

BEHAVIOURAL PROBLEMS AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN NASARAWA WEST SENATORIAL DISTRICT, NASARAWA STATE

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated behavioural problems and academic performance of secondary school students in Nasarawa West Senatorial District, Nasarawa State. The researchers adopted correlational research design. The Study was guided by two research questions and two hypotheses that were tested at 0.05 level of significance. Multi-stage sampling procedure was used to sample 377 secondary school students from a population of 6,730 secondary school students in Nasarawa West Senatorial Zone. The instruments were Students' Behavioural Problem Questionnaire (SBPQ) and Academic Performance Questionnaire (APQ). The Instruments were validated by three experts and then subjected to trial testing. Cronbach Alpha was used to establish the radiality coefficients of the instruments. While SBPQ yielded a gross coefficient of 0.88, APQ yielded 0.89. The two research questions were answered using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMC). The null hypotheses were tested using Pearson's correlation (r). It was found that bullying and truancy have significant relationship with secondary school students' academic performance in Nasarawa West Senatorial District of Nasarawa State. It was recommended that due to the negative impact of bullying on students and the relationship that exists between the act and academic performance, parents should encourage their children to desist from exhibiting such behaviour. Also, teachers should make learning interesting for students in order to drastically reduce the preponderance of truancy

Key words: behavioural problems, Truancy, bullying, Academic performance.

Introduction

Many variables form the objectives of education, one of the most important is students' academic performance. Students' academic performance is the crux of any functional education system. Despite this fact, the academic performance of students has not been impressive over the years. Poor academic performance of has been recorded at all levels of education, especially at the secondary level in Nasarawa West Senatorial District of Nasarawa State. Reports from the West Africa Examination Council as presented by chief examiners showed that students struggled to attain minimum credit passes in cores subjects like English and Mathematics. This is also replicated in core science subjects like Chemistry, Physics and Biology. For example, in 2018, the WAEC Chief Examiner reported that out of 1,572,396 students, 786.380 students failed to obtain minimum credit pass in English Language (WAEC Chief Examiner's Report, 2018). The trend continued in 2019 where the Chief Examiner reported that 569,653 failed to obtain minimum credit pass in the subject (WAEC Chief Examiner's Report, 2019).

The trend of poor academic performance of students is not peculiar to English language. According to Okudube (2018), the percentage failure of students in Chemistry in three years was consistently high, from 61% in 2012 to 63% in 2013 and 68.78% in 2014. Similarly, Chukwu and Arokoyu reported that in two years, the percentage failure of student who wrote Physics SSCE organised by WAEC was 70% in 2017 and 67% in 2018. Also, the WAEC Chief Examination's Report (2022) indicated that students' inability to legibly explain concepts in Biology led to the failure of not less than 30% out of the 1,409,529 that sat for the examination. These unproductive academic performance of students have made scholars not to only investigate the possible cause of this problem, but to also first determine what academic performance should entail.

The concept of academic performance is believed to possess an amorphous nature as it incorporates various factors, ranging from attaining a professional degree to the development of students' moral rectitude (York, et. al, 2015). The present study will adopt the definition by Kumar (2021) that academic performance is the knowledge gained by the student which is assessed through marks and by a teacher over a specific period of time. Recent studies (Kumar, 2021; Nagel, 2025) have established that one the variables that could influence or correlate with students' academic performance is their behavioural problems.

Behavioural problems refer to a retinue of emotional and physical problems that affect an individual. Behavioural problems shape how people think, relate and experience the world around them (Nagle, 2025). Observations have shown that these problems affect students' self-esteem and self-concept especially in the formal school settings. While many of these behavioural patterns begin in childhood, they often have lasting impacts that shape adulthood. The severity of behavioural problems in the formal school setting has prompted researchers to ascertain its relatedness to academic performance. Sabido (2024) is of the opinion that variables like students' deviant behaviour can only degenerate their academic performance. The scholar further adds that core aspects of students' problematic behaviour that may have some level of interference with their academic performance are bullying and truancy.

Bullying is a major deviant behaviour in the formal school setting. It refers to repeated aggressive behaviour characterised by an observed or perceived power imbalance between the victim and the perpetrator (Kollerová, 2023). From the time the child attains the formal school age, to the time he or she graduates; he or she may either be the bully or a victim. While some level of bullying could be tolerable, consistent bullying could lead to unimaginable consequences like total dislike for school on the part of the victim. Bullying is a pervasive type

of aggression which often occurs in schools. As with other types of aggression, the harm that is inflicted – whether physical, emotional or both – is intentional. Moreover, bullying has defining features which set it apart from other aggressive behaviours, in that it is repeated and the bully or bullies often continuously have greater access to power than their victims (James, 2010).

School bullying has always been both a public and academic concern for decades, though empirical literatures in this field were not visible before the 1970s. Presently, bullying is an expanding field of study and much remains to be established in terms of the causes, the characteristics of those involved and the consequences of the act on the bullied. It is however clear that the fear of bullies makes students to become truant, thereby affecting their academic performance (Juhoven, 2011).

Truancy generally refers to unexcused or explained absence of student from school. Truancy has also been defined as any intentional and unauthorized or illegal absence from compulsory schooling. It may also further refer to students who attend school but do attend classes. In most cases, parents may not be aware of their wards' absence from school. Truancy is a delinquent and anti-social behaviour. Animasahun, (2012) submits that there are scenarios where students leave their homes with the intention of going to school and then deliberately skip school to have “fun” elsewhere. The scholar adds that once such students become good at this, they continuously and consistently exhibit such behaviour without considering its effects on their academic performance.

A number of reasons have been identified by researchers as major causes of truancy. Bajon (2022) avers that major causes of truancy are physical/mental ill-health, drug abuse, broken home, harsh disciplinary, lack of parental supervision, poor academic performance, poor parental income, unconducive school environment, bullying and wrong teaching methods. These social and psychological problems negatively affect students' behaviour, thereby heightening their tendency to be truant.

Researchers (Mahmud, et al., 2025; Bolarinwa, 2024; Onoyase, 2016) have over the years investigated the behavioural problems and academic performance of students. Particularly, Mahmud (2025) found that bullying is significantly correlated with students' academic performance. Similarly, Bolarinwa (2024) after conducting a study on the relationship between bullying and students' academic performance found that there was a significant positive relationship between bullying and academic performance of Junior Secondary school students. Due to the centrality of students' academic performance in the development of the country and the retinue of evidence that suggests that students' behavioural problem could affect this, the study ascertained the relationship between students' behavioural problems and their academic performance.

Purpose of the Study

The study investigated behavioural problems and academic performance of secondary school students in Nasarawa West Senatorial District of Nasarawa State. The study specifically:

1. Determine the relationship between bullying and academic performance of secondary school students in Nasarawa West Senatorial District of Nasarawa State
2. Ascertain the relationship between truancy and academic performance of secondary school students in Nasarawa West Senatorial District of Nasarawa State.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. what is the relationship between bullying and academic performance of secondary school students in Nasarawa West Senatorial District of Nasarawa State

2. what is the relationship between truancy and academic performance of secondary school students in Nasarawa West Senatorial District of Nasarawa State.

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. Bullying has no significant relationship with secondary school students 'academic performance in Nasarawa West Senatorial District of Nasarawa State
2. Truancy has no significant relationship with secondary school students' academic performance in Nasarawa West Senatorial District of Nasarawa State.

Methodology

The researcher adopted the correlational survey design. Uzoechi (2015) avers that correlational research design establishes relationships or association between two or more variables. The population of the study consisted 6,730 SS2 students from all the 96 senior secondary schools in 5 local government areas of Nasarawa West senatorial District. A sample of 377 senior secondary two students was selected for the study using Taro Yamen Formula. The multi-stage sampling procedure, particularly purposive, proportionate stratified and simple random sampling techniques was used to distribute the sample.

Two Instruments were used to collect data. One of the instruments was developed by the researcher and titled Students Problem Questionnaire (SBEPQ). SBPQ is a 10-item questionnaire with an adapted Likert scale of Strongly Agreed (SA), Agreed (A), Disagreed (D) and Strongly Disagreed (SD) . The questionnaire also has a total of three sections. Section A evicted demographic data while section B and C elicited responses on students' truancy and bullying respectively.

The second instrument is an adapted from Mcgregory (2015) and titled titled Academic Performance Questionnaire (APQ). APQ is a 22 items questionnaire that elicited responses on students 'academic performance. The researcher adjusted the response pattern of the instruments to align with four-point Likert scale of Strongly Agreed (SA), Agree (A), Disagreed (D) and Strongly Disagreed (SD).

Three experts ascertained the face and content validity of the instruments. The instruments were further trial-tested on 20 students in a school outside the ones sampled for the study. The scores gotten from the trail test were used to ascertain the reliability of the instruments using Cronbach's Alpha. The choice of Cronbach Alpha was predicated on the fact that the items in the instruments are not dichotomously scored (there is no right or wrong answers). The Academic Performance Questionnaire (APQ) yielded a coefficient of 0.89 while the clusters in the Behavioural Problem Questionnaire (SBEPQ) yielded 0.88 for bullying and 0.85 for truancy.

The researchers engaged the services of three research assistants in administering and retrieving copies of the questionnaire. The research assistants were on some technical terms used in the questionnaire. The entire 377 copies of the questionnaire were distributed and collected the same day in order to reduce the mortality rate of the instrument. The data obtained from the field were assigned codes for the purpose of clarity. The Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was used to answer the research questions and Pearson coefficient (r) was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.005 level of significance.

Result

Research Question 1:

What is the relationship between bullying and academic performance of secondary school students in Nasarawa West Senatorial District of Nasarawa State?

Table 1: Pearson Correlation Coefficient (r) on the Relationship Between Bullying and Students' Academic Performance in Nasarawa West Senatorial District, Nasarawa State.

		Students 'Academic Performance	Bullying
Students' Academic Performance	Pearson	1	.680
	Correlation		
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	377	377
Bullying	Pearson	.680	1
	Correlation		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	377	377

Table 1 shows there is a medium positive relationship between bullying and academic performance of secondary school students in Nasarawa West Senatorial District of Nasarawa State ($r = .680$, $n = 377$). This result implies that if bullying behaviour increases in schools, poor academic performance also increases.

Research Question 2

What is the relationship between truancy and academic performance of secondary school students in Nasarawa West Senatorial District of Nasarawa State?

Table 2: Pearson Correlation Coefficient (r) on the Relationship Between Truancy and Students' Academic Performance in Nasarawa West Senatorial District, Nasarawa State.

		Students 'Academic Performance	Truancy
Students' Academic Performance	Pearson Correlation	1	.788
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000
	N	377	377
Truancy	Pearson Correlation	.788	1
	N	377	377

Table 2 shows there is a strong positive relationship between truancy and academic performance of secondary school students in Nasarawa West Senatorial District of Nasarawa State ($r = .788$, $n = 377$). This result implies that if truancy increases in schools, poor academic performance of students also increases.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

Hypothesis One

Bullying has no significant relationship with secondary school students' academic performance in Nasarawa West Senatorial District of Nasarawa State

Table 4: Pearson Correlation Coefficient on the Relationship between Academic Performance and Bullying in Nasarawa West Senatorial District, Nasarawa State.

		Students 'Academic Performance	Bullying
Students' Academic Performance	Pearson	1	.680
	Correlation		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000
Bullying	N	377	377
	Pearson	.680	1
	Correlation		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000
	N	377	377

Table 4 shows that $p = 0.000 < 0.05$; $n=377$. The null hypothesis which states that bullying behavior has no significant relationship with secondary school students' academic performance in Nasarawa West Senatorial District of Nasarawa State is rejected. This means that bullying has significant relationship with secondary school students' academic performance in Nasarawa West Senatorial District of Nasarawa State.

Hypotheses Two

Truancy has no significant relationship with secondary school students' academic performance in Nasarawa West Senatorial District of Nasarawa State

Table 5: Pearson Correlation Coefficient on the Relationship Between Truancy and Students' Academic Performance in Nasarawa West Senatorial District, Nasarawa State.

		Students' Academic Performance	Truancy
Students' Academic Performance	Pearson Correlation	1	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.731	.731
	N	377	377
Truancy	Pearson Correlation	.731	.731
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000
	N	377	377

Table 5 shows that $p = 0.000 < 0.05$, $n=377$. This means that the null hypotheses which states that truancy has no significant relationship with secondary school students' academic performance in Nasarawa West Senatorial District of Nasarawa State is rejected. This implies that truancy has significant relationship with secondary school students' academic performance in Nasarawa West Senatorial District of Nasarawa State.

Discussion of Findings

The first hypothesis found that bullying has significant relationship with secondary school students' academic performance in Nasarawa West Senatorial District of Nasarawa State. This finding could be due to negative influence of bullying on aspects of students' psychological and social behaviour. As a problematic or antisocial activity, bullying affects students' ability to concentrate at school, they are often occupied with thoughts on how to either devise new ways to bully their classmates or how to escape the many schemes of a bully. The finding agrees with Mahmud, Pongpalilu, Aisyah and Purnamasari (2025) who found that bullying is significantly correlated with students' academic performance as students who experience the deviant behaviour performed poorly at school. The finding also agrees with Bolarinwa (2024) who found that there is a significant relationship between bullying and the academic performance of Junior Secondary school students in Jos South Local Government of Plateau State.

The second finding of the study is that truancy has significant relationship with secondary school students' academic performance in Nasarawa West Senatorial District of Nasarawa State. This finding could be connected to the relevance of punctuality in the formal school setting. The understanding is that when students are truant, they miss out in the learning of vital contents in a subject, hence their problematic academic performance. The finding is in congruence with Onisoya (2016) who found that truancy has significant influence on students' academic performance.

Conclusion

The study investigated relationship between behavioural problems and academic performance of secondary school students in Nasarawa West Senatorial District of Nasarawa State. Based on the findings, the study concludes that behavioural problems like bullying and truancy have significant relationship with secondary school students' academic performance in Nasarawa West Senatorial District, Nasarawa State. This finding emphasises the weight of these deviant behaviours on students' academic performance and the need for the school to devise mitigative mechanisms.

Recommendations

The following are recommended based on the findings of this study:

1. Due to the negative impact of bullying on students and the relationship that exists between the act and academic performance, parents should encourage their children to desist from exhibiting such behaviour.
2. Teachers should make learning interesting for students in order to drastically reduce the preponderance of truancy.

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