Economic, Environmental and Cultural Contextual Perpetuators Hiking Truancy in Mwanga District Council Primary Schools

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Abstract: This study assessed the economic, environmental, and cultural contextual factors contributing to rising truancy in selected primary schools within Mwanga District Council. The study employed a mixed-method approach and a descriptive design, using multiple triangulated data collection methods. Semi-structured interviews and questionnaires were used as primary instruments. Descriptive techniques were applied to analyze nominal and ordinal data, yielding percentages and frequencies. Data were collected from a sample of 60 participants. Both probability and non-probability sampling techniques were used 19 headteachers and 1 District Primary Education Officer (DPEO) were interviewed, while questionnaires were administered to 40 teachers. Trustworthiness was ensured through methodological triangulation, multiple data sources, and expert review. The findings revealed that truancy has increased since the COVID-19 pandemic, though at a modest pace. School B recorded a higher percentage of truancy compared to others. All schools studied indicated that boring classes, bullying, harsh punishment, academic failure, and an unsafe school environment contributed to truancy. Additionally, factors such as food insecurity, unreliable transportation, teacher harshness, peer pressure, and pupils engaging in small-scale businesses were also identified as contributors. Participants recommended the full involvement of parents and the wider community in school by-law development, rather than limiting participation to school committees, which may not reflect the views of all parents in Mwanga District.

1. Introduction

This study assessed the economical, environmental and cultural contextual perpetuators hiking truancy in Mwanga district council primary schools. It addresses the philosophical puzzle on a social problem of truancy in form of general research question asking, how are social, economic, cultural, political factors perpetuating the rising of truancy behaviour in the proposed district council of Mwanga? This grand research question had not been addressed before this study was done in Mwanga district council primary schools. Consequently, little was known about it, and this knowledge gap prompted the need to conduct this study in the location studied in Mwanga Kilimanjaro Tanzania.

The researchers' longer year experience as professional teachers in primary schools and llecturersin university level revealed that truancy no matter how small in magnitude it may be, it is neither desired by a learner, a parent, a community, a government nnor international organisation Truancy behavior is regarded as a natural, wicked act of escapism which is likely to take place at some stages during the normal development of children in basic education levels (Reid, 2008). Truancy has become a big problem in schools nowadays at all levels of education. Those who are always absent do gain or benefit nothing from various programs that a school offers. Truancy is a result of various causes both from home, school, and pupils themselves. Some researchers have evidenced that problematic school absenteeism includes school refusal absenteeism owing to mental suffering, especially anxiety and despair and other notions (Gubbels, van der Put, & Assink, 2019).

Internationally, studies show that the problem of truancy at the level of primary school is a global phenomenon and hence deters the Sustainable Development Goal (SDGs)' Goal No.4, with agenda that 'No child is left behind' in achieving compulsory quality education at all levels, primary school inclusive come year 2030 (UNESCO, 2017).The report further shows the global picture that despite significant gains in primary school enrollment, UNESCO (2017a), the completion rates have remained between 76 and 77% since 1999, with sub-Saharan Africa, South, and West Asia far below North America and Western Europe (56%, 77%, and 94%, respectively, in 2013). The Education for All movement, a partnership of four UN agencies and the World Bank, recognizes inadequate completion as a major obstacle to universal primary education as per the latest Paper Commissioned report ofUNESCO; 2017b; UNESCO, 2015 in (Buckner, 2020).

The persistent gap between enrollment and completion rates and the stagnant, low completion rates in many low-income countries highlight the need to identify other promising policies and approaches that support students' ability to complete primary school (Earle, Milovantseva & Heymann, 2018). Countries of Asia within Pakstan, a study in twelve districts and 96 schools nationwide among community members and parents' evidence, thaevidence problem exists. In that country, possible truancy and dropout factors are grouped into socio-economic, physical, geographical, teacher, family, teaching learning material, administrative, child, and school facilities related (Dawood, Ghulam & Tahir, 2019). Authors: Plank, Mac Iver, Durham, Farley-Ripple, and Balfanz (2008), comment that truancy harms more an individual and his or her future prospects. High magnitude of truancy and absence affects the achievement of a school overall, slowing the rate of instruction, which harms all pupils (Mac

Iver *et al*., 2008). This problem also causes low standard test scores because absent pupils are always not present to learn key concepts and skills that are assessed on standardised exams as per (Gabb, 1994). On similar vein, Adeleye (1981) states that truancy is a threat to scholarly performance of a truant learner, because it exhibited to reduce the quality of gained education by a child.

Tanzania, before the onset of Western type of education, tribal education which was informal was the only way children learned adult rituals and responsibilities in the then Tanganyika hinterland. Tribal education was transmitted mainly through experiential learning and through an oral tradition. This was done at the family level and children effectively participated. Western education in Tanzania started way back before the country became German and British colony. Missionaries introduced western type of education in Tanzania in the mid-1800s. Actual systems of education were later introduced by the German and the British colonial government. To note here, is that western type of education was serving mainly the interests of colonial governments through training sons of chiefs to continue and support their indirect rule system. During this time levels of truancy was very low in high schools but higher in bush schools since education was a new thing and not a priority to many. However, during the British rule few managed to get education because of cost sharing of which many could not afford. If any western education credit is due, it should be given to the missionaries who deliberately and single-handedly taught many African children from all walks of life (Fundi, 2016). The issue of truancy in Tanzania encloses many of the broader problems that schools are encountering as a result of the reform process. Although truancy is the oldest educational problem in Tanzania, several factors may have combined to make it also a new problem; one that has required new responses. First, the restructuring of the school system has transferred the responsibility for dealing with truancy to those in power. Second, despite the increased overall retention rate to our school, there is evidence that a small group of young pupils continue to be estranged from the schooling syssystem ande persistent truants and lastly the new trend of social conservatism, evident in the discourse of parental responsibility, is tending to blame individual families for school truancy (Taylor, 2002).

The objective of secondary school education in Tanzania is to provide pupils with academic and vocational skills, but it is quite unfortunate that these objectives have not been fully achieved due to the high level of pupils' involvement in truant behaviors (Ibrahim, 2005).The issue of truancy in Tanzania schools has been of concern in a number of years in education sector and it is obstacles that hinder education progress for the years (Veronoka, 2013). The government tried to solve the problem by formulating Education

Training Policies since independence, for instance 1995 policy of education and the current is 2014. One of their major objectives of these policies was to increase and improve access and equity for all children giving authority to local levels and broadening the financial base for supporting education (Veronoka, 2013). In the light of this, several education programs were introduced such as SEDP and PEDP which were coupled with Fee-Free Basic Education policy to ensure that financial base is not a constraint that contributes to truancy. Despite this government effort, truancy has continued to be a problem in schools and has been the major cause of school dropouts.

Reports show that the possible explanation for the decrease of the enrolment in schools from 2010 to 2014 was due to the increased dropout rate led by truancy which was 75.5 percent in 2012. (B E S A, 2004-2017). Despite the efforts to reduce truancy in schools the problem is continuing. If this problem persists it will perpetuate dropout behaviour in primary schools. Due to this social problem, one may raise a general research question, how are social, economic, cultural, political factors perpetuating truancy behavior rising in the proposed district council of Mwanga? The brief global studies and literature reviewed in the background of this paper revealed little information about the known but hardly addressed the raised puzzle for Mwanga district council. This necessitated the need of the researcher to search for answers empirically to this broadest puzzle. This study was about economic, environmental and cultural contextual perpetuators hiking truancy in Mwanga district council studied primary schools.

Critically speaking, the reviewed South American study: Medina, Leite, Santos, when compared to this study, have similar focus on primary education on the problem of truancy. However, like the previous studies failed to attend the general question asking, how are social, economic, cultural, political factors perpetuating truancy behavior rising in the proposed district council of Mwanga? Thus, there was a knowledge gap necessitating this study to be done in Mwanga district council.

A critical review of the Australian study of Waller, McCallum and Gorringe (2018), when compared to this study reveals that both studies treat similar primary education on the problem of truancy. This study was conducted in Mwanga district where there are communities like Maasai, who need to be advocated in valuing education However, like the previous studies fails to directly pay attention to the riddle in the general question asking, how are social, economic, cultural, political factors perpetuating truancy behavior rising in the proposed district council of Mwanga? Thus, there was a knowledge gap necessitating this study to be done in Mwanga district council.

Artango and Galleto (2020) conducted a study on truancy landscape case of schooling in rural junior schools in Philippines. The sample size for that study was 61 grade 7 pupils' responses. Exploratory triangulated methods and documentary analysis technique were used in that study. Data were collected using a questionnaire checklist and an interview to validate the answers generated by the questionnaires. Frequency count, percent, and Chi-square test were used to treat the data collected. The study revealed that, in the student factors, the influence from peers, low intelligence, and ill-health were the three elements that made the respondents commit truancy. In the family factors, helping at home whether in the household chores or assisting in the family livelihood, no parental guidance, and educational support were the main reasons why pupils practiced truancy. The sample size used in this study was 61, which is relatively low. This study used 60 respondents to ensure that the conclusion would not be because of chance, variation like this study employed both descriptive nominal and ordinal data in this study current study did not use chi-square test.

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Lázaro, Urosa, Mota and Rubio (2020) conducted a study on primary education truancy and school performance in social exclusion settings Galiana Spain. The sample size for that study included 120 teachers and pupils in pre-school and primary school stages. That study used questionnaire to collect information, and data was analysed using descriptive statistics to understand the prevalence and types of truancy in a population of pupils with high social risk in Madrid city, studying the relationship between truancy and their school performance. Results showed a high level of prevalence in the types of truancy. Among these behaviors, 46.86% of pupils skipped entire days without a valid excuse and 42.51% did not usually do their homework. That study findings showed that overall, 60% had underachievement and great rates of curricular gap, 74.42% of pupils had repeated one grade and 27.91% repeated more than once. Generally, that study established a significant correlation between truancy and school performance.

A critical appraisal on this reviewed Spain study of Lázaro, Urosa, Mota and Rubio (2020), when compared to this study reveals that both have similar focus in the primary education on the problem of truancy. However, like the previous studies it also fails to directly answer the general question asking, how are social, economic, cultural, political factors perpetuating truancy behavior rising in the proposed district council of Mwanga? Thus, there were gaps which necessitated this study to be done in Mwanga district council.

2. Literature Review

This study was guided by Ecological Systems Theory developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner in **1979**. It explains how a child's development is shaped by interacting with environmental systems, including the microsystem, mesosystem, ecosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. These layers represent influences ranging from immediate family and school to cultural values and socio-economic conditions. The theory helps understand behaviors like truancy as outcomes of complex, multi-level interactions.

The main assumption of Ecological Systems Theory is that a child's development and behavior, such as truancy, are shaped by dynamic interactions within and between multiple environmental systems. These systems range from immediate settings (family, school) to broader societal and cultural contexts (laws, norms). The theory assumes that development cannot be understood in isolation but must be viewed within the context of the entire ecological environment, where each system influences and is influenced by others over time (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Recent studies support this view, showing that factors like poverty, parental involvement, and cultural attitudes toward education interact across systems to shape students' attendance and engagement (Hong et al., 2022; Mphale, 2014).

The Ecological Systems Theory was applicable in this study as it provided a comprehensive framework for understanding the multifaceted factors contributing to truancy in primary schools. By examining truancy through Bronfenbrenner's five interconnected systems, the study assessed how economic factors (e.g., family poverty, child labor) within the **ecosy**stem, environmental conditions (e.g., distance to school, unsafe neighborhoods) in the microsystem, and cultural **beliefs** (e.g., gender norms, value of education) influence students' attendance patterns. The theory allowed the researcher to explore not just individual or school-level factors, but also how broader social and policy environments interact to perpetuate absenteeism. Moreover, the chronosystem helped explain how these influences evolve over time, such as how economic hardships or cultural shifts impact schooling

decisions. Thus, the theory guided a holistic understanding of truancy as a result of layered, systemic influences (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Hong et al., 2022).

Some varying perpetuators have been empirically exhibited widely worldwide as exemplified in South America as follows. Medina, Leite, Santos, Alencar and Pereira (2015) report a study on child labor and the impact on the dropout of pupils from municipal schools in rural areas of the city of Manaus/Amazon in Brazil. The sample comprised pupils, parents, guardians and teachers from 10 municipal schools in the rural area of the city of Manaus. Questionnaires applied to pupils, parents, guardians and teachers to collect information on levels of awareness of the problem of child labor and its consequences in truancy. The collected data were analysed descriptively, and the results were presented in tabular form.

The findings of that study showed that the dropout of primary school pupils of municipal schools in the rural area of Manaus is caused by the absence of effective public policies and partly because awareness processes of the competent authorities and child labor was also noted to be a factor that prevents the quality of education as well as the permanence of the student. This study used multiple data collection instruments such as questionnaire, interview and document review in order to get enough information on amplifies of truancy and employed qualitative thick descriptions as well as ordinal and nominal categorical data.

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Waller, McCallum and Gorringe (2018) conducted a study on resisting the truancy trap: indigenous media and school attendance in 'remote' Australia. The study is a review which used a qualitative media analysis to show how a diversity of indigenous media has been used in different ways to build a culture of inclusivity, belonging and connection; give indigenous people a voice to reaffirm strengths in communities. The study also employed and Engoori process which is as an epistemological framework for examining how indigenous people are using their own media forms to reveal and resist truancy trap. That study sampled 357 articles to review from indigenous media related to school education from 2012 to 2017. The results showed that indigenous media provided tools for affected communities to resist the 'truancy trap' in mainstream policy and media discourses and facilitate strength-based

conversations about attendance and what constitutes 'successes in their schools and communities.

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Asia too, has some studies informing this study in Philippine.
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3. Methodology

The study employed a convergent parallel design under a mixed methods approach (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). With this research design, researchers collect, analyse and compares quantitative and qualitative data in a single phase to determine whether the results corroborate or contradict one another (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The targeted population had a total of 60 respondents. The sampling procedures employed in selecting the required sample for the study were probability and non-probability. Under non-probability sampling, a purposive sampling procedure was used to select the 19 headteachers and 1 District education officer, because of their uniqueness in the area. Under probability sampling, simple random sampling was used to select 40 Teachers from 10 public secondary schools to reduce biases. The study used a sample of 60 respondents based on Board Yamane. The study used Cronbach Alpha (with a reliability coefficient of 0.8) and content validity to assess the validity and reliability of the research instruments. As a result, the researchers were able to adjust the devices to suit accurate and trustworthy data. The validity of the research instruments in this study was ensured by the expert judgments to look for a consensus. The researchers' supervisors discussed and gave feedback regarding the validity of the research instruments. They indicated by a tick or cross for every item in the

questionnaire if it measured what it was supposed to measure or not. Data triangulation was ensured by the employment of the two approaches. Semi structured interview and questionnaire were used in data collection. Data from such respondents as heads of schools and DPEO were interrogated using interview guide questions. Open and closed-ended questionnaire was directed to teachers. The questionnaire's administered return was 100%. Analysis of quantitative data was done descriptively (mean and standard deviation) and then presented in a table with the help of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Qualitative data was coded as collected from the open-ended questionnaire and in-depth interview. Their responses were summarized to get categories and descriptions given in narratives. The researchers asked the Mwanga District Executive Director (DED) for permission to collect data from the target population while adhering to ethical guidelines, considering the participants' concerns about their privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity as well as their free and informed consent.

4. Results and Discussion

This section presents and discusses the findings of the study based on data collected from participants. The analysis focuses on key themes related to the economic, environmental and cultural perpetuators of truancy in Mwanga District Council.

Table 1 The Economic, Environmental, and Cultural Perpetuators of Truancy

	Schools	Economic Perpetuators	SA	A	N	D	SD	Total
	NJW P.S	Conducting Business	12	7	5	4	2	30
	MNG P.S		9	9	4	2	6	30
Total	**Frequency**		21	16	9	6	8	**60**
	Percent		**35**	**26.7**	**15**	**10**	**13.3**	**100**
	NJW P.S	Lack of food	17	2	5	4	2	30
	MNG P.S		10	8	3	3	6	30
	Frequency		27	10	8	7	8	**60**
Total	**Percent**		**45**	**16.7**	**13.3**	**11.7**	**13.3**	**100**
	Schools	**Environmental Perpetuator**	**SA**	**A**	**N**	**D**	**SD**	**Total**
	NJW P.S	Safe School Environment	14	12	1	2	1	30
	MNG P.S		16	14	0		0	30
Total	Frequency		30	26	1	2	1	60
	Percent		50	43.3	1.7	3.3	1.7	100
	NJW P.S	Boring Classes	0	8	18	4	0	30
	MNG P.S		2	7	13	5	3	30
	Frequency		3	15	31	9	2	60
Total	Percent		5	25	51.7	15	3.3	100
	NJW P.S	Strict Punishment	10	8	4	0	8	30
	MNG P.S		13	6	3		4	30
	Frequency		23	14	7	4	12	60
	Percent		38.3	23.3	11.7	6.7	20	100
Total	NJW P.S	Bullying	0	18	8	0	4	30
	MNG P.S		3	14	6	3	4	30
	Frequency		8	32	14	3	3	60
Total	Percent		13.3	53.3	23.3	5	5	
	Schools	**Cultural Perpetuator**	**SA**	**A**	**N**	**D**	**SD**	**Total**
	NJW P.S	Early morning waking up	12	10	0	8	0	30
	MNG P.S		8	8	4	4	6	30
	Frequency		20	18	4	12	6	**60**

Total	Percent		33.3	30	6.7	20	10	100
	NJW P.S	Sleeping late	4	0	10	16	0	30
	MNG P.S		1	2	9	18	0	30
	Frequency		5	2	19	34	0	**60**
Total	**Percent**		**8.3**	**3.3**	**31.7**	**56.7**	**0**	**100**

Source: Field Data (2024).

In Table 1 the reader sees that, the lack of food in the school environment is the leading economical perpetuator amplifying the smaller increase pace of truancy behavior in Mwanga district council studied. The findings in Table 1 show that the greatest majority of respondents strongly agreed that really the lack of food related category of economic factor within the school is a perpetuator at both studied primary schools in Mwanga district. In comparison one still sees that the lack of food in NJW primary school is a leading economical perpetuator of the truancy rise problem in the studied primary schools of Mwanga district. This was because the school had high frequency of respondents frequently agreeing strongly with the vey factor, while 17 at NJW, followed 10 at MNG P.S. This shows that at school coded NJW, the lack of food factor exists evidenced by the highest frequency consensus of respondents in both studied schools (Table 1).

Another identified category of economic perpetuator was conducting business. This economic facto was supported by respondents all two schools studied in Mwanga district. The researcher continued to interview the head teachers about the item related to the leading perpetuator for truancy rise. The head teacher coded (P1) of NJW primary school, was inquired to comment on whether an economic factor is one of the perpetuators hiking truancy in his school or not. When interviewed, the head teacher stated saying that; "…Well, some pupils like to engage in small businesses such as selling ice cream and buns in towns and on the street…" (P1NJW 08.08.2023). When the head teacher coded (P2) of MNG was interviewed about the potential economical perpetuators for truancy rising in his school, the leader had the following words to say;

> "…Most of the children come from low-income families, and they are involved in businesses such as selling wood charcoal and mangoes, which force them to miss school to some extent..." (P2 MNG 09.08.2023).

Another subcategory of e factors accelerating the studied behavior associated to environmental perpetuator in four groups such as safe school: environment, boring classes, strict classes, and bullying each other, assumed to hike truancy variations in schools NJW and MNG primary schools by using questionnaire tools. The findings are presented in Table 1 as follows. In Table 1, too one reads another category of environmental perpetuator for truancy rise in studied primary schools of Mwanga district. Table 1 showed that the moderate greater respondent's amount frequented agreeing strongly on that as a responsible perpetuator of the behaviour (Table 1).

On the other category of environment, the study results showed that significant few 30(50.00) percents of the respondents out of 60 studied research participants strongly agreed that safety of the school environment contributes to trigger truancy rise. While on the side of failure in studies, result in Table 1 shows that, significant few percent of respondents strongly agreed that it accelerates truancy behaviour rise in selected school in Mwanga district. Moreover, looking at Table 1 strict punishment at the selected two schools was accelerating the truancy.

Apart from the above perpetuator, results in Table 1 further show that, there are some cultural contextual perpetuators, which are responsible at hiking truancy in the selected schools in Mwanga district. These perpetuators include early morning wake up and sleeping late. Moreover, waking up early morning was considered to be the cultural perpetuators in regard to hiking truancy in Mwanga district.

In reference to those previous descriptive nominal and ordinal statistics in terms of frequencies and percents, one might rightly argue that in Table 1, conducting business in both schools was seen by very few respondents to be the perpetuator that is not leading children to go truant. Instead, it was considered as a moderate factor by both schools. The analyses and discussed as well as interpreted data and interviews quotes, study findings suggested that, after Covid 19 the number of truancies has been on the rise to both schools though at smaller pace. However, school B had greater extent of percent of truancy compared to the rest studied.

As one can read from the data analysed in the previous Table 1 and the interviews thick descriptions from school heads of schools coded P1(08.08.2023) and P2 (09.08.2023), were in consensus that both factors of conducting small business and lack of food due because of some parents' weak economy were the perpetuators hiking truancy in both schools within Mwanga district. As the

matter of comparison all school selected in this study showed that, boring classes, bullying, strict punishment, failure in studies and unsafe school environment were all contributing to increase in truancy in the selected schools in Mwanga district. However, NJW primary had showed more percentages in all the variables. This suggests that the school truancy hiking had been more influenced by the environmental factors as compared to the cohort school. These findings suggest that majority (60.00) percent of respondents were involved in the study considered waking up early as a bad culture and have is a perpetuator for truancy rise in the selected school in Mwanga district.

The data presented, analysed and discussed results from Table, 1 clearly show that sleeping late has little to do with truancy in the primary school selected at Mwanga district. These findings reflect other findings in similar studies conducted in Brazil, Europe, Australia and Asia (Medina, Leite, Santos, Alencar & Pereira, 2015; Waller, McCallum & Gorringe, 2018; Artango & Galleto, 2020; Lázaro, Urosa, Mota & Rubio, 2020). food problems and financial constraints (weak economy amongst the parents) caused th pupils to engage in the small business. Not only that but also, truancy was influenced by boring classes, bullying of the pupils and unsafe school environment. Nevertheless, these causes were of not same magnitude to all the schools as, NWJ appeared to have high percent in entire variables studied.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

This study finding suggested the conclusions that as a matter of comparison all schools studied unveiled showed that some evident less dominant perpetuators of truancy include boring classes, bullying, strict punishment, individual pupil's failure in primary school subjects, and unsafe school environment. Nevertheless, in some months of the year the degree of truancy and its reasons rise variedly in schools studied. Much more, the dominant perpetuators for truancy behaviour rising include lack of food problems within nearby school environment; irresponsible parents hindering their children to fully participate in school attendance. Consequently, some pupils get engaged into child laboring around Kenya border. Together those perpetuators contribute to an increase of truancy in primary schools studied in Mwanga district. The empirical evidence has revealed that that truancy in primary schools studied in Mwanga district council, is a real empirical observable phenomenon not whims Suffice to say that research participants recommended some measures to be taken to halt the undesired behaviour including

5.2 Recommendations

The study recommended the followings

1. The government should expand and consistently fund school feeding programs to ensure all pupils receive at least one nutritious meal during school hours. This will help address food insecurity, which is a major contributor to absenteeism and truancy.
2. The government, through local authorities and school committees, should introduce community-based awareness campaigns and enforce bylaws that promote responsible parenting and discourage child labour, particularly in border areas.
3. The government should invest in creating safe and child-friendly learning environments by addressing issues such as bullying, harsh punishment, and teacher-student relationships. Training programs on positive discipline and inclusive pedagogy should be prioritized for school staff.

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