Enhancing Higher Education Student Class Attendance through Truancy Reduction Program at the University of Namibia

Natalia S. Intja[1], AnnaFrugentta Mangundu[2], Rebekka, K. Haingura[3], Irmagard Moyo[4]

[1,4] Department of Intermediate and Vocational Education, Faculty of Education and Human Sciences, University of Namibia, Rundu Campus

[2,3] Department of Early Childhood Education and Care, Faculty of Education and Human Sciences, University of Namibia, Rundu Campus

ABSTRACT: The major objective of the present study was to identify the contributory factors of truancy among higher education students at the university of Namibia. Besides that, it was aimed at gaining a comprehensive understanding of the truancy reduction program which the university may adopt to help lessen the situation. A broader view of attendance issues in higher institutions is becoming more prevalent in literature. Also, the rise of higher institutions of learning has been accompanied by a sharp increase in the journey to source for approaches of enhancing class attendance amongst university students. The sample comprised 48 full-time students from the faculty of Education and Human Sciences aged between 17 to 60 years old from the University of Namibia's Rundu campus. Data was collected using the open-ended online survey questionnaire. The questionnaire consists of two sections, one on respondents' demographic data and the other on higher education students' class attendance. A pilot study had been conducted to validate the instrument. Respondents were sent the link via the WhatsApp platform for them to respond to. Responses were monitored by the corresponding author using google docs. Data were analysed thematically. Results demonstrate that truancy among university students is significantly influenced by students, lecturers, and the university and a thorough grasp of the truancy reduction programme that institutions may use to help reduce truancy should be imposed.

KEYWORDS: Truancy, University of Namibia, Higher Education, Motivation, Students, Reduction Program.

1. INTRODUCTION

Students enrolled at the university of Namibia are required to have 80% class attendance to qualify them to write any examinations administered at the university. Aside that, it is every university's goal around the universe to ensure that its enrolled students attend classes as per the policies governing the university and it is a sad truth that not all students enrolled in a university will attend classes on a regular basis and this is no exception of the University of Namibia's Rundu campus. It is therefore the responsibility of the lecturers and the university's stakeholders to ensure that students attend lectures, and they are not truant. This is because it is believed that frequent class attendance allows students to grasp the content efficiently. However, a broader view of attendance issues in higher institutions is becoming more prevalent in literature. Also, the rise of higher institutions of learning has been accompanied by a sharp increase in the journey to source for approaches of enhancing class attendance amongst university students. In pursuit of these, university staff members should reach a more complete understanding of why students are not attending lectures which may help them investigate strategies which might be the most helpful for their students. Both lowincome and middle-income countries view truancy as a social issue (Maynard et al., 2013; Maynard et al., 2012; Pengpid & Peltzer, 2019; Seidu, Ahinkorah, & et al., 2019; Seidu, 2019, Seidu, et al, 2022). According to Shah et al. (2012), student absenteeism is a common disciplinary issue that might have a negative impact on their academic achievement. Yoep et al. (2016) defined truancy as an unexcused and unapproved absence from class or school to distinguish it from "truancy" and "absenteeism." Contrarily, absenteeism is the total number of school days missed by a student, including both excused and unexcused absences (Balfan & Byrnes, 2012). According to Reid (2005), truancy can be regarded as a behaviour that originates at various levels, including the individual, the family, and the school. The causes of truancy are numerous, according to Ramberg et al. (2019), and they include personal, family-related, social, psychological, and school-related components.

According to two schools of thought, truancy is caused by both people and organisations (Salzer et al., 2012). The first school of thinking characterises truancy as a personal or familial issue. In this situation, it falls on the family to make sure that kids go to school on a regular basis. The family will have failed as parents if they are unable to fulfil this task. Researchers have suggested that truancy is a complicated problem with effects on truant students' development and wellness as well as their adult lives (see, for

Enhancing Higher Education Student Class Attendance through Truancy Reduction Program at the University of Namibia

example, Seidu, 2019; Ramberg et al., 2019). For example, truancy has detrimental effects on academic performance (Vaughn et al., 2013; Henry et al., 2012), educational aspirations (Henry, 2007), criminal activity rates (Baker et al., 2001), risky sexual behaviour and teenage pregnancies (Houck et al., 2012). Truancy is linked to both immediate and long-term repercussions, according to studies (Ramberg, et al., 2019).

Seidu's (2019) study in Mozambique discovered that smoking, being attacked at school, and tobacco usage were all risk factors for truancy among teenagers. There is few research on this crucial topic at the university of Namibia's Rundu campus, despite studies on truancy among students being conducted around the globe to aid campus directors in creating educational initiatives aimed at lowering truancy among students in higher education. More importantly, absenteeism is one of the issues that university lecturers at the university raise the most. However, the university's actions are insufficient to address this issue in education and society. Understanding the correlates of truancy is crucial for the creation of prevention and intervention strategies, according to Vaughn et al. (2013). In a similar vein, Henry and Huizinga (2007) asserted that successful truancy prevention involves a full understanding of the features that identify truant students as well as the variables that may put them at risk for truancy. But according to Garry (1996, p. 1), truancy is "the first step to a lifetime of troubles." To develop targeted interventions to address this issue, campus directors and other important stakeholders of the university need to have a deeper understanding of the variables that contribute to truancy among students enrolled in the university.

The purpose of this study was to elucidate higher education students' motives for attending lecture sessions frequently and effectively from a student's perspective and to seek intervention measures to cease or lessen truancy amongst higher education students at the university of Namibia. There has been extensive research on enhancing higher education student class attendance through gamification, classroom management; examining the linkage between class attendance at university and academic performance (Karnik, Kishore & Meraj, 2020; Bradley, 2015; Al-Shammari, 2016; Pinter, Čisar, Balogh & Manojlović, 2020) but there is very little research seeking intervention or preventative measures to cease or lessen truancy amongst higher education students at the university of Namibia. To this end, the study explored the students' perspectives and feedback to help address the issue of truancy amongst students.

To understand higher education students' motives for attending lecture sessions frequently and effectively, the following research questions were asked:
a) Why are higher education students not willing to attend lectures?
b) What measures should be put in place to motivate truant students and win them back in classrooms voluntarily?

1.1. Factors Contributing to Truancy among Students
Ishak and Fin (2015) postulate that lecturers are crucial in reducing absenteeism. The following are cited in literature to be contributing factors to truant students:

Uninteresting lessons: Lecturers who plan uninteresting lessons attract few students to their lectures. Hence, they must try to draw students to the classroom by planning engaging lessons.

Unpleasant behaviors of lecturers: Ishak, et al (2015) point out that students will be discouraged from continuing in universities by lecturers that are excessively serious, academically focused, like to nag at students, and are difficult to communicate with.

Lecturer-student relationship: Demanet and Van Houtte (2012) posit that lecturers that are approachable, flexible, considerate, and encouraging can create an atmosphere that encourages students to stay in school.

1.2. Motivation through Truancy reduction program
This section highlights the motivational truancy reduction strategies which may be imposed by higher institutions of learning or even schools in stimulating truant students to spend more time in their classes without being forced and actively participate in their education. The following are the truancy reduction strategies for the literature reviewed:

1.2.1. Truancy Courts
O'Connor, et., al (2014) point out that several states have established truancy courts to help fight truancy. To help decrease truancy, these courts are often created to bring together the school, courts, families, and community resources. Cases may be dropped if the student starts going to class on a regular basis. These courts frequently provide decisions more quickly and consistently. The court staff is knowledgeable with laws pertaining to attendance and truancy (National Drug Court Resource Center, 2012).

1.2.2. Data Systems
Additionally, many schools are beginning to compile information on absences so that they may identify trends and take early action with specific pupils. These schools maintain student attendance data and provide regular updates using technology and data systems. There are currently eight states that have analysed chronic absences across the state, including Connecticut, Georgia, Hawaii, Indiana, Maryland, Oregon, Rhode Island, and Utah (Lu, 2013). Additionally, some school districts or schools have started to create

data systems that warn staff when pupils fulfil certain criteria, like missing five days of school, enabling schools to act before the absences become chronic.

1.2.3. Rewards for consistent attendance

Other initiatives try to use incentives for increased or high attendance. These could consist of being acknowledged at school assemblies, receiving certificates from the institution, having the chance to receive real prizes or free meal coupons (from nearby restaurants, etc.), among other incentives. At the extreme, a Jeep Patriot car will be randomly awarded to a student in Anchorage, Alaska, who has maintained perfect attendance (Anchorage Public Schools, 2013). Although it is unknown whether these wellpublicised incentives have had any significant effects on truancy in general, school districts in California, Connecticut, and Wyoming have also given out vehicles or trucks to prevent truancy (Fox News, 2006). To encourage their pupils, several schools have enrolled students in mentoring programmes like the Big Brothers Big Sisters programme.

1.2.4. Staff-student relationships

Building strong, individualised connections between students, their families, and school staff may be sufficient to boost school attendance, according to some studies (Kronholz, 2011). According to Railsback (2004), "schools that have established more intimate and/or individualised learning settings had higher attendance and lower dropout rates" (p. 12). This pattern may help to explain why larger schools (Puzzanchera, Stal, Finnegan, Tierney, & Snyder, 2004) and inner-city schools (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002) tend to have greater truancy rates than smaller, rural schools. It makes it logical that it is much simpler to get to know at-risk pupils and act when they are truant in places with tiny student populations. To convey to children that they are desired at school and that someone cares about their attendance, it is crucial for schools to connect with families and forge connections.

1.2.5. Mentoring Programs

For truant students and/or their families, mentoring programmes appoint a mentor, tutor, or advocate to serve as a guide and keep track of attendance. These programmes are especially suitable for children whose parents they don't get along with or who come from families who don't value education (Teasley, 2004). According to Gonzales, Richards, and Seeley (2002), students who suffer with truancy "say that having a person at school who is checking up on them gives them the sensation that someone cares and pushes them to attend to school."

2. METHODOLOGY

Respondents for this study were all full-time students from the faculty of Education and Human Sciences aged between 17 to 60 years old from the University of Namibia's Rundu campus. Data was collected using the open-ended online survey questionnaire. The questionnaire consists of two sections, one on respondents' demographic data and the other on higher education students class attendance. A pilot study had been conducted to validate the instrument. Respondents were sent the link via the WhatsApp platform for them to respond to. Responses were monitored by the corresponding author using google docs. From the total of 49 students, 24 (50%) are males and 24 (50%) females. Samples were selected based on purposive and random sampling procedures. Respondents were given a time frame of two weeks to response on the survey, and when the two weeks lapsed, the recorded responses were taken as final data for analysis discussion and recommendations. The instrument of this study has been developed by a team of researchers based on the research questions and the aim of the study. Data were analysed thematically where themes were derived and merged using students' responses. easy way to comply with the conference paper formatting requirements is to use this document as a template and simply type your text into it.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Characteristics of the student sample

For this study 48 full-time education students were included in the analysis. Half (50%) were females, and the remaining were (50%) males (see figure 1 below). Most of the students (77.1%) were within the age range 17–29 years. Students aged 30 -39 years constituted 16.7%. Those in the range of 40 – 49 years constituted 4.2%. Lastly, those in the age range of 50 and above constituted 2.1% of the sample (see figure 2 below). In terms of the year of study, the majority of the students were those in year 3, constituting 44.9%, followed by year 4 with 42.9%. Year 1 scored 2% and year 2 scored 10.2% (see figure 3 below). In terms of enrolled courses for the respondents, 55.1% constitute full-time students enrolled in the Bachelor of Education Degree in Junior Primary (Honours,) while 42.9% constitute students enrolled in the Bachelor of Education Degree in Senior Primary (Honours).

The least were students enrolled in Bachelor of Education Degree Honours with 2% (see figure 4 below).

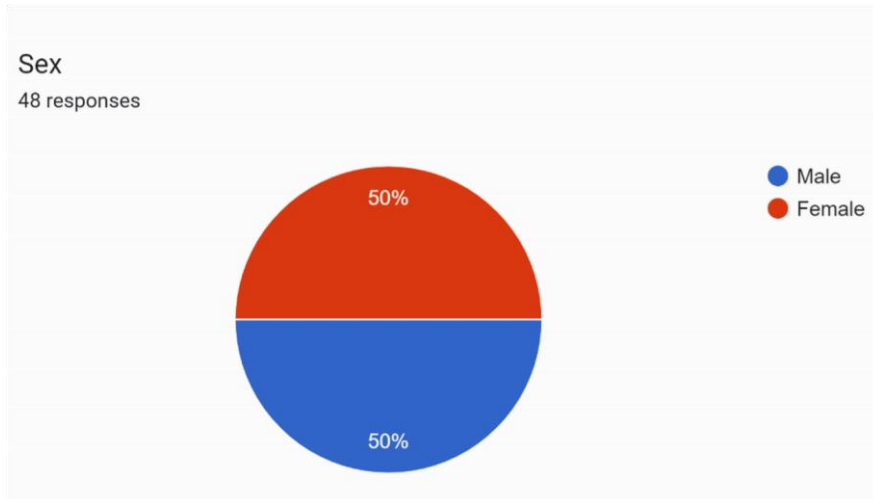**Characteristics of study participants**
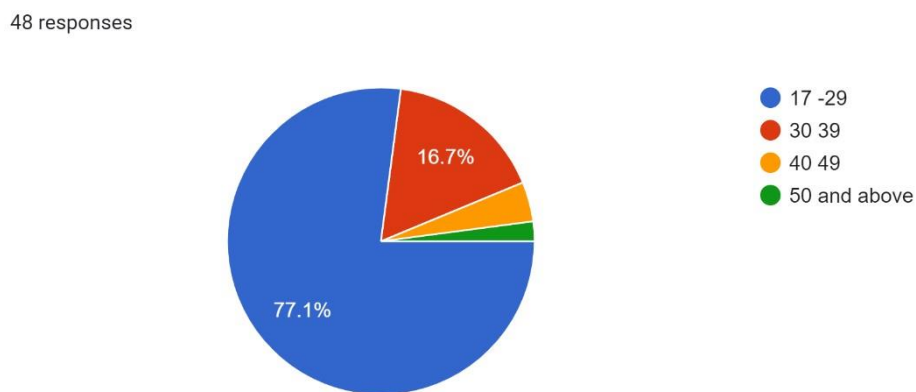

Figure 1. Sex of participants
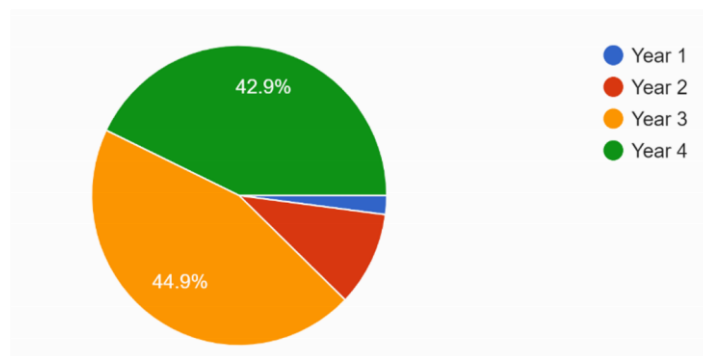

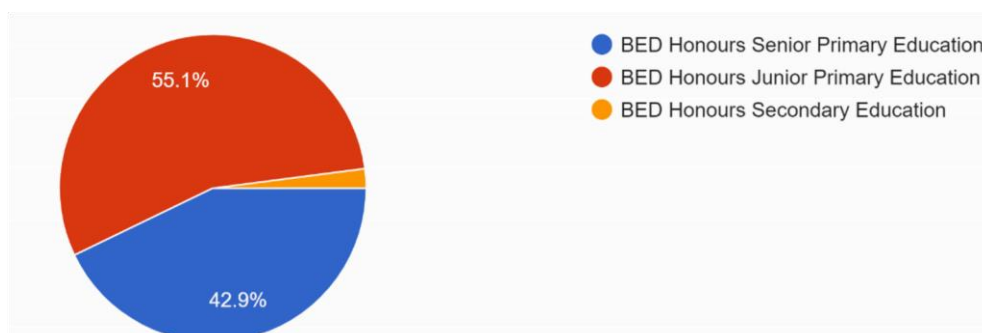**Figure 2. Age of participants**

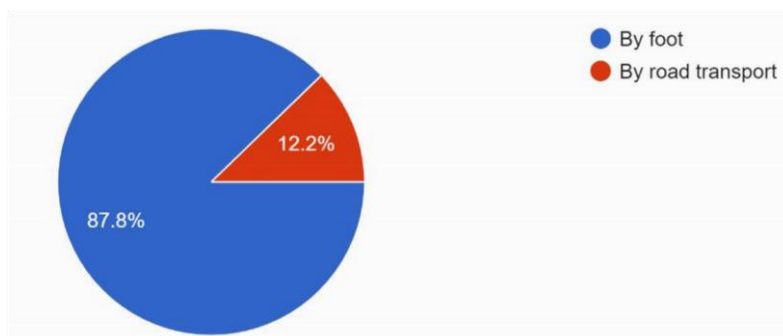**Figure 3. Year of study**

Figure 4. Enrolled Course

Figure 5. Means of transport to the University

Figure 5 shows the respondents means of getting to the university. 87.8% indicated that they foot for them to attend lectures, while 12.2% indicated that they use road transport to reach the university and attend classes.
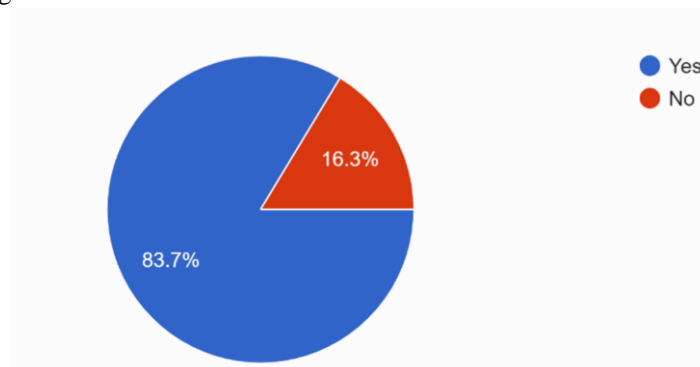
3.2. The Frequency of attending lectures

Figure 6.This figure shows that 83.7% of students attend lectures on a regular basis and only 16.3 % do not attend classes regularly.

3.3. Students' Motives Towards Attending Lectures

Many of the students mentioned what motivates them to attend lectures is to gain more knowledge about their subject matters and enable them to accumulate more continuous marks which will later qualify them to sit for examinations. While others alluded that they are motivated to attend lectures because they would want to change situations at home. Other students said that they feel it is a must for them to attend lectures because they are students. Moreover, some students said that they attend lectures to attain first - hand information and to get time to ask questions where they need clarity.

3.4. Factors contributing to truancy amongst education students

While most students are motivated to attend lectures regularly, the minority feels the following: The University of Namibia's Rundu campus lectures end in the late evenings (21h00) and the proximity between the university and their homes is further and it is not safe to walk home that late. While some spoke on the time of lectures are conducted and end, the others spoke on having personal problems which they cannot disclose, busy schedules of students also surfaced as an issue, availability of resources to get to campus, uninteresting lectures, frequent cancellation of classes without prior notice to students, lecturer's approaches and behaviours, lecturers' absenteeism.

The findings of this study reveal that, lecturers are also contributing to students' truancy as they do not come for lectures, they cancel classes regularly and mostly without prior notice and their behaviours are pushing away students from not attending their lectures. This is well documented in Kronholz (2011) study that building strong, individualised connections between students, and University staffs may be sufficient to boost school attendance.

It can also be deduced that students have personal problems which makes them to not attend lectures regularly and a truant reduction program in this regard would be ideal to unravel the personal problems which students have and win them back in lecture rooms. The university also pointed out here that their lecture slots are live threatening to day students as they knock off late in the evening and most of them walk home due to financial constraints.

3.5. Lecturers' Approaches of Lecturing to attract students' regularly

When asked to respond on the lecturing approaches of lectures, the majority alluded that lectures are conducted face to face without learning materials and mostly they adopt the lecturer-centred approach by displaying slides on smart board and start reading to students.

3.6. Preferred Lecturing Approaches by Students

The students reveal that they prefer interactive lectures compared to lecturer-centered approaches and they suggested that lessons for the next day should be announced in advance and give students take aways of going to research on the topic and discuss their findings when they will come to class the next day. They have also noted that doing this will boost their confidence and attend lectures regularly. They have also suggested that they prefer blended learning (face to face and online learning) since they are always provided with data monthly than coming for face-to-face lectures everyday which is costly. They also prefer lecturers to record their lessons to aid revision of students and upload it on their individual Moodle platforms. Moreover, more practical lessons are sought by students than theory lessons.

The students also suggested that lecturers should keep an attendance register to keep the attendance record of each student to easily identify the students who are always absent and act. This is in line with Lu (2013) study who suggested that institutions should come up with data systems to compile information on absences so that they may identify trends and take early action with specific students. The institution maintains student attendance data and provides regular updates using technology and data systems.

4. CONCLUSIONS

By identifying the contributing reasons of truancy among higher education students at the university of Namibia's Rundu campus, the study has enhanced the literature in education. Additionally, a thorough grasp of the truancy reduction programme that institutions may use to help reduce truancy has been gained from the literature. Research has shown that truancy among university students is significantly influenced by students, lecturers, and the university. Again, classroom attendance is important for every student at the university of Namibia and when students become truant it impacts the university's progress and that of students. However, there are numerous contributory factors underpinning truancy that lecturers and the university of Namibia's Rundu campus need to be aware of and reduce their impact on the students' class attendance and academic performance in general. This implies that, despite labelling class attendance to be important for students at the university, the university should seek truancy reduction programs to be imposed so that truant students are won back to classrooms. All paragraphs must be indented. All paragraphs must be justified, i.e., both left-justified and right-justified.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following strategies are suggested for consideration and eventual implementation by all based on the results of the research findings:

Identifying truant students: identify students with chronic absenteeism and refer them for counselling.

Following up on truant students: The university should make efforts to contact students' homes to inquire about the truant students.

Enforcing the university's attendance policy: The university and the lecturers should consistently enforce the attendance policy for students to be motivated to attend lectures regularly and attendance policies must be publicised and understood by all staff and students. There must be a clear understanding of the difference between excused and unexcused absences.

Depression/withdrawal from social contacts: Use counselling interventions, develop staff-student relationships.

REFERENCES

1) Al-Shammari, Z., N. (2016). Enhancing higher education student attendance through classroom management. *Cogent Education, 3*.

2) Anchorage Public School District. (2013). Fly and drive for perfect attendance. Retrieved on October 3, 2022 from, http://www.asdk12.org/media/anchorage/globalmedia/documents/calendar/PerfectAttendance_Flier.pdf.

3) Baker, M. L., Sigmon, J. N., & Nugent, M. E. (2001). Truancy reduction: Keeping students in school. *Juvenile Justice Bulletin*.

4) Balfan, R., & Byrnes, V. (2012). The importance of being in school: A report onabsenteeism in the nation's public schools. *Education Digest, 78*(2), 4–9.

5) Bradley, R., R. (2015). A Comprehensive Approach to Improving Student Attendance. Education Doctoral. Paper 225.

6) Demanet, J., & Van Houtte, M. (2012). Teachers' attitudes and students' opposition: School misconduct as a reaction to teachers' diminished effort and affect. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 28*(6), 860-869.

7) Garry, E. M. (1996). *Truancy: First step to a lifetime of problems*. OJJDP: Juvenile Justice Bulletin. October, 1–7. [8] Gonzales, R., Richards, K., & Seeley, K. (2002). Youth out of school: Linking absence to delinquency. Retrieved May 3,

2022, from

8) Henry, K. L. (2007). Who's skipping school: Characteristics of truants in 8th and 10th grade. *Journal of School Health, 77*(1), 29–35.

9) Henry, K. L., & Huizinga, D. H. (2007). School-related risk and protective factors associated with truancy among urban youth placed at risk. *The Journal of Primary Prevention, 28*(6), 505–519.

10) Henry, K. L., Knight, K. E., & Thornberry, T. P. (2012). School disengagement as a predictor of dropout, delinquency, and problem substance use during adolescence and early adulthood. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 41*(2), 156–166.

11) Houck, C. D., Hadley, W., Tolou-Shams, M., & Brown, L. (2012). Truancy is associated with sexual risk among early adolescents. *Journal of Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics: JDBP, 33*(9), 728. http:/ /www.truancyprevention.org/documents/DonnerComplete9-04.pdf.

12) Ishak, Z., & Low Suet Fin, L., S. (2015). Factors Contributing to Truancy among Students: A Correlation between Predictors. *British Journal of Education, Society & Behavioural Science, 9*(1), 33-39.

13) Karnik, A., Kishore, P., & Meraj, M. (2020). Examining the linkage between class attendance at university and academic performance in an International Branch Campus setting. *Research in Comparative & International Education, 15*(4) 371–390.

14) Kronholz, J. (2011). Truants: The challenges of keeping youth in school. *Education Next, 11*, 32-38.

15) Lu, A. (2013). States tackle chronic absence in schools. The PEW Charitable Trusts: State and Consumer Initiatives. Retrieved from http://www.pewstates.org/projects/stateline/headlines/states-tackle-chronic-absence-in-schools-85899504904.

16) Maynard, B. R., McCrea, K. T., Pigott, T. D., & Kelly, M. S. (2013). Indicated truancy interventions for chronic truant students: A Campbell systematic review. *Research on Social Work Practice, 23*(1), 5–21.

17) Maynard, B. R., Salas-Wright, C. P., Vaughn, M. G., & Peters, K. E. (2012). Who are truant youth? Examining distinctive profiles of truant youth using latent profile analysis. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 41*(12), 1671–1684.

18) National Drug Court Resource Center. (2012). *What is a truancy court?* Retrieved November 23, 2022, from http://www.ndcrc. org/node/360.

19) O'Connor, A., Peterson, R. L. & Strawhun, J. (2014, March). *Truancy reduction. Strategy brief.* Lincoln, NE: Student Engagement Project, University of Nebraska-Lincoln and the Nebraska Department of Education. http://k12engagement.unl.edu/truancy-reduction.

20) Pengpid, S., & Peltzer, K. (2019). Prevalence of truancy in a national sample of school going adolescents in Laos is associated with potential risk and protective factors. *Children and Youth Services Review, 107*, 104521.

21) Pinter, R., Čisar, S., M., Balogh, Z., & Manojlović, H. (2020). Enhancing Higher Education Student Class Attendance through Gamification. *Acta Polytechnica Hungarica, 17*(2), 13-33.

22) Puzzanchera, C., Stahl, A. L., Finnegan, T. A., Tierney, N., & Snyder, H. N. (2004). *Juvenile court statistics 2000.* Pittsburg, PA: National Center for Juvenile Justice.

23) Railsback, J. (2004). Increasing student attendance: Strategies from research and practice. Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. Retrieved October 31, 2022, from http://www.nwrel.org/request/2004june/.

24) Ramberg, J., Brolin Låftman, S., Fransson, E., & Modin, B. (2019). School effectiveness and truancy: A multilevel study of upper secondary schools in Stockholm. *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth, 24*(2), 185–198.

25) Reid, K. (2005). The causes, views and traits of school absenteeism and truancy: An analytical review. *Research in Education, 74*(1), 59–82.

26) Salzer, C., Trautwein, U., Lüdtke, O., & Stamm, M. (2012). Predicting adolescent truancy: The importance of distinguishing between different aspects of instructional quality. *Learning and Instruction, 22*(5), 311–319.

27) Seidu, A. A. (2019). Prevalence and correlates of truancy among school-going adolescents in Mozambique: evidence from the 2015 Global School-Based Health Survey. *The Scientific World Journal,* 2019.

28) Seidu, A. A., Ahinkorah, B. O., Darteh, E. K. M., Dadzie, L. K., Dickson, K. S., & Amu, H. (2019). Prevalence and correlates of truancy among in-school adolescents in Ghana: Evidence from the 2012 Global School-based Student Health Survey. *Journal of Child & Adolescent Mental Health, 31*(1), 51–61.

29) Seidu, A., A., Arthur-Holmes, F., Agbaglo, E., & Ahinkorah, B., O. (2022). Truancy: How food insecurity, parental supervision, and other factors influence school attendance of adolescents in Seychelles. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 135

30) Shah, S. A., Abdullah, A., Aizuddin, A. N., & Rohaizat, M. (2012). Psycho-behavioural factors contributing to truancy among Malay secondary school students in Malaysia. *ASEAN Journal of Psychiatry, 13*(2), 128–137.

31) Teasley, M. L. (2004). Absenteeism and truancy: Risk, protection, and best practice implications for school social workers. *Children & Schools, 26,* 117-128.

32) Vaughn, M. G., Maynard, B. R., Salas-Wright, C. P., Perron, B. E., & Abdon, A. (2013). Prevalence and correlates of truancy in the US: Results from a national sample. *Journal of Adolescence, 36*(4), 767–776.

33) Yoep, N., Tupang, L., Jai, A. N., Kuay, L. K., Paiwai, F., & Nor, N. S. M. (2016). Prevalence of truancy and its associated factors among school-going Malaysian adolescents: Data from global school-based health survey 2012. *Psychology, 7*(08), 1053.