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INFLUENCE OF SCHOOL FEEDING PROGRAM AND INSECURITY ON TRUANCY AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN BIRNIN KEBBI, KEBBI STATE

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Abstract
This study investigates the influence of school feeding program and insecurity on truancy among secondary school students in Kebbi State. Two research hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significant. The study adopted a descriptive cross sectional survey research design. Three hundred (300) senior secondary school students were randomly selected. Three research instruments were adapted (school feeding program scale 0.73, insecurity scale 0.75, and truancy scale 0.74). The result showed that there was a significant negative relationship between the school feeding program and truancy (r= -.75, p<.01). There was a significant positive relationship between insecurity and truancy (r= .88, p<.01). School feeding programs and insecurity have a joint prediction on Truancy (R2 = 0.78, F (2,297) = 520.25, p<.05). The result further revealed that independently, insecurity (β = .81, t=16.99 p<.05) predicted truancy, while school feeding programs (β = .09, t=1.87 p>.05) have no significant independent prediction on the school feeding program. The study, therefore, concluded that sschool feeding programs were found to have a significant negative relationship with truancy, indicating their potential to reduce absenteeism. Conversely, insecurity showed a significant positive relationship with truancy, highlighting the detrimental effect of safety concerns on school attendance. It was recommended that the school should provide psychological support and implement counselling and support services to help students cope with the psychological impacts of insecurity, which may contribute to truancy.
Keywords: School feeding program, Insecurity, Truancy, Secondary School and Students

Introduction

Education serves as a cornerstone for personal development and societal progress.It is widely acknowledged that attending school is crucial for acquiring knowledge, skills, and shaping one's future. Moreover, the benefits of education,which will still be discussed at a later part of this section, extend beyond the individual, contributing to the overall development of communities and nations. However, the issue of truancy poses a significant challenge to the educational system, hindering the realization of these benefits (Evans, 2022). Truancy, defined as the intentional absence from school without a legitimate excuse, has multifaceted consequences on students and society (Ampofo, Opoku, & Opoku-Manu 2022). It is associated with academic underachievement, increased dropout rates, and a higher likelihood of engaging in delinquent behaviour (Hoffmann, 2018). Recognizing the importance of addressing truancy, this study focuses on understanding the factors that contributeto this phenomenon among secondary school students in Birnin Kebbi, Kebbi State, Nigeria.

The benefits of attending school extend beyond the acquisition of academic knowledge. Schools serve as crucibles for the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills and the cultivation of social skills. Furthermore, education empowers individuals to contribute meaningfully to the socio-economic fabric of their communities and nations. The transformative potential of education is not confined to personal development but radiates outward, shaping the trajectory of societies. Regular school attendance is the linchpin of educational success. It establishes aroutine conducive to learning, fosters discipline, and provides a structured environment for intellectual and social growth (Gottfried, 2014). Moreover, schools are not just educational institutions; they are platforms for socialization, character development, and the nurturing of future leaders. Recognizing the multifaceted benefits of attending school underscores the need to investigate and mitigate factors that contribute

to truancy.

Truancy poses a significant barrier to achieving universal education goals, particularly in developing countries. Chronic absenteeism limits students' learning opportunities and denies them their right to education, often leading to dropping out or falling behind academically (UNESCO, 2017). This perpetuates a cycle of undereducation that entrenches illiteracy across generations (Saeed, 2019). The level of truancy is immense in the developing world where social problems exacerbating school absenteeism, such as poverty, conflict, and lack of infrastructure, are prevalent. According to the most recent UNESCO Institute of Statistics data, approximately 258 million children and youth were out of school in 2018, with sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia accounting for most of this number (UNESCO, 2020). Health and economic hardships are significant contributors to absenteeism in these regions (Ahmed, Bloom, Iqbal, Lucas, Rasheed, Waldman, Khan, Islam, & Bhuiya 2021). Illnesses stemming from poor sanitation and malnutrition, as well as child labor duties, hamper regular attendance (Alam, Ahmed, & Rahman, 2020). Natural disasters and conflicts also disrupt education through displacement and school closures (Iram & Arshad, 2020). Where costs pose barriers, marginalized groups become excluded from education (Jayasinghe, 2020). Education is officially free and compulsory for every child, particularly at the junior secondary stage. The students at this stage were trained to obtain the proficiency that will set them up for a higher degree of schooling. But there is a problem of low attendance especially, in the north-western geopolitical zone of Nigeria in which Kebbi state is inclusive (Ibrahim & Zainab, 2023).

National development goals are hampered when large sections remain semi-literate or illiterate due to truancy (Asim Arfeen, Noreen, & Rehman., 2021). Lower human capital development impedes productivity, technological advancement, and economic growth (Bilal, Khan & Malik 2021). Higher dropout risks amplify societal problems such as crime, unemployment, and intergenerational poverty transmission (Saeed, 2019). Therefore, innovative, multi-sectoral solutions tailored for local contexts are imperative to drastically reduce truancy and make universal primary and secondary education a reality, especially for vulnerable populations (Nawab, Nazish, & Ali 2021). Family troubles significantly contribute to truancy. Children coping with poverty, parental neglect, abuse or household breakdown lack crucial support systems, making them more prone to missing school (Eiden, Coles, Schuetze, & Colder, 2017). Learning difficulties or inadequate special needs assistance also discourage school attendance, as frustrated students avoid perceived failure and humiliation (Finning, Ukoumunne, Ford, Danielsson-Waters, Shaw, De Jager, Stentiford & Moore,2019). Peer influence emerges as a causal factor since skipping classes becomes a social activity to gain peer acceptance (Henry, 2007). School-level issues, including overcrowding, large class sizes, teacher absenteeism, and harsh discipline methods, undermine the appeal of schooling (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002).

Furthermore, mental health issues such as depression and behavioral problems diminish commitment to education (Kearney, 2008). If addressed, truancy yields undesirable short and long-term outcomes. It results in academic deficiencies, higher dropout rates, increased juvenile crime, teen parenthood and diminished career prospects for affected students (Finning et al., 2019). Families experience emotional stress, legal issues and financial burden in attempting to curb their children's absenteeism (Eiden et al., 2017). Governments lose resources allocated to universal education for absent students (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). Ultimately, societies are deprived of skilled human capital and face elevated problems like unemployment, healthcare costs and crime (Henry, 2007).

Tackling truancy demands a collaborative multi-pronged approach targeting underlying determinants (Kearney, 2008). Effective strategies include early intervention, strengthening parental involvement, mentoring at-risk youth, counseling, rewarding attendance and consistent enforcement of attendance policies (Finning et al., 2019). Addressing societal issues through poverty alleviation, provision of basic services, improved schools, and specialised learning support can reinforce the commitment to education from students and families (Eiden et al., 2017; Henry & Huizinga, 2007). With concerted multi-sectoral action focused on the needs of the whole child,

truancy rates can be significantly reduced to positively impact lives. School feeding program have been identified as potential cases of truancy. The school feeding program is a government initiative aimed at providing nutritious meals to students, is designedto enhance attendance, concentration, and overall academic performance. The implementation of school feeding programs has been a global strategy to address issues of malnutrition and enhance school attendance (Kristjansson, Gelli, Welch, Greenhalgh, Liberato, Francis, & Espil, 2022). Previous research has demonstrated a positive relationship between nutritional interventions in schools and enhanced academic outcomes. Access to healthy meals has been shown to improve students' cognition, behavior, and educational achievement.

A meta-analysis of 18 studies examining school feeding programs found they significantly increased standardised test scores by an average of 0.28 standard deviations (Kristjansson Robinson, Petticrew, MacDonald, Krasevec, Janzen, Greenhalgh, Wells, MacGowan, Farmer, Shea, Mayhew & Tugwell, 2007). Children who participated in breakfast clubs demonstrating higher math, vocabulary and general knowledge test results compared to non-participants (Brown, Beardslee, & Prothrow-Stith, 2019). Proper nutrition is important for brain and cognitive development in children. Feeding programs help address malnutrition, which is associated with deficiencies in critical micronutrients essential for learning, like iron, iodine, and vitamin B12 (Florence, Asbridge, & Veugelers, 2008). School meals also promote consistent energy levels and concentration needed for academic engagement and performance throughout the day (Kleinman, Hall, Green, Korzec-Ramirez, Patton, Pagano, & Murphy 2002). Studies further report reduced absenteeism and fewer health complaints on schooldays when meals were provided (Jyoti, Frongillo, & Jones, 2005; Kristjansson et al., 2007). Children are less likely to fall sick or miss class due to hunger-related illnesses when nourished adequately at school (Kleinman et al., 2002). Reduced absenteeism directly translates to improved accumulation of learning. School feeding was also found to enhance psychosocial well-being by reducing short-term hunger, improving mood and increasing self-esteem of disadvantaged children (Kristjansson et al., 2007; Brown et al., 2019). A positive psychosocial environment enables better cognitive absorption and academic success.

Previous research by Ibrahim and Zainab, (2023) has explored the impact of school feeding programs globally, revealing varying degrees of success in different contexts. In the Nigerian context, the NHGSFP represents a laudable effort to address both educational andnutritional needs. However, the specific influence of this program on truancy among secondary school students in Birnin Kebbi remains an uncharted territory that warrants investigation. In tandem with the school feeding program, the issue of insecurity introduces another layer of complexity to the educational landscape. Insecurity, manifested through violence, conflict, and threats to personal safety, has the potential to disrupt the educational journey of students (Wang, & Fawzi, 2020). Kebbi State, like many regions globally, contends with various forms of insecurity that can deter students from attending school regularly. The school feeding program, while ostensibly addressing nutritional needs, may inadvertently influence truancy if its implementation lacks efficiency or fails to resonate with the target population. Conversely, insecurity, by creating an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty, may lead to increased absenteeism among students. The complex dynamics at play warrant an empirical investigation into the relationships between these variables and truancy.

However, research evidence is very scanty as regards school feeding program and insecurity on truancy especially in this region. Most of the studies carried out here were focused on school attendance, and none has ever focused on truancy regarding school feeding and insecurity. Therefore, the present study to fill the gap observed. Especially, this study focused on the influence of school feeding program and insecurity on truancy among secondary school students in Kebbi State.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the recognized importance of education, truancy remains a persistent challenge in secondary schools in Birnin Kebbi (Hassan & Said, 2022). The existing gaps in understanding the relationships between the school

feeding program, insecurity, and truancy necessitate an in-depth investigation. The implications of truancy are far-reaching, affecting not only individual academic achievements but also the overall development of the community (Ampofo, Opoku, & Opoku-Manu, 2022). The impact of insecurity extends to students' education, with frequent attacks on schools, abductions from dormitories, and students being kidnapped on their way to school leading to a significant decline in school attendance (Ibrahim and Olojede, 2024). Moreover, the broader implications of truancy include school dropout, poor academic performance, unwanted pregnancy, wastage of educational resources, and an increase in out-of-school children. This study aims to bridge existing gaps in knowledge by examining the interplay between the school feeding program, insecurity, and truancy among secondary school students in Birnin Kebbi. While existing literature acknowledges the importance of education and explores various factors contributing to truancy, there is a notable dearth of research specifically delving into the nexus between the school feeding program, insecurity, and truancy in Birnin Kebbi, Kebbi State. Bridging this gap is essential for developing region-specific interventions that address the unique challenges faced by students in this locale

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to investigate the influence of the school feeding program and insecurity on truancy among secondary school students in Birnin Kebbi, Kebbi State. Specifically, the study tends to:

1. Assess the impact of the School Feeding Program on the truancy rates among secondary school students in Birnin Kebbi.
2. Examine the relationship between insecurity and truancy among secondaryschool students in Birnin Kebbi.

Research Hypotheses

1. There is no significant relationship between school feeding programs and truancy among secondary school students in Brinin Kebbi
2. There is no significant relationship between the level of insecurity and truancy among secondary school students in Brinin Kebbi

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive cross-sectional survey research design. This design is appropriate for investigating the influence of school feeding programs and insecurity on truancy among secondary school students in Birnin Kebbi, Kebbi State, at a specific point in time. The target population for this study comprised of all secondary school students in Birnin Kebbi, Kebbi State. Simple random sampling techniques was used to select (20) public secondary schools in Birnin Kebbi. Also, 15 senior secondary school students were randomly selected from each of the 20 selected schools. Making total number of the participants to be three hundred (300). Three research instruments were adapted for the purpose of this study, this includes: School feeding program scale (SFPS) by Akodu, Patrick, and Ayodele (2019), Insecurity scale (IS) by Smith Johnson and Williams, (2020) and Truancy behavior scale (TBS) by Keppens and Spruyt (2017). The data obtained from the study were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistcs. Simple percentage and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions, while hypotheses was tested using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), this is due to the fact that there are more than two levels of the independent variables used. The hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

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Results

Hypothesis One: There is no significant relationship between school feeding programs and truancy among secondary school students in Brinin Kebbi

The hypothesis was tested using Pearson r correlational analysis, and the result is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Pearson Product Moment correlation showing the relationship between school feeding programs and truancy

Variables	Mean	S.D	r	
School feeding program	27.38	7.68		
Truancy	23.64	6.95	-.75**	.01

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The results obtained from the test are shown in Table 1. The table shows that there was a significant negative relationship between the school feeding program and truancy (r= -.75, p<.01). The result implies that an increase in the school feeding program significantly relates to a decrease in truancy. The hypothesis is thus accepted.

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant relationship between the level of insecurity and truancy among secondary school students in Brinin Kebbi.

The hypothesis was tested using Pearson r correlational analysis. The result is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Pearson Product Moment correlation showing the relationship between insecurity and truancy

Variables	Mean	S.D	r	
Insecurity	45.69	13.53		
Truancy	23.64	6.95	.88**	.01

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The results obtained from the test are shown in Table 2. The table shows that there was a significant positive relationship between insecurity and truancy (r= .88, p<.01). The result implies that an increase in insecurity significantly relates to an increase in truancy among students. The hypothesis is thus accepted.

Discussion of the Findings

The first hypothesis stated that there is no significant relationship between school feeding programs and truancy among secondary school students in Brinin Kebbi. The results revealed a significant negative relationship between school feeding programs and truancy. The result implies that an increase in the school feeding program significantly relates to a decrease in truancy. Studies by Alderman and Bundy (2012) in sub-Saharan Africa and Aurino et al. (2019) in Ghana have similarly demonstrated the positive impact of school feeding programs on attendance and reduced dropout rates. Ibrahim and Zainab (2023) concluded that school feeding program has a significant positive impact on the attendance rate of students in Kebbi State. This relationship can be attributed to several factors, including improved nutrition, economic relief for families, and increased motivation for students to attend school. School meals provide essential nutrients that enhance students' cognitive abilities and overall health, making them more likely to attend school regularly. For families struggling with poverty, these programs reduce the financial burden of providing meals and encouraging parents to send their children to school. Additionally, the prospect of receiving a meal can serve as an incentive for students to attend, especially in areas where food insecurity is prevalent.

The second hypothesis stated that there is no significant relationship between the level of insecurity and truancy among secondary school students in Brinin Kebbi. The results showed that there was a significant positive relationship between insecurity and truancy. The result implies that an increase in insecurity significantly relates to an increase in truancy among students. Studies such as those by Olanrewaju et al. (2018) in Nigeria and

reports from UNESCO (2011) have highlighted how conflict and insecurity in various parts of Africa have led to increased truancy and school closures. Several factors can explain this relationship. Fear and safety concerns may make students and parents reluctant to attend school due to the risk of violence or abduction. Insecurity often leads to the displacement of families, disrupting children's education. Furthermore, the stress and trauma associated with living in insecure environments can negatively affect students' ability to focus on education, leading to increased absenteeism.

Conclusion

This study investigated the relationships between school feeding programs, insecurity, and truancy among secondary school students in Birnin Kebbi. The findings revealed a complex interplay between these factors. School feeding programs were found to have a significant negative relationship with truancy, indicating their potential to reduce absenteeism. Conversely, insecurity showed a significant positive relationship with truancy, highlighting the detrimental effect of safety concerns on school attendance. When examined jointly, school feeding programs and insecurity accounted for a substantial portion of the variance in truancy, underscoring the multifaceted nature of the issue. However, insecurity emerged as the stronger independent predictor of truancy when both factors were considered simultaneously. These results emphasise the need for a comprehensive approach to addressing truancy that considers both incentives for attendance and barriers to education.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Government should ensure the strengthening and expanding the school feeding programs' policy that are regularly reviewed and updated
2. The scope of the program should be extended to more categories of schools so as to serve as a motivator to students
3. Community stakeholders should be engaging in securing schools and foster partnerships between schools, families, and community leaders to create a supportive environment that encourages regular school attendance.
4. Psychological support and counselling services should be render to assist students to cope with the psychological impacts of insecurity, which may contribute to truancy.

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