

**UNDERSTANDING TRUANCY AMONG SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN THE
OFFINSO MUNICIPALITY OF GHANA**

ABSTRACT

The aim of this descriptive survey was to identify the factors influencing truancy among Senior High school students in the Offinso Municipality of Ghana. There were 429 data-producing respondents comprising heads of institutions, teachers, students and parents who responded to the questionnaire. From the responses, we found that the sources of truancy among the students included the teachers, parents, school environment and the students themselves. The study results show that peer influence is the most common factor causing senior high school students in the municipality to be truants. Based on the study findings, we recommend, among others, intensified supervision of both students and teachers as well as strengthening Guidance and Counselling services among high schools in the Municipality and elsewhere.

Keywords: behaviour, students, senior high school, social, teachers, truancy, Ghana.

1.0 Introduction

It is true that the younger generation of every society constitutes the future of that society. For this cause, society is expected to transmit its values to its young ones. This is a sure way that society can be sustained and developed (Duodu, 2003). Donkor, Issaka, and Asante (2013) on traditional education in Ghana pointed out that the focus of education should be on use as opposed to being for ornamentation. This explains why traditional education was for both individual and group efficiency by preparing the whole person for active participation in the affairs of the society. This functional education led to social reconstruction and improvement. It was not education merely for the transmission of cultural heritage. Rather, learning was by living and doing (Donkor et al., 2013).

Education has been described as the means to prepare individuals to contribute to societal development and transformation. That is why communities that know the importance of education see community participation in education as a necessary social capital for realizing the benefits education affords (Asare, 2011). Formal education in Ghana, with a focus on turning out people with the requisite knowledge and skills to contribute to the development of society and the perpetuation of Ghanaian ideals and values, by no means deviates from the aims of traditional education. For example, formal education, through the school system, ensures students' acquisition of knowledge and skills to be functional members of society who work to earn a living for themselves while contributing to socio-economic development (Duodu, 2003). The presupposition is that the educational system of a country exists mainly to equip its citizens with the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that

help them make meaningful contributions to the development of their nation. The school therefore becomes an important institution that is crucial to every country's development. Zande (2011) thus asserted that education helps to strengthen the economy. To him, education is an investment in manpower: increasing the flow of skills, assisting people to acquire new technologies; destroying traditional attitudes which so impede progress, and linking knowledge with methods of production (Zande, 2011). With such a purpose schooling becomes the central institution through which the young may find reasons to educate themselves (Collins & Halverson, 2018).

Reasonably, education is the primary means of bringing about change and socio-economic development in countries around the world (Asare, 2015; Essuman & Ringdal, 2003). By implication, the students in our schools will need new and powerful capabilities for their lives in this century, and schools have a crucial part to play in helping them acquire those skills and qualities they will need to strive in a world in which we can no longer predict for them. It is in view of this challenge of education that the committee appointed to evaluate the educational reforms in Ghana in 2002 suggested the purpose of Senior High School (SHS) education in the twenty-first century, among other things to:

- i. provide an opportunity for further education and training and introduce students to a variety of relevant occupational skills necessary for national human resource development;
- ii. understand the environment and the need for its sustainability, and
- iii. inculcate a sense of discipline and selflessness in students (Report of the President's Committee on Education Reforms in Ghana, 2002, p. 60).

Linking education with national development, Contreras and Plaza (2010) stressed that the higher the level of education of the workforce, the greater their contribution to productivity and growth. In this sense, education is perceived primarily as the transmission of knowledge from one generation to the other and as an instrument for promoting and controlling change, for transmitting national values, skills and as a medium for incorporating into a rapidly changing national society typified by pluralism in relation to beliefs and values, and the individual's attachment to one or many of these (Akummey, 2003). Similarly, education serves the purpose of uniting concerned people for the right upbringing of its pupils and the improvement of national life (Sahlberg, 2021). The above views provide a justification for why countries devote a significant percentage of their national budgets to the education of the younger generation. For instance, a 2017 publication in the People's Daily Graphic featured the minister of education disclosing in an interview that since the rollout of the Free SHS programme in September 2017, the Government of Ghana has spent over seven billion Ghana cedis (about 1.12 billion US dollars) to enable 1,261,495 Ghanaian children gain access to Senior High Schools. The minister added that the amount excluded the provision of basic infrastructure for SHS, salaries of teachers, the provision of books, and other such things (The People's Daily Graphic: 23rd July 2022, p. 4).

School attendance is indifferently imperative for the learning and acquisition of requisite knowledge and skills for societal development. Hence, the Education Act of Britain (1944) states, inter alia, that "no parent has the right to deprive the child of the advantage of full-time education" (p. 28). The Act led to the introduction of school attendance as a means of making both parents and children accountable for pupils and students not attending school. Ghana's Education Act of 2008 makes provision for fee-free and compulsory education for all children of school age and specifies that parents are responsible for complying with this Act. It is evident from the above that the value and pertinence of education make it a core concern of Ghanaian society and also, provide substantial evidence

of the nation's commitment to ensuring that the young are provided and equipped with effective and useful knowledge and skills. Such a drive-in education not only helps the young to contribute to socio-economic development and transformation (Asare, 2011) but it becomes a path towards occupational prestige for individuals (Pederson et al., 2017).

Notwithstanding the undergirding principle that education forms the bedrock of societal advancement and constitutes the wealth of nations (Asare, 2011; Harbison, 1973), Duodu (2003) observed that some pupils in the Ghanaian school system do not avail themselves of all the opportunities the school and the nation offer for their education. Their attendance at school is on and off. They become truants in the process.

When young people start skipping school, they are telling their parents, school officials and the community – indeed all stakeholders in education – that they are in trouble and need help. Given the purpose of training students coupled with the cost of educating them, truancy among students should be a matter of grave concern to parents and school authorities. However, evidence from research indicates that many children who are supposedly expected to be in schools on a regular basis for effective upbringing rather find themselves in such commercial activities as newspaper deliverers, sales personnel, part-time workers, hackers and in some cases full-time workers (Hack-Polay et al., 2020; Lambert et al., 2012). The researchers who have attempted to find the cause(s) of these problems have often presented divergent findings. On the one hand, there is the assertion that it evolves as a result of the poor economic conditions within which parents of such children find themselves (Zande, 2011); on the other hand, there is the view that it is the cumulative result of peer pressure (Duodu, 2003).

The findings of Maliki, Ngban and Ibu (2009) among teachers and parents in Bayelsa State of Nigeria that youth leaving school without a diploma were significantly more likely to become involved in chronic delinquency than graduates underscore the urgent need for investigations to ascertain the actual factors responsible for students' absenteeism. This is important to help find a solution to it or at least minimize the incidence in our schools. No part of the community large or small, urban or rural, prosperous or poor is completely free from the menace (Davis, 2017). Despite calls from numerous stakeholders, student absenteeism is still a concern in the Offinso municipality. In a recent news item captioned "Education standards falling at Offinso" on myjoyonline.com on 23rd August 2017, truancy was identified as the culprit. In this report, education authorities in the municipality bemoaned a huge drop in school attendance. They described the situation as unfortunate and worrying since truancy among the students was alarming (Gyimah, 2017). The specific causes of truancy among students in the Offinso municipal area need to be identified. The forms truancy takes among the students are not known. The strategies that could help mitigate truancy in the municipality have not been explored. These issues are critical to understanding the impact of truancy among SHS students in the Offinso municipality of the Ashanti Region of Ghana. They therefore form the basis for this study.

Significance of the Study

Although the study is primarily directed at teachers and staff of senior high schools in the Offinso municipality, school counsellors, parents and other stakeholders in education could benefit from the findings by taking cognizance of how their activities link with students' attendance and affect the socio-economic and politico-cultural dynamics of their contexts. In particular, the study highlights the role of stakeholders in education in tackling truancy among senior high schoolers and students of other levels of schooling and the

measures to take to improve school attendance towards the realization of the aims of education for the country.

1.2 Research Questions

The researchers sought to answer the following questions:

- a. How prevalent is truancy in Senior High Schools in the Offinso Municipality of Ghana?
- b. What factors contribute to truancy in senior high schools in the municipality?

2.0 Review of related literature

2.1 Theoretical framework

Truant students do not all behave in the same way. For example, Reid (1999) identified three types of truancy among students – absence from specific lessons (in which case students fail to be present for a particular subject period on the timetable), post-registration truancy (students go to school and get marked for being present then leave school), and parental-condoned truancy (i.e., students miss school/class with permission from parents/guardians). Reid (1999) also argued that there are four categorizations of truants namely, traditional, psychological, institutional and generic. Traditional truants who are typically shy have low self-worth and isolate themselves because they do not see the school environment as welcoming or accommodating. Such truants miss school because of issues relating to others or challenges they have with the school environment. Psychological truants mostly miss school because of emotional issues and demonstrate their truancy through behaviours such as laziness, illness, timidity, fearing people or things or any other socially unacceptable unwillingness to do things because they appear to have emotional problems. Reid described the institutional truant as one who leads their peers in some shape or form in their cliques. Such truants are not usually absent from school; however, they may engage in such antisocial behaviours as bullying and harassment that put them at odds with expected norms and thus remove them from class or school. The generic truant is amorphous in that s/he may exhibit some of the behaviours of the first three categories. In addition, s/he may behave in unpredictable patterns and fail to justify why they are absent from school (Reid, 1999).

Rumberger's push-and-pull factors to truancy

According to Rumberger (1987), factors that influence students to truant are in two main forms: push and pull effects. Push effects relate to factors in the school that hinder or foster students' ability to form endearing relationships with members of the school thus influencing students' school-sense feelings of belonging or otherwise (Rumberger, 1987). The push effects come in varied forms and may include non-conformance to rules and regulations, absenteeism, and negative attitudes toward school work. Rumberger described the push effects as internal school factors, which make the school unattractive to students and negatively move students to want to disengage from school. Such factors include school climate, context and structure as well as students' inability to cope with the demands of academic work due to low intelligence, low grades or failure in school (Farmer & Payne, 1992; Loeber & Dishion, 1983; Rumberger, 1995; West & Farrington, 1973; Wolfgang, Figlio & Sellin, 1972), poor study habits, subjects not interesting to students and students assuming that a grade level does not satisfy their interest and need (Titone, 1982) or not being popular in school (Bonikowske, 1987). On the other hand, are the pull effects that Rumberger (1987) described as being external factors that transcend students' internal feelings and

worldviews but relate to their constantly evolving milieu or social environment resulting from continuous interactions with individuals and institutions such as the family, government agencies, peers, religion, workmates, educational system (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2003).

It is worth noting that the categorizations of the push and pull effects are not exhaustive, permanent designations nor are they stereotypical. In other words, individuals in varied ways and at different times act in ways that influence or amend their energies, role performances, and relationships and engagements that affect their reaction to the goings on and resultant behaviours, which may lead to conflicts and conflicting personalities. The struggle to find balance and stability could potentially lead individuals to cultivate a sense of purpose that steers what they do (Schriver, 2005) and ultimately define whether or not to be truant. It is therefore important for school authorities to have strategies that cater to the adjustments that adolescents (i.e., high schoolers) would deal with while addressing their cognitive, physical and psychosocial needs for their total development. In this regard, Ogden and Germinario (1994) noted that adolescents could better cope with and adjust to the pressures of life and develop acceptable personalities and behaviour patterns if they are helped to satisfy the following seven needs (arranged alphabetically): competency and achievement, diversity, meaningful participation in school and community, physical activity, positive social interaction with peers and adults, self-exploration, and structure and clear limits.

Social bonds are important as they tend to influence patterns of behaviour and acceptance. The assumption is that weak or missing social bonds imply weak influence or no one to influence students away from unacceptable behaviours. This worldview aligns with our assumption of truancy among students. Thus, the discourse in this paper is influenced by Social Control theory (SCT), which focuses on determining but also understanding why individuals follow society's mores and rules, as opposed to ideologies concerned with determining why people do not willingly want to follow rules and regulations (Gentle-Genitty, 2008; Curran & Renzetti 2001; Goode, 2022). According to SCT, delinquent behaviours emerge when individuals' bonds or ties to conventional social institutions such as the school, family or community are weakened, making people more vulnerable to the temptations of delinquency (Curran & Renzetti 2001). One SCT theorist is Travis Hirschi (1969) who argued that delinquency emerges when social bonds are weakened or broken entirely (Curran & Renzetti 2001; Elmesky & Marcucci, 2023).

According to Hirschi (1969), individuals are born with the tendency to act in selfish and aggressive ways that lead to delinquent behaviours; however, social bonds end up controlling individuals' behaviours when they attempt to engage in deviant acts. Hirschi found that interpersonal connections in the formation of a relationship are important factors in delinquency, adding that students' disengagement and truancy are somehow a function of a lack of opportunities for connection and social bonding at school. Put differently, there is no one to influence the student away from negative behaviours when these bonds are absent or weak (Brown, Trevio, & Harrison, 2005) – a situation that Toby (1957) referred to as a lack of stakes in conformity. Inasmuch as there is a presumed relationship between social bonds and school engagement and truancy, the relationship may be influenced by certain school factors that help or hinder this relationship within the school (Eith, 2005).

Hirschi (1969) advanced four social bond elements that foster or hamper truant behaviours among students, namely *attachment*, *commitment*, *involvement*, and *belief*. Attachment, Hirschi argued, represents an individual's sensitivity and empathy toward others as well as connectedness to prosocial others and institutions. For Hirschi, students who formed close attachments to their parents and schools would experience greater levels of social control – concluding that students with strong attachments to social institutions are less

likely to truant and violate school policies than students with weak attachments because they are actively engaged and have a high stake in the school.

The second of Hirschi's social bond elements is commitment – the time and effort invested in conventional activities such as peer relationships and school activities. Commitment can be viewed in terms of the social relationships that people value and would not want to jeopardize by engaging in deviant behaviour (Hirschi, 1969). Students who feel committed and invested in school through academics, extracurricular activities, leadership opportunities, and relationships with a good teacher or peer group may be less likely to be truant. In essence, when people know they have something to lose, they are less likely to misbehave (Hirschi, 1969).

The third type of social bond is involvement which refers to what people do to keep themselves busy and deterred from delinquent behaviour. The more invested and engaged students are in prosocial, structured activities, such as school, club or sports teams, the less likely they are to engage in deviant activities, such as truanting, because they are too busy (Hirschi, 1969). This engagement prevents idling for unwholesome outcomes including engaging in deviant behaviours.

Belief is the fourth and final type of social bond. To Hirschi, belief serves as the moral conscience of a group of people – determining what is right and wrong. The assumption is that the greater the importance of moral values to a person, the less likely they will engage in deviant behaviours such as truancy. According to Hirschi (1969), truants do not yet believe that education is key to success and that without education they likely will fail in life or only have limited opportunities. In sum, Hirschi argued that the greater the presence of the four constructs of attachment, commitment, involvement and belief, the greater the level of social bonding and the resultant conformity to acceptable behaviours thus reducing truancy among students.

2.2 Prevalence of Truancy in Senior High Schools in Ghana

Truancy is a repeated practice of avoiding or running away from school or class to engage in some activities or have one's own way, sometimes without the knowledge of school authorities. The various definitions used in this study perceive truancy among other things as absence or staying away without permission (Jager & Denessen, 2015). Cutting classes regularly (Traphagan, Kucsera, & Kishi, 2010); absence from school for whatever reason "without leave" (Gyansah, Soku & Esilfie, 2015), absence from school purely on students' own initiative, unexcused absence of students (Lenhoff & Pogodzinski 2018; Durlak et al., 2011), lateness; refusal to attend school; on-and-off attendance of school; intentionally refusing to return to school after break and staying away from school during co-curricular activities (Duodu, 2003).

Generally, truancy is more of attitude or a 'delinquency' or at least a "difficulty of adjustment" than a mere non-attendance (Dembo et al., 2014, p. 22). According to Gyansah, Soku and Esilfie (2015), in big towns and cities in Ghana, students find it very easy to play truant. Some students leave home on the pretext of going to school but they would never reach school. Others do go to school only to vanish after a few hours' stay. Kanga (2015) noted that persistent truancy affects school attendance in Ghana and concluded with the suggestion that teachers look for ways to entice students to enjoy learning through mirth and other interesting learning activities.

Truancy among students in Ghanaian schools is a confirmed phenomenon. For example, Duodu (2003) identified five different manifestations of truancy occurring at different periods in the life of truant students. These manifestations are:

- i. Persistent or regular lateness to school;
- ii. Deliberate refusal of students to send materials needed to school for work;

- iii. On-and-off attendance at school;
- iv. Running away from co-curricular activities such as sports, games, gardening and school-community labour;
- v. Students deliberately staying at home **of** their own volition when parents or guardians are unable to provide some school requirements.

2.3 Factors Contributing to Truancy among Senior High School Students

Evidence from literature shows that there is no simple explanation for why students are unjustifiably absent from school. In a 2007 study on determinants of children's school attendance in Ghana, Sackey reported that truancy was prevalent in schools and that tutors, parents, administrators, the students themselves and the school environment were contributing factors to students' truant behaviours. Different factors, therefore, account for the existence and persistence of truancy among high school students. The literature on truancy is replete with such variables as personal, family, home, neighbourhood and school factors are likely causal factors.

i. Home Factors Responsible for **Students'** Truancy in Schools

Every student belongs to a home which constitutes their primary and immediate environment. The influence of the home on an individual's behaviour, attitudes toward and actions **toward** other people and society as they grow through childhood, adolescence and adulthood therefore cannot be underestimated (Laurence & Bentley, 2016). A student's behaviour and attitude in school are thus intricately linked with their home environment. In a discussion of ways to manage truancy, Duodu (2003) noted that the children he studied demonstrated some behaviour disorders which are the outcomes of parental rejection, inconsistency, lack of love or over-protection that they lacked sufficient motivation to accept their own society's demands and code of right and wrong. Similarly, Kanga (2015, p.12) observed that home factors contributing to truancy among students include;

- a. Attitude of parents to students' schooling.
- b. The relationship between poverty in the home and **a** child's school attendance.
- c. Child labour and the student's attendance.

ii. School Factors that Contribute to Students' Truancy

The environment of a school obviously affects the students positively or negatively. The observation is that a school with a poor, uncondusive and unfriendly learning environment usually hardly attracts its' students' attention or enhances their engagement (Akummey, 2003). For example, a **school's** environment and surroundings as well as academic performance can be justifiable **causes** for poor school attendance (Lenhoff & Pogodzinski, 2018). Schools that are old, deprived, inadequately equipped and badly staffed are often characterized by over-crowding in **classrooms** resulting in impaired movement in class and lack of learning and recreational facilities (Norton & Hathaway, 2008). This situation makes students feel uncomfortable and bored. They become more susceptible to distractions, learning impairment, dislike of school and uncooperative behaviour at school. Many of them resort to truancy (Hack-Polay et al., 2020). Again, a repeated absence of a **teacher** in the classroom may induce in students a similar behaviour that would make them **truant**. Teachers' negative attitude to students, often leading to **abusive and provocative** language contributes immensely to student's truancy (Duodu, 2003; **Lakeman et al., 2022**).

Balfanz and Fox (2014) argued that unwholesome behaviour and utterances towards especially low-achieving students in the school in light of the student's response or reaction

sooner or later could make students have low self-worth. If such unwelcoming comments and behaviours are not checked, affected students could possibly resort to not attending classes or school regularly or on time and ultimately if appropriate help is not offered to address students' concerns could lead to truancy. To them, education failure evokes negative responses from important people in the child's life including teachers and prospective employers. These reactions help to solidify feelings of social inadequacy and, in some cases, lead **underachieving** students into a pattern of chronic delinquency, which could affect students' attendance **at** school or make them turn out truants (Andrade et al., 2022). Sadly, as Jager and Denessen (2015) asseverated, dull students feel a hopeless failure – their life may be one of humiliating **rounds** of rebuke, disgrace and punishment. Soon they may come out to dread the daily journey of schooling and that they might be tempted to play truant since that appears to bring them some freedom and opportunities to **enjoy** mischief.

Student factors that contribute to truancy

As we earlier highlighted, there is no simple explanation for truancy among students in schools. Similarly, factors that influence this unreasonable absence from school are many and different, and **variables** within the individual students themselves may contribute to the behaviour. Lenhoff and Pogodzinski (2018) attributed students' truancy to a number of interrelated factors common with low-performing students. For instance, they found that academically weak students rarely learn how to manage homework assignments nor do they come to class for regular class work. Such low performers often assume that attendance does not make any difference and that being in school does not increase their chances of passing **examinations** or improving academically. Truancy therefore becomes a common characteristic of students who struggle with academic work.

A similar observation has been presented by Durlak et al., (2011) that the school presents a set of academic demands on students. Consequently, low-academic achievers, as a result of failing to meet academic requirements, may become frustrated, **tension-ripped** and befuddled, resort to truancy and finally give up schooling. Put differently, **for** students who constantly are unable to cope with the rigours of academic work, the classroom becomes a place of frustration, discouragement and disgrace. Such students give up all hope and reject the education system, play truant initially and finally drop out of school.

Within the context of the school, peer group influence has also been reported to be a major factor that determines whether students will go to school or not (Ali et al., 2009; **Wu & Zhang, 2023**). These authors added that since adolescents like to do what their friends do if they see their peers dropping out of school, for example, to get work to do to earn money, they are persuaded to do **the** same. Such occurrence is indicative that though there are home and school factors that are responsible for truancy among students, the students themselves may be a factor contributing to truancy.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This cross-sectional descriptive, non-experimental survey involved the systematic collection and presentation of data to give a vivid picture of the event under study. Descriptive non-experimental surveys allow researchers to gather data at a particular point in time with the intention of describing the nature of existing conditions, or identifying standards against which existing conditions can be compared or determine the relationship that exists between specific events (Rahi, Alnaser, & Abd-Ghani, 2019). Descriptive surveys help in making **generalizations** and inferences from a sample to a whole population in terms of characteristics, attitudes or behaviours of the population (Cozby & Bates, 2012; Creswell,

2014). Given the purpose of the study, a descriptive survey was considered an appropriate research design that would permit the researchers to make inferences and draw conclusions from the study and to make recommendations to inform future actions and research to improve school attendance and persistence among students in general and high school students in particular.

3.2 Population

The population for the study encompassed all SHS in the Offinso Municipality of the Ashanti Region of Ghana. The target population included students, teachers, parents and school administrators (i.e., headmasters/headmistresses and assistant headmasters/mistresses) of the three senior high schools in the Offinso Municipality. Because of being students or their role in working with students, these individuals were believed to have been very familiar with student attendance and truant behaviours and thus could provide information to help in understanding the problem under study.

3.3 Sample and Sampling Procedure

The number of individuals selected from the three schools was 300 students, 60 teachers, three headmasters/mistresses, six assistant headmasters/mistresses and 60 parents. Thus, bringing the total study sample to 429. The researchers intentionally excluded first-year SHS students from the study because they were experiencing senior high school education for the first time and were still getting accustomed to their new surroundings and routines. The class lists of SHS 2 and 3 students of the three schools were used to determine the sampling frame for each school. A systematic random sampling technique was then used to select 100 students from each school – giving 300 student respondents.

Also, in each school, the headmaster and two assistant heads were purposefully selected because of their role in leading the schools and being responsible for the day-to-day running of the schools. They could thus provide information on student attendance and truancy. A convenient sampling technique was used to select 20 teachers from each of the three schools due to their busy schedules. A random sampling technique was used to select the parents/guardians. Sixty respondents were selected from the Parent Association (P.A.) (i.e., 20 from each school). The names of “day” students (who resided at their various homes and commuted to school daily) were used to represent their parents/guardians. In each school, 20 names of these students were selected randomly and for each name selected the parents/guardians were invited to participate in the study.

3.4 Instrumentation, data collection and procedure

The instrument used for obtaining the data was a self-developed, self-administered questionnaire. The items used for all the four categories of respondents were invariably the same. This was done in order to easily ascertain the correlation among the opinions of the four different groups of respondents. The items were predominantly close-ended and pre-coded questions. According to Phellas, Bloch and Seale (2011), pre-coded questions have the advantage of being easy to administer, and they help to produce fully completed questionnaires and avoid irrelevant answers. However, the opportunity was also given for respondents to write additional responses where necessary.

Apart from the demographic information the rest of the items were categorized into four sections and arranged on a four-point Likert-type scale. The statements were arranged in descending order from 4 to 1, “4” being strong agreement and “1” indicating strong disagreement. Section “A” involved questions on the prevalence of truancy in the schools.

Section “B” was on school factors that contribute to truancy while sections “C” and “D” were on home factors and student factors respectively.

Three data collection assistants who were fluent in the local languages of the communities (Akan, Ewe, Ga and Hausa), after receiving a week's training were used in the questionnaire administration and data collection. Most (88.1%) of the 429 respondents had basic education and as such could read and answer the questionnaire items on their own. The few (11.9%) less literate or illiterate ones who could not read and answer on their own had the items interpreted to them in the language of their choice. The research assistants then recorded their responses in English. The administration of the questionnaire took five weeks (from 10th February 2022 to 25th March 2022).

3.5 Piloting the instrument

The researchers subjected the self-developed questionnaire to both validity and reliability measures. Validity is the extent to which a test measures what it purports to measure. The validity of the questionnaire items was determined through expert advice. Three reviewers whose experience and research interests aligned with this study helped to determine both the face and content validity of the items. Two of them, quantitative methodologists, were university professors in Educational Psychology. The third reviewer was a mixed methodologist professor in Educational Leadership. Their critique revealed errors and modifications that needed to be attended to improve the relevance of the items to generate data to answer the research questions. In the process, all corrections, omissions, grammatical errors and ambiguities were addressed. The review was followed by a pilot study in Aduman Senior High School in the Afigya Kwabre District of Ghana which shares similar characteristics with the study area. Only a drawn boundary for demarcating the two districts for political and administrative purposes separates them. Apart from the fact that the study district and the pilot area shared a common boundary, the two areas have similar traditional or cultural contexts including language and occupation.

Reliability refers to the extent to which the results of a study can be repeated or replicated under the same or similar circumstances (Koo & Li, 2016). The reliability of the instruments was determined through test re-test. The reliability co-efficients for the questionnaires for students, teachers, administrators and parents were 0.696, 0.724, 0.732 and 0.783 respectively. The pilot study revealed that certain statements in the questionnaire were not well understood by the respondents and therefore not well answered. Such questions were reframed using simple language (or were reworded) to make it easier for the respondents to understand and answer appropriately. Those that were not well structured were revised to prevent ambiguity or misunderstanding. For instance, under the home-related factors that may contribute to truancy, the statement “using students for domestic duties” had to be changed to “the engagement of students in economic activities in the home (e.g., trading and farming)”. Also, the statement “there is dislike for a particular teacher” that was initially placed under school-related factors had to be moved to the students’ related factors.

3.6 Data Collection Procedure

After obtaining site and parental permissions, the researchers supported by three data collection assistants administered the questionnaires to the respondents. The students selected for the study agreed to meet the teams at various times and school locations that were convenient for them to answer the items. The teachers and school heads were given the questionnaires at their offices or chosen locations in their schools such as the staff common room and places of residence. Parent respondents preferred to meet the research teams on the school premises. Following permission from school authorities, the parents involved in the

study were assembled at the assembly hall, for a more convenient and relaxed atmosphere. To get the parents' consent, separate invitation letters bearing the endorsements of the respective school heads were sent to them through their wards. All participants gave their written consent before completing the questionnaires, and they were assured of confidentiality and the freedom to leave the study at will without any repercussions. For this reason, all the questionnaires were responded to on the spot and returned to the researchers immediately after completion. The return rate of the questionnaires was 100% for school administrators, teachers, parents and students.

3.7 Data Analysis Procedure

The responses to the various items were coded and transferred to a broadsheet taking cognizance of their serial numbers. We used SPSS version 23.0 software for data entry and analysis. The researchers analysed the data research question by research question as they determined frequency counts, percentages, means and standard deviations of the dataset to help them to answer each research question.

4.0 Results and Discussion

Research Question One: How prevalent is truancy in Senior High Schools in the Offinso Municipality of Ghana? A summary of the respondents' views to help answer this question is presented in Table 1:

Results in Table 1 reveal that the respondents in this study believed that truancy existed in all three SHSs in the Offinso municipality. All nine administrators (i.e., school heads and their assistants) strongly agreed that there were regular absentees in their schools and that the absentees had no permission to be away from school. Most of the teacher respondents, 96.6% (that is, $\bar{X} = 3.59$; $STD = 0.72$) expressed the view that regular student absenteeism was common in their schools, and all the teachers 100% (that is; $\bar{X} = 3.69$, $STD = 0.75$) accepted that majority of the absentees did not obtain permission. Similarly, both students, 96% (that is, $\bar{X} = 3.33$; $STD = 0.62$) and parents, 92.6% (that is, $\bar{X} = 3.52$; $STD = 0.77$) agreed with the school authorities that absenteeism without permission was a common behaviour of some SHS students in the Offinso municipality. On whether some students "leave school before school formally closes" and, or whether "some students report to school late", almost all respondents (90% to 100%, that is $\bar{X} > 3.11$) agreed that the two problems of cutting school or classes and lateness existed among the students. From the results presented in Table 1, it is obvious that respondents in this study are of the opinion that there is truancy among SHS students in the Offinso Municipality.

It is evident in the light of the definitions of truancy that regular absenteeism, leaving school earlier than formal closure, regularly reporting to school (or class) late and being absent without permission – characteristic of some students in the SHS for this study – are different shades of truancy (Hirschi, 1969; Reid, 1999; Rumberger, 1987). This finding aligns with earlier observations by Duodu (2003) and Kanga (2015) that truancy is not only a mere reality in schools in Ghana but more importantly, a recurrent problem constantly undermining student learning. Thus, truancy is admittedly prevalent in SHS in the Offinso municipal area. Also, the finding from this study regarding the different natures of truancy is indicative that various versions of truancy exist and that parents and authorities of educational institutions must endeavour to understand all the varying forms and take measures to address them.

Table 1: Prevalence of Truancy

Statement		SA N(%)	A N(%)	D N(%)	SD N(%)	Mean	STD
Some of the students are regular absentees	Administrators	9(100)	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	4.00	0.67
	Teachers	32(53.3)	26(43.3)	2(3.3)	0(0.0)	3.59	0.72
	Students	112(37.3)	172(57.3)	12(4.0)	4(1.3)	3.31	0.65
	Parents	36(59.3)	20(33.3)	4(7.4)	0(0.0)	3.52	0.84
Some of the students leave school often before school formally closes	Administrators	5(55.6)	4(44.4)	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	3.65	0.66
	Teachers	44(73.3)	10(16.7)	4(6.7)	2(3.3)	3.69	0.56
	Students	154(51.3)	136(45.4)	6(2.0)	4(1.3)	3.47	0.58
	Parents	34(56.7)	22(37.0)	4(7.4)	0(0.0)	3.48	0.69
Some of the students often report to school late	Administrators	1(11.1)	8(88.9)	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	3.11	0.73
	Teachers	40(66.7)	20(33.3)	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	3.67	0.76
	Students	108(36.0)	184(61.3)	4(1.3)	4(1.3)	3.32	0.71
	Parents	29(48.1)	31(51.9)	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	3.48	0.79
Most often, students absent themselves from school without permission	Administrators	3(33.3)	6(66.7)	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	3.33	0.61
	Teachers	36(60.0)	24(40.0)	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	3.69	0.75
	Students	114(38.0)	174(58.0)	8(2.7)	4(1.3)	3.33	0.62
	Parents	36(59.3)	20(33.3)	4(7.4)	0(0.0)	3.52	0.77

Notes. SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree; STD= Standard Deviation

Research Question Two: What factors contribute to truancy in senior high schools in the Offinso municipality?

The responses gathered from the administrators, teachers, students and parents to answer this question are presented in Tables 2, 3 and 4.

Table 2 is a description of the student factors contributing to truancy. As shown in Table 2, the highest factor contributing to truancy as perceived by each group of respondents was peer influence, as the acceptance was above 90% (that is, $\bar{X} > 3.59$). While teachers and parents perceived students dislike for particular teachers as the second commonest reason ($\bar{X}=3.5$; $STD=0.64$ and $\bar{X}=3.5$; $STD=0.73$ respectively) why SHS students in the Offinso municipality were truant, the administrators and students perceived the lack of interest in school as the second reason ($\bar{X}=3.4$; $STD=0.72$ and $\bar{X}=3.25$; $STD=0.82$ respectively). Also, a significant factor that caused students to be truant was low academic performance, as 56 (92.6%) of parent respondents indicated.

Table 2, however, shows that though many students accepted the first two items (lack of interest in school and dislike for co-curricular activities) as student factors, they were not as popular as the other factors. For example, whereas 182 (60.7%) and 210 (70.0%) of students accepted that these factors influenced students to be truants, there were remarkable numbers of 118 (39.3%) and 90 (30.0%) of the students who rejected these two as factors contributing to truancy. In the case of lack of interest in school, more than a third of the respondents did not accept it as a factor and almost a third also did not accept dislike for co-curricular activities as an issue affecting students' attendance at school. It is true that students perceive factors influencing truant behaviours from different angles. Thus, a one-size approach to understanding truancy or dealing with it to increase student persistent and school completion would not yield expected outcomes unless the approach is targeted in nature – including social bond strategies (Eith, 2005; Gentle-Genitty, 2008; Hirschi, 1969).

Also, it is observed from Table 2 that two student factors: students' lack of interest and the influence of peers received 100% confirmation by all the 60 teachers and 9 administrators on student factors fostering truancy. This finding affirms earlier observations by researchers that some students are truant as a consequence of their disinterest in learning and having a negative attitude towards school and particular subjects (Lenhoff & Pogodzinski, 2018; Rumberger, 1995; West & Farrington, 1973). This finding also aligns with the observation by Sackey (2007) that there are groups in schools in which it is mandatory that 'members' be scornful of the school and rebellious towards teachers. This attitude of 'members' in peer groups often manifests in constant truancy in schools (Kanga, 2015).

Similarly, the responses to the students' factors that induced truancy are not surprising as they reflect the findings of Gyansah et al. (2015); Jager and Denessen (2015) as well and Ali et al. (2009) that academic failure, peer influence and students' own attitudes are very important variables in relation to truancy among student

Table 2: Respondents' view of student factors contributing to truancy

Statement		SA N(%)	A N(%)	D N(%)	SD N(%)	Mean	STD
There is lack of interest in school	Administrators	5(55.6)	4(44.4)	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	3.4	0.72
	Teachers	24(40.0)	36(60)	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	3.4	1.52
	Students	64(21.3)	118(39.4)	106(35.3)	12(4.0)	3.25	0.82
	Parents	13(22.2)	45(74.1)	2(3.7)	0(0.0)	3.1	0.75
Dislike for co-curricular activities	Administrators	0(0.0)	6(66.7)	3(33.3)	0(0.0)	2.7	0.7
	Teachers	22(36.7)	24(40.0)	14(23.3)	0(0.0)	3.1	0.75
	Students	42(14.0)	168(56.0)	74(24.7)	16(5.3)	2.97	1.25
	Parents	16(25.9)	35(59.3)	9(14.8)	0(0.0)	3.1	0.64
Dislike for the courses they study	Administrators	1(11.1)	6(66.7)	2(22.2)	0(0.0)	2.9	0.57
	Teachers	30(50.0)	22(36.7)	8(13.3)	0(0.0)	3.4	0.65
	Students	100(33.3)	162(54.0)	32(10.7)	6(2.0)	3.19	0.58
	Parents	24(40.7)	27(44.4)	9(14.8)	0(0.0)	3.3	0.69
There is influence of peers	Administrators	5(55.6)	4(44.4)	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	3.6	0.76
	Teachers	34(56.7)	26(43.3)	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	3.6	0.73
	Students	168(56.0)	156(38.6)	14(4.7)	2(0.7)	3.59	0.73
	Parents	42(70.4)	18(29.6)	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	3.7	0.79
There is low academic performance	Administrators	1(11.1)	7(77.8)	1(11.1)	0(0.0)	3	0.71
	Teachers	34(56.7)	18(30.0)	8(13.3)	0(0.0)	3.4	0.75
	Students	112(37.3)	152(50.7)	34(11.3)	2(0.7)	3.25	0.82
	Parents	36(59.3)	20(33.3)	4(7.4)	0(0.0)	3.2	0.57
There is dislike for some particular teachers	Administrators	3(33.3)	5(55.6)	1(11.1)	0(0.0)	3.2	0.86
	Teachers	32(53.3)	24(40.0)	4(6.7)	0(0.0)	3.5	0.64
	Students	130(43.3)	142(47.3)	20(6.7)	8(2.7)	3.31	0.62
	Parents	29(48.1)	31(51.9)	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	3.5	0.73

Notes. SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree; STD= Standard Deviation

Table 3 presents a summary of the respondents' views on the four (4) areas of school factors. With regard to teacher factors responsible for truancy, data presented in Table 3 appear to suggest that the respondents acknowledged that elements of what teachers do or fail to do influence students' school attendance. According to the results in Table 3, the number one teacher factor that influences school attendance among SHS students in the Offinso municipality is **the** perceived lack of teachers' interest in some of the students as 401 (93.3%) of the 429 respondents indicated so. It was also revealed that with the exception of the statement that attributed students' truancy to teachers' use of the students for non-academic work activities, to which 172 (40%) of the respondents rejected, about 90% of the 429 respondents accepted that teachers' absence from classes encourages truancy and that abuse and humiliation of students by some teachers influence students' unwillingness to attend or stay in school. This finding is an unpleasant reality because teacher presence and engagement with students affect learning outcomes (Duodu, 2003; Hirschi, 1969; Rumberger, 1987). For example, Duodu (2003) noted that teachers' attitude in class determines a student's interest and that students who may not be able to absorb **a** certain level of abuse might resort to non-attendance in reaction to a teacher's action.

The respondents also rated very high all the school supervision and administrative factors that influence student attendance . The number one supervision /administrative factor that causes SHS students in the Offinso municipality to stay away from school is the lack of effective guidance and counselling services in the school as 93.3 % (that is, \bar{X} =3.6; STD=0.77) of the 429 indicated so. This implies that only 29 (6.7%) of the respondents rejected the statement that some students are truant because of **a** lack of effective guidance and counselling services in senior high schools. Moreso, all the **discipline** factors that influence students to stay away from school were rated high by the respondents. The number one factor identified by the respondents in the area of discipline is related **to** supervisory practices in the school as 99.8% (that is, \bar{X} =3.8; STD=0.74) of the respondents accepted this assertion. Such related supervisory practices include checking both teachers' and pupils' punctuality and regularity, teachers' lesson notes and scheme of work (Ankoma-Sey & Maina, 2015). Furthermore, in the area of resources, all the statements received the approval of the respondents. The results show that the many outlets in the school which students can use to sneak out was the number one resource factor contributing to truancy, as 90% (\bar{X} =3.5; STD=0.81) of the 429 respondents endorsed this statement.

According to Ankoma-Sey and Maina (2015), not only must supervision in school scrutinize the curriculum, syllabus, subjects' contents, timetabling, **and** suitability of learning environment but also **students'** school attendance. Failure of school supervision function to intentionally focus on student attendance would be tantamount to inadvertently creating fertile grounds for truancy to thrive. This is because, as Akumme (2003) and **Tadese et al. (2022)** observed, the surroundings of a school as well as the academic performance could be a justifiable cause for students' poor school attendance.

On discipline, whereas **the** majority 386 (90%) of the respondents agreed that the inability of punishment to scare the students due to lack of monitoring was responsible for truancy, 242 (56.6%) responded that excessive corporal punishment discourages students from attending school. However, 43.3% of the respondents disagreed that corporal punishment promotes truancy. The view that corporal punishment contributes to truancy requires attention. As Ofori et al. (2019) observed, instructors do not need a cane to teach classroom discipline. These

authors added that when students' punishment is constantly physical, regardless of whether they misbehaved or did not perform well academically, it can be quite confusing for them. For Hirschi (1969) and Mamolo (2022), students must be helped to determine what is right and wrong. The assumption is that the greater the importance of moral values to a person, the less likely they will engage in deviant behaviours such as truancy. That should be the focus of school authorities as they plan and implement strategies to reduce truancy to the minimum.

Regarding the link between truancy and absence or inadequacy of school resources, respondents in the study agreed that there is a connection between the availability of school resources and student attendance. For example, the results (Table 3) show that 372 (86.7%) agreed that inadequate staffing resulting in overburdening of teachers and the absence of proper canteen services in the schools affected students' attendance. Clearly, the majority of the respondents considered the school resources to be very important and that their absence could affect students' attendance. This finding agrees with Norton and Hathaway's (2008) revelation that in developing countries, the basic elements of an orderly school environment are missing and that students and teachers are regularly absent because they lack the resources necessary to promote effective teaching and learning. Thus, material, physical and human resources are important elements that greatly influence students' school attendance

Table 3: Cluster results of Respondents' perception of school factors that promote truancy

Statement	SA N(%)	A N(%)	D N(%)	SD N(%)	Mean	STD
Teacher attitude						
Teachers' absence from classes	200(46.7)	186(43.3)	14(3.3)	29(6.7)	3.3	0.75
Teachers' use of the students for non-academic work	99(23.0)	159(37.0)	172(40.0)	0(0.0)	3.3	0.63
Abuse/humiliation of students by the teacher	229(53.3)	157(36.7)	43(10.0)	0(0.0)	3.4	0.79
Lack of teachers' interest in some of the students	272(63.3)	129(30)	29(6.7)	0(0.0)	3.7	0.71
Supervision and Administration						
Utterances of school administrators	229(53.3)	157(36.7)	43(10.0)	0(0.0)	3.3	0.77
The strategies used to get students to fulfil financial commitments in the school. Eg. School fees	215(50.0)	172(40.0)	43(10.0)	0(0.0)	3.4	0.86
Lack of effective guidance and counselling services in the school	272(63.3)	129(30.0)	29(6.7)	0(0.0)	3.6	0.54
Lengthy instructional time which makes students tired	186(43.3)	157(36.7)	86(20.0)	0(0.0)	3.2	0.62
High population of students which results in over burdening of staff	215(50.0)	143(33.3)	72(16.7)	0(0.0)	3.3	0.89
Discipline						
Excessive use of canes (corporal punishment)	100(23.4)	143(33.3)	172(40.0)	14(3.3)	2.8	0.87
Inability of punishment to scare students due to lack of monitoring	172(40.0)	215(50.0)	29(6.7)	14(3.3)	3.5	0.95
Related supervisory practices in the school	342(79.8)	86(20)	1(0.2)	0(0.0)	3.8	0.74
Resources						
Inadequate staff which results in the over burdening of staff	215(50.0)	157(36.7)	57(13.3)	0(0.0)	3.4	0.71
The many outlets in the school which students can use to sneak out	286(66.7)	100(23.3)	29(6.7)	14(3.3)	3.5	0.81
The absence of proper canteen services in the school	243(56.7)	129(30.0)	57(13.3)	0(0.0)	3.4	0.82
The absence of First Aid services in the school	172(40.0)	157(36.7)	100(23.3)	0(0.0)	3.2	0.57

Notes. SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree; STD= Standard Deviation

Respondents in this study expressed the view that there was a connection between home factors and school attendance. The results presented in Table 4 show that all **nine** administrators agreed that all **five** statements that attributed truancy to the home environment of students were true. However, the results show that respondents did not all agree that all the home factors led or should lead to truancy. The greatest point of disagreement between the school administrators, parents and teachers on one side and the students was with respect to their views on the engagement of students in economic activities in the home (e.g. trading and farming) leading to truancy. Whereas 80% to 100% of school administrators, teachers and parents accepted that the engagement of students in economic activities at home resulted in students' truancy in school, more than half of the student respondents 152 (50.7%) rejected this assertion. This is an interesting finding because one would have thought that the students who spend time in the economic activities would be the ones to know how much time they spend doing those activities and thus know the impact on their learning. Probably, the students also consider the economic benefit of the activities as more important than schooling or that they are able to combine both schooling and work effectively thus their perception that engaging in economic ventures does not affect their education. It might be necessary for broader consultations to better understand the dynamics of schooling and work by high schoolers and to strategize to reap the synergies resulting from both schooling and engaging in economic activities.

In the case of parents' inability to fulfil their financial obligation to their wards and the inability of parents to provide the needed learning materials (Eg. Textbooks) for the students, over 90% ($\bar{X} > 3.3$) of each group of respondents admitted that they led to students' truancy. However, regarding the unwillingness of some parents to provide for their wards' academic needs, as many as 27 (44.4%) parent respondents rejected this statement. In other words, it was clear that almost half of the parents in the study did not see it as a major issue for students to absent themselves from school. The finding that respondents in this study agree that home factors relate to truancy provides additional reinforcement to the earlier finding of Balfanz and Fox (2014) that parent's unfavourable attitudes and negligence about their wards' education result in emotional and psychological effects which make some students who are unable to properly adjust to stay away from school. That notwithstanding, the parents' disagreement should merit further consideration that despite the lack of the necessary resources, high schoolers should put in much effort to achieve maximum returns on the little investments they are able to make. This assertion supports the adage that if someone gives you lemons, make lemonade out of it (i.e., to turn a bad situation into a deserving, pleasant one). Coincidentally, even though the authors of this paper come from varied backgrounds and diverse influences, all three grew up facing very daunting challenges that could potentially prevent them from pursuing their education. However, they persevered and sought needed academic and social help – what is referred to as social connectedness and bonding (Eith, 2005; **Kim & Sul, 2023**; Rumberger, 1995) – from teachers, **schoolmates**, families and friends to spur them on. Indeed, they are living examples that there is light at the end of the tunnel.

Table 4: Respondents' views about the Home Factors that contribute to Truancy

Statement		SA N(%)	A N(%)	D N(%)	SD N(%)	Mean	STD
The inability of some parents to fulfil their financial obligations. (Eg. School fees)	Administrators	3(33.3)	6(66.7)	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	3.3	0.73
	Teachers	48(80.0)	12(20.0)	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	3.8	0.57
	Students	176(58.6)	116(38.7)	6(2.0)	2(0.7)	3.6	0.63
	Parents	49(81.5)	7(11.1)	4(7.4)	0(0.0)	3.7	0.78
The inability of some parents to provide the needed learning materials (Eg. Textbooks)	Administrators	8(88.9)	1(11.1)	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	3.9	0.89
	Teachers	42(70.0)	16(26.7)	2(3.3)	0(0.0)	3.6	0.76
	Students	152(50.7)	130(43.3)	16(5.3)	2(0.7)	3.4	0.73
	Parents	42(70.4)	16(25.9)	2(3.7)	0(0.0)	3.7	0.73
The engagement of students in economic activities in the home (Eg. Trading and farming)	Administrators	5(55.6)	4(44.4)	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	3.6	0.79
	Teachers	32(53.3)	26(43.3)	2(3.3)	0(0.0)	3.5	0.71
	Students	26(8.6)	122(40.7)	122(40.7)	30(10.0)	2.4	0.74
	Parents	22(37.0)	27(44.4)	11(18.5)	0(0.0)	3.2	0.82
Lack of parents' interest in schooling	Administrators	8(88.9)	1(11.1)	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	3.9	0.57
	Teachers	32(53.3)	28(46.7)	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	3.5	0.86
	Students	114(38.0)	140(46.6)	38(12.7)	8(2.7)	3.3	0.64
	Parents	29(48.1)	20(33.3)	9(14.8)	2(3.7)	3.4	1.22
The unwillingness of some parents to provide for wards' academic needs	Administrators	8(88.9)	1(11.1)	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	3.9	0.73
	Teachers	48(80.0)	12(20.0)	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	3.7	0.56
	Students	112(37.3)	170(56.7)	14(4.7)	4(1.3)	3.4	1.02
	Parents	20(33.3)	13(21.7)	20(33.3)	7(11.1)	2.8	0.98

Notes: SA = Strongly agree, A = Agree, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly disagree; Mean ranges: 1–2.4 = Disagree, 2.5–4.0 = Agree.

STD=Standard Deviation

4.0 Recommendations

The study has underscored the existence and spread of truancy among SHS students in the Offinso municipality of Ghana. A number of factors were identified as contributing factors from major stakeholders in education such as the students, teachers, administrators and parents. The findings show that at the time of the study there was regular absenteeism among SHS students without permission and that school-related supervisory practices in the school contributed to this problem. On this basis, we recommend that discipline should be intensified for both teachers and students. Teachers must properly be supervised to ensure their continuous presence in school and fully be engaged in teaching students, which is the core responsibility of being teachers. Discipline of students should not only be corporal in nature. Role modelling, guidance and counselling services and resource availability and usage for engaging SHS students could create pleasant environments for students to receive needed assistance and support to thrive for holistic development.

On the basis of the findings that students' lack of interest and the influence of peers contributed to truancy, we recommend the introduction of mentoring programmes in the SHS. This is intended to enhance the academic success and self-esteem of at-risk students. Senior high schools in the Offinso municipal area can pair first-year students with exemplary students in higher classes based on specific need(s) such as academics, sports, morals or socio-economic challenges. Such pairing of younger students with older ones, done in a considerate manner, can yield positive results. It must, however, be emphasized that only those students with good character are to be used. It was also found that students' truancy was a result of the lack of effective guidance and counselling services in the high schools in the Offinso municipality. Based on this, we recommend that the Ghana Education Service strengthen Guidance and Counselling services in SHS in the municipality and across the country by posting trained personnel or retraining personnel to support students by responding to personal and family needs of students such as parent-child conflict or teacher-student conflict. This effort would help SHS schoolers properly adjust and cope with their challenges to ensure holistic development from adolescence to adulthood. Remedial and tutorial services can be used to reduce barriers to academic progress, which may lead to truancy.

Furthermore, the study found that the many outlets in the senior high schools that students can use to sneak out was a factor contributing to truancy. It makes it easy for students to leave the school premises without being noticed. On the one hand, we recommend that Infrastructure development such as fence walls, and canteen services should be prioritised to provide security for staff and students, to make it difficult for students to leave the schools without permission and to keep students in school throughout the instructional period to improve teaching and learning outcomes necessary for ultimately producing literate, responsible and productive citizens. On the other hand, SHS in the Offinso municipality must give serious attention to the supervision of students and teachers. While headmasters/mistresses and their assistants in the administration would have to intensify their management-by-walking-about to assure that teachers and students are available and that teaching and learning go on, teachers must check attendance and keep track of absentee students for further action by school authorities and parents/guardians.

Moreso, strengthening Guidance services in SHS could go a long way to help SHS in the municipality to appropriately identify students' potentials and accordingly place them in disciplines that fit their needs. Such a drive would cater to the needs of both high achievers and low achievers and match students to suitable vocations instead of seeing themselves as misfits. This may reduce the academically weak students' rebellion against learning experiences they go through that serve as push factors encouraging truant behaviours (Hirschi, 1969).

Finally, In the case of the finding that parents' inability to fulfil their financial obligation to their wards, and not providing needed learning resources such as textbooks for the students contribute to truancy, we recommend that a progressive sensitization must be done through Parents' Association (P.A.) to encourage parents to show commitment to their wards' education. Parents and guardians must be educated to see the value of their wards' schooling as an investment that would yield higher returns than dropping out of school or not being serious about school work.

5.0 Conclusion

Findings from this study show that truancy exists among SHS students in the Offinso municipality of Ghana. Factors that cause students to play truant are many and varied. An important implication of the findings for policymakers and stakeholders in education is that a holistic approach needs to be adopted when tackling the problem of truancy since it has been demonstrated that the students themselves, the school, the home environment and even the government (unavailability or inadequate numbers of needed instructional resources) all share a part of the blame. The paper would be useful to Guidance counsellors, SHS students, school administrators and instructors as well as education authorities to take steps to curb truancy to improve education outcomes in the Offinso municipality and Ghana as a whole.

Future Research

Based on the outcome of this study, we recommend that similar research be conducted elsewhere in Ghana or across the country. The outcome of such a study would provide insights into how prevalent and pervasive the factors that make students resort to truancy are and enable the Ghana Education Service and all stakeholders in education, including school authorities and parents and guardians, to pursue targeted measures to address the canker.

Consent

As per international standard or university standard, Participants' written consent has been collected and preserved by the author(s).

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