEMS AMONG SCHOOL STUDENTS IN MALAYSIA

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Abstract:

Truancy among school students, both in primary and secondary schools, is a common main discipline problem faced by any educational institutions. The problem is not only confined domestically but is a global phenomenon facing the educational institutions, which needs to be concertedly addressed by the school's management, community, educationist, and the government. The primary aim of this research is to understand the factors causing truancy problems among school students in Malaysia. The pivotal approach is to review on past research studies from established and reliable journal databases, research articles, and online news related to this topic. There are five (5) main factors and causes of truancy problems, these being student's attitude, peers influence, parents, teachers, and lastly mental disorders. The results of this study can be taken as useful guidelines in understanding truanies in Malaysian schools, thereby enabling all stakeholders, educationists, and non-educationists, to collaboratively articulate proper plans to manage and address future truancy problems not only in schools but also in the educational fraternity.

Keywords:

Factors Affecting Truancy, Student's Attitude, Peers Influence, Parents, Teachers and Mental Disorders.

Introduction

Truancy, such as skipping classes or early dropping out among students, do occur in any educational institutions, be it schools, colleges, or universities. If this is not addressed properly, it could escalate into unfavorable implications on the learning process of the students themselves. Truancy is one of the typical disciplinary problems faced by any educational institutions, whether these are in the city or outside the city. The term “truancy” is defined as the act of not attending a class without a reasonable reason. Symptoms of truancy ought to be given serious attention because this problem also has an impact on student’s achievement with negative ramifications upon reaching adulthood or the society. Past research studies have identified three (3) main factors that have caused truancy, these being student’s attitudes, family relationship factors, and the environment in the school itself (Baker, Ariffin, Ridzuan, Sallehudin, Liaw and Mohd Zainol, 2020). Besides this, there are other factors that also affect skipping school symptoms, such as the negative influence of their peers who skip schools (Mat Nor, Hamzah and Junus, 2012) and that of Vidyakala and Priya (2015), who cited financial problems, poor school environment, transportation problems to school, and lastly concerns of the community that differ according to different community, as being factors that have caused truancy symptoms among school students.

There are umpteen statistical data regarding truancy problems among school students in Malaysia. The Johor State Education Department (Daily News, 2019) reported a total of 3,992 cases of truancy involving primary and secondary school students in the state; The Director of the State Education Department, Negeri Sembilan (Daily News, 2019), reported a total of 10,154 cases of student discipline problems and out of which, a total of 7,709 cases involved truancy cases in Negeri Sembilan for the year 2019. Meanwhile in Kedah, the Kedah State Education Department registered a total of 14,000 primary and secondary school students skipping school classes in the state in 2019 (Sinar Harian, 2020). Skipping school means running away from responsibilities without permission. This phenomenon occurs not only involving male students but also of female students in schools nationwide. There are two broad categories of truancy in schools, firstly it refers to truancy of not attending school at all and the second category is truancy of attending school but not attending class, even when the teacher is teaching. The causes or factors of truancy may vary from individual to individual and need to be understood before articulating the most effective means of controlling truancy. Although researches in this area are increasing, most findings are confined to small scale studies or limited geographical coverage, which are not representative of the overall Malaysian school’s population.

Truancy accounts for the highest student discipline problems among schools throughout the year. Students who are involved with truancy problems need to be properly counselled as they are prone to, or it is feared that they will be involved with negative and bad elements outside of school (Kearney, 2019). It could also expose students to criminal cases, as for example, the State of Perlis recorded a total of 36 criminal cases involving school students in 2015, with 73 criminal cases recorded in 2014 (Bernama.com, 2015). As a result of an increased and wide-spread number of cases, parents are always advised to closely monitor their children's activities, especially in terms of attendance in schools. The parental role of parents on the importance of their children's education is the main factor that motivates and influences a student's attitude at school. According to the statistics of one of the primary schools in Perlis, Sekolah Kebangsaan Kuala Perlis, out of the total number of 800 students

ranging from Years One to Six, an average of 50 students have been found to be absent from attending the said school every day (Astro Awani, 2016).

The problem of truancy in Malaysian schools recorded the highest for the year 2017. Table 1 highlights the country's matrix on ten disciplinary misconducts of school students for 2017 and the highest misconduct recorded was truancy involving 67,053 students (1.40%) out of nearly five (5) million students from the data base of both primary and secondary schools nationwide (Astro Awani, 2017).



BIL	SALAH LAKU	PERATUS (%)	JUMLAH
1	PONTENG SEKOLAH	1.40	67,053
2	KURANG SOPAN	0.29	14,509
3	TIDAK PENTINGKAN MASA	0.28	13,415
4	KEKEMASAN DIRI	0.23	10,946
5	ROKOK	0.18	8,514
6	BERUNSUR JENAYAH	0.14	6,917
7	KENAKALAN	0.12	5,825
8	BULI	0.06	2,795
9	BERUNSUR KELUCAHAN	0.05	2,266
10	LAKU MUSNAH	0.04	1,868

Table 1: Misconduct of School Student Disciplines in 2017

In a previous study conducted by Mohamad Amin et al. (2019), it was observed that there was an increase of 16.8% (1,365 students) in the number of students truancy in the State of Perlis involving teenagers, from 8,116 students (2012) to 9,481 students (2017). Most of the students involved in truancy came from schools located in the suburbs, where students who lived in the suburbs often faced problems in terms of poor living environment, family socioeconomics and socializing between friends. Most of these parents were from the low-income category with many supporting school-bound children and thus, financially could not provide adequate expenses to support the large number of children. One of the options available to ease the financial burden borne by their parents, was that these students were willing to quit schools and work on part time basis to earn money to meet their daily expenses (Smerillo et al., 2018). The problem of truancy is not a new phenomenon in the education sector in Malaysia. This problem has never subsided despite been discussed regularly by educationists, school management, and parental groups from time to time. The gravity of such problem has been subdued but remains as totally unsolved and is getting more serious. Reports of students leaving classes while studying are bad news since today's generation of students are the country's future leaders and those being the country's catalyst for development.

Literature Review

Skipping school is one of the main disciplinary problems that is becoming more apparent over the years and a myriad of factors that cause students to skip classes can be narrowed down to

three (3) crucial parties, from teachers, from the students themselves (such as attitudes and peers), and lastly from parents (greatly influence the students involved in the symptoms of school truancy). Symptoms of truancy usually occur due to peer factors, family factors, teachers' attitudes, personal factors, and school facilities (Baker, 2020; Gase et al, 2016). In addition, poor school environment factors, ineffective school management and inadequate school infrastructures can also cause students to be involved in the symptoms of truancy. It has been the teachers' perception that laziness as being the main factor causing students to skip schools. Counseling sessions and motivational camps are often being held, such as the "Skipping Zero" program, to overcome the problems of skipping schools. Healthy and beneficial school activities need to be developed in schools for students to rejuvenate their interest towards attending schools. Students are indeed easily influenced by activities that they are not used to doing in the past. Most students easily feel stressed and having no specific idea on what to do next when they are alone at home or at schools. In overcoming these problems and as a way out, they prefer to be on their own, being seclusive, or prefer to be in solitary confinement, which may prompt them to run away from the school atmosphere or to engage in activities that are not beneficial to or those that are harmful to them. In addition, there are also students who prefer to spend time hanging out and socializing with teenagers who have dropped out of schools (Santibanez and Guarino, 2021).

Students Attitude Factor

Student attitude is one of the main factors causing truancy in schools. Among the reasons cited by students for not attending schools are due to waking up very late in the morning, worrying about being late to school, not obtaining a doctor's medical confirmation letter for the illness, and not being able to fully focus during learning sessions at schools. Skipping school has a lot of negative ramifications on students and opens space for other negative behavior attributes such as smoking, drug abuse, bullying, and other negative elements to seep into their minds. The problem of skipping schools will also cause problems with the quality of learning outcomes for the students, they are prone to being drop-outs towards later stages, and failure in sitting for school exams. In addition, a previous study by Ungar et al. (2019) states that a factor of students skipping school is due to the family's poor economic situation. The unwavering economic environment and sub-par social conditions in the family expose a high risk of students and great tendency in skipping schools.

Peer Factor

The peer factor is a factor that influences the symptoms of school truancy among students. Things that are new for a student usually have a connection with the actions of other friends. If a student does not concur with the behavior of their friends, the student will feel worried and may not be well accepted by their friends. So being an accepted member of a group is a way to achieve the student's objective. The consequences of dropping out of school midway will make it difficult for students to find a steady job or a prospective career elsewhere and will eventually increase the unemployment rate in the country. However, a study by Nosiah (2014) also looked at other factors that caused students to skip schools, such as student attitudes, peers, family, school atmosphere, teachers, environment, and student discipline management skills. According to Muhammed Sharif Mustaffa et al. (2012) the primary cause of school truancy among students is the peer factor, followed by other secondary causes, such as family relationships, personal, teacher's attitude, and school infrastructures.

Parents Factor

The findings of this study show that most of the respondents came from family backgrounds with low to moderate socio-economic status. Most researchers admit that the main factor that causes truancy among students is caused by family factors (Wulandari, 2018). The results of previous studies have discussed that parent as being one of the several factors that influence the occurrence of the problem of skipping school behavior among teenagers. In referring to the study by Ting Len and Muhamad Sidek (2007), the problem of truancy is often associated with parental factors, teacher's teaching, lesser interactions between teachers and students, classrooms that are not conducive, negative influences from the environment, and the composition of too many students in the classrooms.

Teachers Factor

Nawawi et al. (2017) has linked both Emotional Conditioning Theory and Social Learning Theory (ECSLT) with the symptoms of school truancy. Based on the ECSLT, students will react with various fearful emotions whenever they see their disciplinary teachers publicly punishing students who skip schools. The effect of these emotional fears will cause students to refrain from attending schools for fear of facing similar punishment or facing the disciplinary teacher. Teachers and students should have a close interpersonal relationship. The method of reprimanding students who are involved in disciplinary problems, especially truancy, needs to be reviewed by the teachers and the school (Md Akhir, Matderis and Kamaludin, 2019). The teacher's teaching style in the classroom is a component or element that ensures the existence of a desire to learn more among students. There are studies proving that moral problems that exist among students are linked to the effectiveness of teachers' teaching in schools. In Asmawati Suhid, Abdul Rahman Md. Aroff and Norliana Kamal (2012), the teacher's factor is one of the reasons for student truancy. Based on the teacher's influence, respondents explained that the teaching method was boring and ineffective, recording the highest mean value compared to other factors. A teacher who is ill-prepared, ill-equipped with proper teaching materials or incompetent to teach will create a sense of boredom among students and the teacher's unattractive teaching style will cause students to be less interested in learning. The prospect of absenteeism is high and without suitable qualifications may exacerbate concerns on their employment opportunities in the challenging and dynamic, but yet dampening, economic environment. In addition, a study by Ainonmadiyah et al. (2016) showed that the teacher's teaching style in the classroom is an important component that ensures the existence of an interest in learning among students. There are empirical studies proving that moral problems, such as truancy among students, are directly linked to the effectiveness of teachers' teaching at school.

Mental Health Factor

Based on previous studies, mental disorders are also one of the causes of absenteeism in school among students. Yong Kang Cheah, Chee Cheong Kee, Kuang Hock Lim and Mohd Azahadi Omar (2021) pointed to positive relationships between the possibility of truancy with symptoms of severe anxiety and depression, suicidal ideation, grade level, male, having a single parent, rural areas, smoking, drinking, and using illegal drugs. The increasing percentage of mental disorders among school students has also increased arising from changes in times and lifestyles. According to the Institute for Public Health (2012-2017), the percentage of students experiencing emotional stress has increased from 17.7% to 18.3% for the years 2012 to 2017 respectively. Students experiencing mental disorders indeed have a significant relationship with school's failure. This is evident from previous reports stating that students with mental

disorders tend to skip schools several times compared to students who are mentally and physically healthy (Burton et al, 2014 and Gubbles et al, 2019). The numbers of studies regarding the relationships between mental health and truancy rates among students are still lacking. This is reinforced when previous studies have only studied a few specific topics and the scope is focused to limited topics. For example, the study by Kaur et al., (2014) only examined factors related to mental health disorders, while the study by Mahmud et al. (2019) focused on the factors that cause truancy symptoms but did not involve studies on mental disorder variables.

Theoretical Framework

There are a myriad of theories linking the problems of truancy among students. In relation to this research paper, the Researchers will discuss only two theories, firstly the Social Structure Theory, and secondly the Choice Theory. In Social Structure Theory (Shaw and McKay, 1969), it assumes that a child whose life involves a disorganized structure fosters the occurrence of juvenile delinquency. Among the indicators of disorganized structures are high poverty rates, high ethnic heterogeneity, and high mobility. The Choice Theory, as discussed by Ruohollahi (2016), touches on external psychology where people try to obtain what they want from other people every day. A typical example is the need for freedom, one of the five basic needs built into the human genome, leading to a vicious circle of force on the one hand and resistance on the other. The Choice Theory was initially introduced by William Glasser in 1999, where the most important needs that every person should possess are affection, love, and belonging. These needs are desired so that anyone can meet their needs. It can simultaneously help everyone to have certain closeness or feeling of connection with family, friends, and acquaintances they love as well avoiding them from falling into negative elements.

Discussion and Recommendation

There five (5) main factors that cause students to skip schools, namely student's attitude, peer influence, parent factors, teacher, and mental disorders. In facilitating wider public interests and reader's understanding, the researchers summarizes down below the results of the previous study as in Table 2.

Researchers/Titles/Year	Findings
José-Julian, Escario, J. Ignacio Giménez-Nadal, Anna V. Wilkinson. (2022). Predictors of adolescent truancy: The importance of cyberbullying, peer behavior, and parenting style. <i>Children and Youth Services Review</i> . 143 (2022) 106692.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cyberbullying and parenting styles play important roles in students' decision on truancy. • Peers play an important role in influencing students to skip schools.
Abdul-Aziz Seidu, Francis Arthur-Holmes, Ebenezer Agbaglo, Bright Opoku Ahinkorah. (2022). Truancy: How food insecurity, parental supervision, and other factors influence school attendance of adolescents in Seychelles. <i>Children and Youth Services Review</i> . 135 (2022) 106377.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is a highly significant relationship between truancy and mental disorders, including being involved in smoking, drinking alcohol, getting involved in fights, being bullied, going hungry, and having been attacked by peers. • Parents who do not monitor their children's activities may lead to truancy among students.

<p>Stephen Filkin, Dara Mojtahedi, Dominic Willmott. (2022). Motivations for adolescent offending and truancy from school: retrospective interviews with adults recently released from a custodial prison sentence in England. <i>Heliyon</i> 8 (2022) e09762.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tired of attending classes where the teacher's teaching methods are not interesting. • Peer influence for truancy. • Mental disorders leading to involvement in crimes, such as drinking alcohol, robbing, smoking, and selling drugs.
<p>Derrick Nyantakyi Owusu, Kenneth Owusu Ansah, Nutifafa Eugene Yaw Dey, Henry Ofori Duah, Pascal Agbadi. (2022). Bullying and truancy amongst school-going adolescents in Timor-Leste: results from the 2015 global school-based health survey. <i>Heliyon</i> 8 (2022) e08797.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Truancy is synonymous with mental disorders, being bullied in schools.
<p>Tuomo Virtanen, Kati Vasalampi, Marja-Kristiina Lerkkanen, Jenni Pelkonen, Anna-Maija Poikkeus. (2022). Stability of social support during school transitions: Associations with truancy and not completing upper secondary education in normative time. <i>Learning and Instruction</i>. 82 (2022) 101663.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skipping schools and not completing studies at the school levels are associated with social support, which is the influence of parents and school friends.
<p>Mat Min, R., Brahim, S. S., Mohd Yusoff, R. A., & Ramley, F. (2022). Truancy among school children: Reasons and counselling experiences. <i>Journal of Nusantara Studies</i>, 7 (1), 79 – 99. http://dx.doi.org/10.24200/jonus.vol7iss1pp79-99</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self and relationship with others.
<p>T.E. Virtanen, E. Raikonen, M.C. Engels, K. Vasalampi, M.-K. Lerkkanen. (2021). Student engagement, truancy, and cynicism: A longitudinal study from primary school to upper secondary education. <i>Learning and Individual Differences</i>. 86 (2021) 101972.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Symptoms of truancy are related to the student's own attitude, which is losing interest in learning.
<p>Baker, R., Ariffin, N.M., Ridzuan, A.A., Sallehuddin, H. Jessica, O.H.L., and Mohd. Zainol, N.A. (2020). Faktor-Faktor Yang Mempengaruhi Gejala Ponteng Sekolah: Satu Kajian Di Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Pengkalan Chepa Kota Bharu, Kelantan. <i>Persidangan Antarabangsa Sains Sosial dan</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student's attitude. • Family relationships. • School environment has a significant relationship with the symptoms of truancy among students.

Kemanusiaan ke-5 (PASAK5 2020) – Dalam Talian 24 & 25 November 2020. e-ISBN: 978 967 2122 90 6	
Dong Ha Kim. (2020). Applying the social-ecological framework on the pattern of longitudinal trajectory of truancy in South Korean adolescents. <i>Children and Youth Services Review</i> . 119 (2020) 105511.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Absentism from schools by male students is more than female students. • Students who skip schools are made up of those who have high emotional pressure. • Lack of parental love and poverty, driving truancy among students. • Influence of peers who have disciplinary problems is significant with truancy symptoms. • Students who do not observe school rules, have poor relationships with teachers, and are less involved in healthy activities at schools, tend to skip schools.
Aqeel, M. and Rehna, T. (2020). Association among school refusal behavior, self-esteem, parental school involvement and aggression in punctual and truant school-going adolescents: a multilevel analysis. <i>International Journal of Human Rights in Healthcare</i> , 13 (5), pp. 385-404. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJHRH-06-2020-0041 .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good parenting care can enhance children's motivation to attend schools and avoid truancy symptoms. • Male students are more likely to skip schools.
Lukman Hakim, M.A. (2019). Masalah kecelaruan tingkah-laku: Ponteng Sekolah. <i>International Journal of Humanities, Management and Social Sciences</i> . 2(1). Pp. 51-64.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good parenting. • Teacher as a tutor. • Family problems faced by students.
Laurine B. van der Woude, Trudy van der Stouwe, Geert Jan J.M. Stams. (2017). Differences between risk factors for truancy and delinquency in Dutch adolescents. <i>Children and Youth Services Review</i> . 73 (2017) 9–14.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Truancy has a positive relationship with unmanaged home conditions and care given by parents to children.
Norzawati Yoep, Leni Tupang, Ahmad Nazri Jai, Lim Kuang Kuay, Faizah Paiwai and Noor Safiza Mohd Nor. (2016). Prevalence of Truancy and Its Associated Factors among School-Going Malaysian Adolescents: Data from Global School-Based Health Survey 2012. <i>Psychology</i> , 7, 1053-1060.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The factors associated with truancy were current smoker. • Current drug user. • Current alcohol use. • Having been bullied. • Not currently live with both parents.
Tai, S.S., & Ah, S.H. (2016). The untold truancy stories: a case study in Malaysia. DOI 10.22452/MJSA.VOL12NO1.4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skip classes, sneak out of the school, stay out late. • Look for ways to make money during school hours. • Take drugs, steal and rob.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Break into shops or houses. • Waste their time hanging around looking for mischief.
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Table 2: Past Studies Related to Factors That Affect Skipping of Schools by Students.

It has been observed that students are less interested in learning, which leads to them in skipping schools. This is significant with previous study outcomes by Keppens & Spruyt (2018) and Krannich et al. (2019), both stating that skipping school classes is positively related to student's attitude and interest in learning, and even some students have to repeat grades/studies because they failed in learning. Previous studies have also associated truancy with the cognitive level of the students themselves. Mihalec-Adkins et al. (2020) in their study found that factors such as motivation, implications, and efforts of students to excel in academics, have a positive relationship with truancy. In other words, students with academic excellence will always be highly motivated to attend schools. The second factor of students skipping school, is due to peer influence. The influence of their peers will affect students being truant and previous studies also found that peer influence is also significant with the number of days students are truant (Borderias, 2015). Fears of not being accepted by their peers (who coincidentally are also school dropouts) require them to emulate feats or activities of their peers, where such feats or activities are deemed unbeneficial to them.

Apart from that, parents also influence in escalating truancy problems in schools. Lack of parental care, financial difficulties, and large family in house are few of the magnitude of factors in this theme. Next, factor number four, it has been observed that truancy is also influenced by teacher's factor. Poor learning methods and the uncomfortable learning environment at schools do have significant influence for students to skip schools. In addition, students who are punished, such as from disciplinary problems, also cause them to skip schools. Disciplinary problems are more associated with male students than female students and this situation is significant with previous studies stating that male student's miss classes the most than their female counterparts (Salzer, 2012; Gubblers, 2019). Although there are studies stating that more male students skip schools, it does not mean that there are no cases of skipping schools among female students. Maynard et al., 2017's study found a positive relationship between truancy and female students. The last factor highlights that mental disorders have been known to cause truancy problems among students in schools. Mental disorders are associated with emotional stress, nervousness to go to school, and being bullied at schools (Pengpid & Peltzer, 2019; Morin et al., 2018). In addition, a previous study by Askeland et al. (2020) also echoed the same findings, where students with stress problems are at a very high risk of skipping schools as this factor is closely related to the student's own mental health.

Conclusion

Truancy is a social disease across a wide spectrum of industries, not limited to education. There are also truanies at workplaces, at business or non-business organizations or even in our local communities and homes. Although the types of truancy in each spectrum may differ in forms, the magnitude of these problems collectively points towards a future troubled society and an unsafe living environment, if not addressed properly and timely. Truancy in schools could not be eliminated in its entirety but with proper plans could be curtailed. It is thus our recommendation that collaborative efforts by educationists and non-educationists, parents,

teachers, communities, and the government ought to be mustered towards having a concerted Master Plan in managing truanancies in the educational fraternity. There must be a strong will by all walks of life to muster our efforts to curtail truanancies in schools.

Limitations of Research Study

This research study is merely a review with limited scope, where secondary data is obtained from a multitude of online sources, including online databases of journals, online articles, and online news bulletins. Future studies should appropriately involve primary data collection methodology, either qualitatively or quantitatively, and spanning over a wider geographical coverage of schools in Malaysia. The literature review that has been carried out observed common factors such as mental disorders, stress, and emotional disorders as having profound effect on truancy among students in school. As such, expanded studies on how to overcome these truancy problems need to be undertaken for value-added knowledge in this specific study scope.

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