



TRUANCY AND STRESS AS CORRELATES OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS' ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND MATHEMATICS IN RIVERS STATE

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Abstract

This study investigated truancy and stress as correlates of secondary school students' academic performance in English Language and Mathematics in Rivers State. The study adopted correlational research design. Three research questions and three hypotheses guided the study. The population for this study is made up of 5,236 senior secondary one (SSI) students in the 261 government owned secondary schools in the 23 Local Government Areas of Rivers State. A sample size of 400 SSI students in public schools was used for the study drawn through multi-stage sampling method. The instrument for data collection was a questionnaire constructed by the researcher titled: "Truancy and Stress Questionnaire" (TSQ). The instrument was validated by experts in Measurement and Evaluation, Department of Educational Psychology, Guidance and Counselling, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Port Harcourt. The reliability of the instrument was determined using test-re-test reliability method and yielded a reliability coefficient of TSQ ($r = 0.83$). Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to answer research questions and test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The findings of the study showed that there is a very weak and significant relationship between truancy, financial stress, workload and academic performance of secondary school students in Rivers State. Based on the findings, it was recommended that parents should collaborate with school management to take a drastic measure to reduce students' truancy to enhance academic performance, financial stress should be reduced in all state secondary schools in Rivers State to enable secondary school students to perform better in their academics.

Keywords: Truancy, Stress, Financial Stress, Workload, Academic Performance

Introduction

Academic Performance refers to the students learning outcomes which include the knowledge, skills and ideas, acquired through their course of study. Over the years, common societal stereotype have been to understand the causal reasons of dreadful academic performance in certificate examinations in Nigeria. Olanipekun and Aina (2020) explained academic performance is an observable or measurable behaviour of a person or an animal in a particular situation. Therefore, performance measures the behaviours or an aspect of achievement that can be observed at a specific period. Hence, students' academic performance is significant because, it shows the criterion of effectiveness and success by which any educational institution could be evaluated. Bassey (2020) explained that the term, academic performance, is used to describe the academic position of a student at a particular moment. Academic performances consign students' ability in exhibiting their scholastic aptitude. Furthermore, this scholastic standing could be explained in terms of grades obtained in a course or group of courses taken; hence performance is viewed as a determinant of educational outcome.

Olanipekun and Aina (2020) stated that academic performance is the outcome of education; the degree to which a student, teacher or institution has achieved their educational goals. Accordingly, academic performance is commonly measured by examination or continuous assessment. In Nigeria, academic



performance is measured majorly by the student's performance in external examinations like West African Examination Council Examinations, National Examination Council examinations, both Senior and Junior, and the Joint Admissions Matriculation Board examinations (Obeta, 2020). The West African Examinations Council (AWEC) has stated that it recorded 7.69 percent decrease in the performance of candidates who sat for the 2024 West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE). Compared to 2023 79.81 percent, WAEC said the percentage of candidates who obtained credits and above in a minimum of five subjects, including English Language and Mathematics, this year is 72.12 percent (This Day Newspaper, 2024).

Truancy is defined as incessant illegal nonattendance to class or school. Truancy may be acknowledged differently, however, successive unexcused absence from school is the most frequent and suitable definition, according to Rivers (2019) observed that truancy, or the regular act of being absent from school without authorization, is a foremost concern disturbing the overall success of secondary school students academic performance; and Reid as cited in Rivers (2019) explicitly identified school attendance as the sole most significant variable in appraising students' performance levels; it is necessary therefore, that remedial measures be taken against chronic absenteeism or truancy. However, students' physical and mental health concern according to Rivers (2019) are causative factors of truancy, and may be a signpost for post-traumatic stress disorder, nervousness, dejection, and substance abuse. Likewise, alcohol use by a student, at-least once or more times in a month, may viably neglect school, but if the alcohol use gets to intoxication, there may be an increased probability of school skipping. Additionally, truant students who smoke cigarettes or marijuana at least once a month hold lower self-perception and are more likely to skip school than students with high self-perception (Rivers, 2019). These can affect their academic performance.

Sutphen et al. (2021) viewed truancy as a term lawfully defining unexcused absence from school over a designated period of time. And typically referenced to as "chronic" or "habitual" when a student surpasses a specific number of unexcused absence over a certain period of time. Hence, regular school attendance is necessary for acceptable academic performance. Thus, a study by Hendricks et al. (2019) revealed a positive relationship between students' regular school attendance and academic performance. Studies investigating causes contributory to truancy according to Baker et al. (2021) are categorized into four broad groups: individual, family, school, and community. Individual aspects thus comprise, fear for school, learning impairments, poor school bonds, and conduct problem. Family aspects truancy connectedness comprise, low family earnings, single-parenthood, child abuse, parental disability, non-involvement of parents in education, and family dynamics. School aspects comprise sadistic interaction with teachers, attendance guidelines deficiency, and non-adjustment of varied learning styles. Oluremi (2022) acknowledged home truancy factors as; children and parents poor relationship; poor home physical conditions; use of corporeal chastisement; lack of parental attention in the child's wellbeing. Henry (2019) identified the school as a strong element liable for truancy. They enumerated breakdown of communication, excess student population, dearth of teachers, constant strike and work-to-rule, unjustified application of bodily reprimand and negative peer influence as robustly connected with truancy. Furthermore, truancy may be caused by bullying of students by non-teaching staff, tediousness, loathing for teachers and evading of tests, amongst secondary school students.

Consequently, study by Salami (2021) revealed that students' lack of financial support, absenteeism, truancy, use of local language in the classroom, lack of interest, and joy in teachers' lessons may cause poor academic performance of students. Therefore, Enyiorji (2018) opined that truancy is a foremost behavioural problem among primary and secondary school students globally; and has been defined in various ways. Accordingly, the National Center for School Engagement defined truancy as a student who has four to five days of unexcused absence in a term. Likewise, truancy is a premeditated unexcused non-school attendance by a student. For, Rivers (2019) truancy is a consecutive illegal absence from class or school. Furthermore, truancy as a principal issue has fused in to the socioeconomic framework of Nigeria's educational system, mutually in municipal and rural schools. Uzoeshi (2012) stated that stress is any demand or condition that affects an individual's normal way of functioning; which induces him or her to take extra steps in order to cope with such a demand or condition. It is those demands that make an individual mobilize additional resources in order to be



healthy or effective in his environment. Therefore, stress is an unavoidable part of life that can imperil on students' physical and mental health, academic success and on life generally (Abdulrahman & Kawthara, 2019).

Likewise, Uzoeshi (2012) see stress as any assault on the organism; and as any event or circumstance that threatens the individual and requires some form of coping reaction. Thus, these problems render adaptation difficult and put considerable strain on the individual. It is an outer or inner condition or both that makes demands on the child beyond his/her capacity to handle with his usual resources; or to arouse anxiety or threat that he/she will be unable to deal with. Despite the recognized importance of both English Language and Mathematics, there is a paucity of empirical research examining their combined impact on the academic performance of students in Rivers State. This gap in knowledge impedes the academic performance of students. Hence the present study sought to investigate truancy and stress as correlates of secondary school students' academic performance in English Language and Mathematics in Rivers State.

Statement of the Problem

The analysis of the statistics of the performance of candidates in the examination of WAEC 2022 shows that a total of 1,601,047 candidates sat the examination, out of which 1,222,505 representing 76.36%) obtained credits and above, including English Language and Mathematics which is a notable decrease performance of 5.34% from 81.7% of that of 2021. The poor level and decline in the quality of students' academic performance in Nigeria has become a national concern, and one of the contemporary educational problems of public interest. Hence, this study investigated truancy and stress as correlates of secondary school students' academic performance in English Language and Mathematics in Rivers State.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine the relationship between truancy and stress as correlates of academic performance of secondary school students in English Language and Mathematics in Rivers State. Specifically, the study sought to;

1. Determine the relationship between truancy and academic performance of secondary school students in Rivers State.
2. Determine the relationship between financial stress and secondary school students' academic performance in Rivers State.
3. Ascertain the relationship between workload and academic performance of secondary school students in Rivers State.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. To what extent does truancy relate to secondary school students' academic performance in Rivers State?
2. To what extent does financial stress relate to secondary school students' academic performance in Rivers State?
3. To what extent does workload relate to academic performance of secondary school students in Rivers State?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested at 0.05 significant level:

1. There is no significant relationship between truancy and secondary school students' academic performance in Rivers State.
2. There is no significant relationship between financial stress and secondary school students' academic performance in Rivers State.
3. There is no significant relationship between workload and academic performance of secondary school students in Rivers State.



Methods

The research design for this study is correlational design. The study was carried out in Rivers State. The population of this study was 5,236 SS1 students in the 261 government owned secondary schools in the 23 Local Government Areas in Rivers State. The sample size for this study was 400 students in the study area drawn using multistage sampling method. A self-structured instrument was used for data collection titled: "Truancy and Stress Questionnaire" (TSQ). The instrument was validated for face and content validity by experts in Measurement and Evaluation, Department of Educational Psychology, Guidance and Counselling, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education. The reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronbach alpha reliability method. The instrument yielded a reliability coefficient of ($r=0.83$). The instrument was administered by the researcher with the help of one research assistant. Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to answer the research questions and test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Research Question One: To what extent does truancy relate to secondary school students' academic performance in Rivers State?

Hypothesis One: There is no significant relationship between truancy and secondary school students' academic performance in Rivers State.

Table 1: Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Analysis on the Relationship between Truancy and Secondary School Students' Academic Performance in Rivers State

Correlations		Truancy	Academic Performance
Truancy	Pearson Correlation	1	0.15**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.00
	N	400	400
Academic Performance	Pearson Correlation	0.15**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.00	
	N	400	400

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 1 shows the extent to which truancy relate to secondary school students' academic performance in Rivers State. As such, the answer to research question one is that the relationship that exist between truancy and secondary school students' academic performance in Rivers State is very weak ($r = 0.15$). The implication of this result is that the extent of relationship between truancy and secondary school students' academic performance in Rivers State is very weak since the correlation coefficient ($r = 0.15$) is within the range of $r \leq \pm 0.10$ to ± 0.19 . Furthermore, Table 1 shows that the test to hypothesis one indicated that there is a very weak correlation ($r = 0.15$, $r \leq \pm 0.10$ to ± 0.19), between truancy and secondary school students' academic performance in Rivers State. Thus, since $p\text{-value} = 0.00 < 0.05$, there is significant relationship between truancy and secondary school students' academic performance in Rivers State, hence null hypothesis one is rejected at the 0.05 significance level.

Research Question Two: To what extent does financial stress relate to secondary school students' academic performance in Rivers State?

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant relationship between financial stress and secondary school students' academic performance in Rivers State.

Table 2: Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Analysis on the Relationship between Financial Stress and Secondary School Students' Academic Performance in Rivers State Correlations

		Financial Stress	Academic Performance
Financial Stress	Pearson Correlation	1	0.20**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.00
	N	400	400
Academic Performance	Pearson Correlation	0.20**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.00	
	N	400	400

**Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 2 shows the extent to which financial stress relate to secondary school students' academic performance in Rivers State. As such, the answer to research question six is that the relationship that exist between financial stress and secondary school students' academic performance in Rivers State is weak ($r = 0.20$). The implication of this result is that the extent of relationship between financial stress and secondary school students' academic performance in Rivers State is weak since the correlation coefficient ($r = 0.20$) is within the range of $r \leq \pm 0.20$ to ± 0.39 . Furthermore, Table 2 shows that that there is a weak correlation ($r = 0.20$, $r \leq \pm 0.20$ to ± 0.39), between financial stress and secondary school students' academic performance in Rivers State. Thus, since $p\text{-value} = 0.00 < 0.05$, there is significant relationship between financial stress and secondary school students' academic performance in Rivers State, hence null hypothesis six is rejected at the 0.05 significance level.

Research Question Three: To what extent does workload relate to academic performance of secondary school students in Rivers State?

Hypothesis Three: There is no significant relationship between workload and academic performance of secondary school students in Rivers State.

Table 3: Pearson's Product Moment Correlation analysis on the relationship between workload and academic performance of secondary school students in Rivers State

Correlations		Workload	Academic Performance
Workload	Pearson Correlation	1	0.34**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.00
	N	400	400
Academic Performance	Pearson Correlation	0.34**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.00	
	N	400	400

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 3 shows the extent to which workload relate to academic performance of secondary school students in Rivers State. As such, the answer to research question seven is that the relationship that exist between workload and academic performance of secondary school students in Rivers State is weak ($r = 0.34$). The implication of this result is that the extent of relationship between workload and academic performance of secondary school students in Rivers State is weak since the correlation coefficient ($r = 0.34$) is within the range of $r \leq \pm 0.20$ to ± 0.39 . Furthermore, Table 3 shows that the test to hypothesis three indicated that there is a weak correlation ($r = 0.34$, $r \leq \pm 0.20$ to ± 0.39), between workload and academic performance of secondary school students in Rivers State. Thus, since $p\text{-value} = 0.00 < 0.05$, there is significant relationship between workload and academic performance of secondary school students in Rivers State, hence null hypothesis seven is rejected at the 0.05 significance level.



Discussion of Findings

The study investigated the relationship between truancy and stress with academic performance of secondary school students in Rivers State. However, the result in Table 1 revealed that the extent of relationship between truancy and secondary school students' academic performance in Rivers State is very weak. Furthermore, the result of hypothesis one indicated that there is significant relationship between truancy and secondary school students' academic performance in Rivers State. The finding of this study is supported by the study of Oluremi (2022), which revealed that there was a significant relationship between truancy and academic performances of students. Furthermore, Musa (2020) opined that peer group factors, socio economic background of the students, poor academic performance of students, are contributory factors to absenteeism and truancy in our secondary schools.

The result in Table 2 revealed that the extent of relationship between financial stress and secondary school students' academic performance in Rivers State is weak. Furthermore, the result of the tested hypothesis two indicated that there is significant relationship between financial stress and secondary school students' academic performance in Rivers State. Joo et al. (2021) corroborate these results in their study, which revealed negative relationship between financial stress and academic performance.

The result in Table 3 showed that the extent of relationship between workload and academic performance of secondary school students in Rivers State is weak. Furthermore, the result of the tested hypothesis three indicated that there is significant relationship between workload and academic performance of secondary school students in Rivers State. These results are consistent with the findings of Muhammad et al. (2017) which revealed that there was a significant relationship between workload and academic stress/performance among fresh undergraduate students. Furthermore, the finding is supported by Yoshiki et al. (2018), which revealed that there is a significant influence of high workload on students' academic performance.

Conclusion

The study investigated the relationship between truancy and stress as correlates of secondary school students' academic performance in English Language and Mathematics in Rivers State. However, the findings from the study revealed that financial stress and workload had a weak relationship with students' academic performance while truancy had a very weak relationship with students' academic performance in Rivers State. Based on the findings of the study on the relationship between truancy and stress with the academic performance of secondary school students in Rivers State, it can be concluded that the increase in finance, less workload and parent-teacher communication will facilitate students' academic performance. Teachers must also employ an efficient curriculum for secondary school students, research about the potential stressors of students' academic performance and different stress management strategies.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made:

1. Parents should collaborate with school management to take a drastic measure to reduce students' truancy to enhance academic performance.
2. Financial stress should be reduced in all state secondary schools in Rivers State to enable secondary school students to perform better in their academics.
3. Workload should be reduced in all state secondary schools in Rivers State to enable secondary school students to perform better in their academic performance.

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