

***Deprived Learning Environment and Delinquent Behaviour among Undergraduates in Nigerian Public Universities: Implication for Sustainable Development***

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**Abstract**

*The study explores deprived learning environment and delinquent behaviour among Undergraduates of Faculty of Education, University of Calabar, Nigeria. Survey research design was adopted for the study. The sampling techniques adopted for the study were census, purposive, proportionate and accidental; 601 respondents were drawn from the population of 8,400 undergraduate students of Faculty of Education in the 2018/2019 academic session. An instrument titled “Perceived Deprivation Factors and Truancy of Undergraduate Questionnaire,” validated through peer review, was used for data collection. The data was analyzed using simple statistical tools like frequency and percentages. The results showed perceived deprivation factors responsible for truancy among undergraduate students of the Faculty of Education to include poor lecturer-student interpersonal relationship, inaudibility of lecturers, lecturers' postponement of lectures/change of venue, peer influence, among others. Institutional factors suggested to curb truancy among the students include effective supervision of lecturers, effective guidance and counselling to help student focus on their studies, regular orientation programme especially to address adolescent students in class about truancy and its consequences among others.*

**Keywords:** Deprived, Learning, Delinquent, Behaviour, Undergraduate, sustainable, development.

## **Introduction**

Personal observation of activities of students and their perceived adjustment to life on campus environment shows that of a mixed feeling. While some seem to be satisfied, and well adjusted, others are at the extreme, insatiable, stressed and exhibit truancy. The different scenarios can be readily deciphered as one interacts with some students on campus. Besides, there is no time one do not find two or three academic staff complaining about the depreciating input of students to the teaching and learning activities. These inputs are in terms of attendance to lectures, late submission of assignments, non-participation in seminar and general attitude toward school. The observation is that some students seem to have developed truant behaviours which is a kind of delinquency. According to Ekpo and Ajake (2013), delinquency has remained an agelong problem in the Nigerian secondary school. The carrying over of delinquent behaviour into the university system is undesirable for the university system. To Muncie in Alemika and Chukwuma (2000), delinquency is a condition of drift, maladjustment, pathology, disturbance, moral depravity and unruly behaviour. Hirsh cited in Maheshwari (2016) classified delinquent behaviour into six classes based on the kinds of offences committed. There are: (i) incorrigibility such as disobedience (ii) truancy such as staying away from school (iii) larceny ranging from petty theft to armed robbery (iv) destructive behaviour (v) violence such as against community by use of weapons, and (vi) sex offences ranging from homosexuality to rape. The concern of this study is on truancy among undergraduates in Nigerian public universities. Research shows that truancy has negative impact on students' learning outcome and adjustment. To this end the study sets forth to investigate truancy among University students and impact on sustainable development.

Truancy is a common phenomenon witnessed in schools, particularly at the primary and secondary levels of education. To Kimberly, Huizinga and Thornberry (2009), truancy is having an unexcused absence from school for one or more school days during five days of a school week. The concern of this study is found in these questions: What could be responsible for students' decision to stay away from school? Why would students not want to be in class to attend to the very activities that they sought admission for? How have university administrators and lecturers responding to this awkward behaviour among undergraduate students in the Faculty of Education in the University of Calabar?

Thus this study was necessitated with the view to providing information that could help modify students' behaviour and also help the affected students to participate and enjoy school. Orji (2019), on classroom condition and Principals' Perception of Factors Responsible For Students' Drop Out in Public Secondary Schools in Calabar Education Zone, Cross River State, noted that school life is meant to be an enjoyable activity for both the school administrators and the students. However, the downward trend in students' interest, enthusiasm and motivation to school is worrisome and this has manifested in truancy. There is need to put this demeanour under check because of the

immediate and far reaching negative consequences. Immediate consequences show in gaps in learning, poor school adjustment, disillusionment, poor academic performance (seen in poor grades) and low Grade Point Average (GPA) and tendency towards cheating in test and examination. Far reaching effects include poor academic performance at the end of the programme seen in low cumulative grade point average and incurring of extra year to remedy poor grades. So many factors have been implicated as the cause of truancy among students in institutions of learning; for example, Ajayi and Adeniyi (2009) identified the following causes of truancy: Laxity in the home control and parental supervision, social factor, teacher factor, societal factor and government influence. According to Iheanacho (2015), schools should be equipped to encourage learning and enhance positive attitude to school. This implies that any form of inadequacy or deprivation experienced by students could lead to discouragement, demotivation and negative attitude to school. Chugh (2011) reported in a study in India that because schools fail to respond appropriately to some special educational needs of students, they usually are forced to drop out. This case may not be different in the University of Calabar. Therefore, this study was interested in identifying the undergraduate students' perception of deprivation factors in the learning environment that could be responsible for their truancy and also to obtain their suggestion on what institutional support can alleviate or help to curb the problem in the University of Calabar. Students' suggestion on how best they can be served is important if the teaching learning process is to be learner centred; this substantiates the reason for asking for their suggestion in this study.

Learning environment constitutes all the physical surroundings, psychological, environmental, social and cultural influences affecting the growth and development of the learner engaged in educational enterprises (Hiemstra, 1991). Deprivation according to Cambridge Dictionary is the damaging lack of material benefits considered to be basic necessities in a society. This means that lack of conducive learning environment constitutes deprivation.

This study is anchored on Agnew's (1985) General Strain Theory which held that when people are treated badly, they may get upset and engage in deviant behaviours. Freud (1920), in his pleasure principles, holds that individuals are attracted to pleasurable environment and abstain from unpleasant conditions. The implication of these theories to this study on truancy among undergraduate students is that truancy is the response to the deprived learning environment instigated by the feeling of lack of the basic resources needed by the students to learn.

Social Disorganization theory by Shaw and McKay (1969) viewed society as a collection of people bound together by a set of interrelated norms and values. The theory sees deviance as a natural by-product of rapid social change especially when the pace of social change is significant enough to disrupt a society's normative order. The relevance

of this theory to the present study is that it explains how undergraduate students of the University of Calabar developed truancy as a result of the rapidly downward change of the social order of the society represented in the perceived deprived condition of the learning environment.

The physical learning environment includes the classroom space, facilities such as tables, chairs, ventilation and instructional materials like whiteboard and flip charts. According to Anyaogu (2010), inadequate or lack of desired condition leads to disruptive behaviour by the students as they struggle for the few because of inadequacy. Ozuzu, Achunime and Emetaram cited in Anyaogu (2010) noted that a rich, stimulating and challenging classroom minimizes misconduct and truancy because it generates satisfaction with school work and enhances learning outcome.

A study by Ayonmike (2010) examines the adequacy of instructional resources for improving teaching and learning of furniture craft, in Delta and Edo State Technical Colleges. The study was guided by three research questions. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data for the study. Frequency counts, mean scores and standard deviation were used to analyze the data collected. The finding revealed that the instructional facilities in the technical colleges were inadequate. Ekuban cited in Ayonmike (2010) noted that availability of suitable instructional materials/facilities in good quantity and in rich variety and range is essential in education. Inyang-Abia (2003) averred that a school environment supports teaching learning activities by providing facilities, space and materials for both teachers and students. However, because of an upsurge in enrolment of students in institutions of learning due to growing awareness of the importance of education for development of society; therefore, it is advisable for institutions to be proactive by applying sustainable measures that will curb truancy. For example, Arre (2011), on overcrowding or undercrowding in schools, found that overcrowded classes could have a direct impact on students' learning and increase drop out. Ikoya and Onoyase (2008) in their study found a significant relationship between school environment and students' attitude to schooling and noted that conducive physical environment could enhance students' school attendance, involvement in academic activities and academic performance positively.

For educational systems to achieve its set goals, teachers are expected to be up and doing in their defined duties (Yusuf & Fashiku, 2016); the reason is because teachers' high productivity shows in the students' academic performance. Iheanacho (2015) made it clearer that the school is expected to possess certain qualities that will serve to enhance learning, attitude of students to academic pursuits, academic achievement motivation and general success in life.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What perceived deprivation factors are responsible for truancy among students of the Faculty of Education, University of Calabar?
2. What are the likely institutional supports that can be applied to address truancy?

### **Methodology**

The study adopted a survey design. This design becomes appropriate because the research is about self-report behaviours, attitudes, self-classification, knowledge, expectations and characteristics (Newman, 2003).

The study area was Faculty of Education, University of Calabar, located in Calabar municipality, Nigeria. The university was established on 1<sup>st</sup> October 1973 as part of the national development plan under the then military government. The university grew out of the Calabar campus of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka which began functioning as such in the 1973/1974 academic session with 154 students with a small cadre of academic administrative and technical staff. The institution has as its motto “knowledge for service” from its inception; the university adopted the four-year integrated degree programme based on the semester system and the course system. Forty five years after, the University of Calabar has witnessed both qualitative and quantitative changes. These include changes in student enrolment and staff size. As at 2018/2019 academic session, there are ten (10) faculties, three (3) institutes with sixty five (65) departments (University of Calabar Academic Planning Department, 2019). Faculty of Education is just one out of the faculties which was purposively chosen for this study and being one of the largest faculties in the institution, it was considered representative enough to mirror the event in other faculties in the university in general.

The population of the study comprises all undergraduate students of the University of Calabar during the first semester of the 2018/2019 academic session. From the database information unit, the number of cleared undergraduate students in the Faculty of Education is eight thousand, four hundred (8,400). The sampling techniques adopted for the study were census, purposive, proportionate and accidental. Census was used because all the 14 departments were considered while undergraduate students in their second year of study were purposively selected as sample for the study. Proportionate sampling was done to select 10% of sample size from the target population and this was applied in each department. Data collection was by accidental sampling of students at their departments. At the end out of 840 questionnaires administered, 601 respondents were admitted into the study. This comprised 404 male and 297 females undergraduate students (Field report, 2019).

The researchers constructed an instrument titled “Perceived Deprivation Factors and Truancy of Undergraduate Questionnaire” which was validated through peer review and considered valid for data collection. The instrument had three sections; section one elicited information on demographic data; students were able to tick their age range, sex

and family as applicable. In section two, students were asked to list those conditions perceived to be responsible for truancy among them. Factors were delineated as infrastructural and school facilities while truancy was operationalized as absenteeism and lack of interest to attend lectures. Section three elicited information on the likely institutional support that can help to curb truancy. Five research assistants assisted in data collection, this was to enable full coverage of all the Departments. Each assistant covered two departments. The method of administration was face-to face. Data was analyzed using simple statistical tools like frequency counts and percentage scores.

### **Presentation of results**

Before presenting the result of the research questions, analysis of the demographic data of the respondents is as follows in Tables 1, 2 and 3.

**Table 1:** Demographic information of respondents based on sex

<b>Sex</b>	<b>Number of respondents</b>
Male	404
Female	197
<b>Total</b>	<b>601</b>

**Table 2:** Demographic information of respondents based on age range

<b>Age range</b>	<b>Number of respondents</b>
Under 18 years	14
18 years to 20 years	337
21 years and above	256
<b>Total</b>	<b>601</b>

**Table 3:** Demographic information of respondents based on sponsorship

<b>Sponsorship</b>	<b>Number of respondents</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Parents	510	85%
Self sponsored	22	4%
Relatives	69	11%
<b>Total</b>	<b>601</b>	<b>100%</b>

*Source: field work, 2019 computed from data*

As shown in Table 1, based on sex, there are 404 male and 197 female respondents in the study. Table 2, based on age range, those under 18 years are 14, those from 18 years to 20 years are 331 while those from 21 years and above are 256. Table 3, based on sponsorship, those sponsored by parents constitute 85% of the total respondents while those sponsored by relatives is 11%, those sponsored by self is least with 4%.

**Research question 1:** What perceived factors are responsible for truancy among students in your department?

**Table 4:** Perceived deprivation factors responsible for undergraduate students' truancy

S/N	Description	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
1.	Poor lecturer -student interpersonal relationship	101	16.80
2.	Lack of motivation	92	15.30
3.	Overcrowded hostel accommodation	82	13.64
4.	Over indulgence in social activities	78	12.98
5.	Poor condition of lecture venues/classrooms	60	9.98
6.	Poor finance of students	56	9.32
7.	Ill health condition of students	54	8.99
8.	Inaudibility of lecturers	31	5.15
9.	Peer influence	28	4.66
10.	Lecturers postponement of lectures/change of venue	19	3.16
<b>Total</b>		601	100

Several factors were mentioned as perceived factors responsible for undergraduate students' truancy in the faculty. The students' responses were organized in themes. These themes were further arranged in order of occurrence with corresponding frequencies and percentages. The result is presented in Table 4. Among the factors identified were poor lecturer and students interpersonal relationship which was the highest contributing factor responsible for undergraduate students' truancy as perceived by the students themselves. Further classification of the factors into personal and institutional shows personal factors were more, 6 out of 10 (see table 4 Serial No. 2, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9) while institutional factors were less, that is 4 out of 10 (see table 4 serial No. 1, 3, 5, 10).

From the table, personal factors responsible for truancy among students as perceived by them include lack of motivation, poor attitude to school, over indulgence in social activities, ill-health condition of students and peer influence. Institutional factors responsible for truancy among students include poor lecturer-student interpersonal relationship, overcrowded hostel, poor condition of lecture venues and lecturers' postponement of lectures/change of venue.

**Research question 2:** What are the likely institutional supports that can be applied to address truancy behaviour?

**Table 5:** Institutional support to curb undergraduate students' delinquent behaviour (truancy)

S/N	Description of items
1.	Effective supervision of lecturers.
2.	Effective guidance and counselling to help student focus on their studies.
3.	Regular orientation programme especially to address younger students in class about truancy and its consequences.
4.	Provision of enough lecture venues and facilities to make them convenient.
5.	Libraries should be stocked with relevant books and students should be provided with variety of choices
6.	Mentorship for students to give them desired direction.
7.	Facilities like seats, tables should be provided and existing ones that are in bad shape should be repaired and put back to use.
8.	Excellent students should be given scholarship award.

Measures were suggested by the respondents to curb problem of truancy among students in the University of Calabar. These institutional supports were captured under eight themes as presented in Table 5.

### **Discussion of the findings**

The results on perceived factors responsible for truancy among undergraduate students of the Faculty of Education revealed a lot and show that indeed truancy among students are provoked by psychosocial issues of deprivation in the learning environment. This finding is consistent with the postulate of Sigmund Freud (1920) in his pleasure principles that individuals are attracted to pleasurable environment conditions and repel unfavourable conditions, and Agnew (1985) General Strain Theory which held that when people are treated badly, they may get upset and engage in deviant behaviours. The

findings of Arre (2011) that overcrowded classes could increase dropout among students could play out if conditions of the lecture venues or classes are not improved to sustain students' motivation.

On perceived institutional support to curb truancy among undergraduate students of the University of Calabar, so many suggestions were offered; these suggestions were organized into eight themes as presented in Table 5. An examination of the suggestions reveals that the management of the Faculty and the University in general has to address unfavourable conditions in the school learning environment that are capable of causing truancy among undergraduates. This result is consistent with Ikoya and Onoyase's (2008) study that found a significant relationship between school environment and students' attitude to schooling. The authors noted that conducive physical environment could enhance students' school attendance, involvement in academic activities and academic performance positively. In like vein, Inyang-Abia (2003) averred that a school environment supports teaching and learning for both teachers and students. The suggested factors to curb truancy among students find support in the observation of Ozuzu, Achunime and Emetaram in Anyaogu (2010) that a rich, stimulating and challenging classroom environment minimizes misconduct and truancy because it generates satisfaction with school work and enhances learning outcome. This result is consistent with Iheanacho (2015) that schools should be equipped to encourage learning and enhance positive attitude to school.

### **Implications for sustainable development**

University education is a manpower industry that produces the knowledge and skills necessary for development. Therefore the university must prevent human capital deficiency especially in critical areas of the economy that promote sustainable development. What would a deprived learning environment of the highest citadel of learning in Nigeria beget? This result has implication for sustainable development for quality university education. To support this quest, Ayonmike (2010) in a study which examines adequacy of instructional resources for improvement of teaching and learning of furniture craft in Delta and Edo States discovered that instructional facilities in the technical colleges were inadequate and that poor infrastructure threatens education in these states. The implication is that the condition for effective learning in the University must be well provided and not deprived, to enhance sustainable development in this level of education.

### **Conclusion**

Through this study, the perceived factors responsible for the observed delinquent behaviour (truancy) among undergraduate students of the Faculty of Education, University of Calabar have been revealed. The institutional factors suggested by the students reveal areas of improvement by the Faculty. The students believe that lecturers should be effectively supervised, guidance and counselling should be provided to help

direct students, that orientation programme organized by the faculty should be regular, libraries should be stocked with relevant books to enhance student access to such books among others.

### Recommendations

1. Lecturers should be advised to improve on their interpersonal relationship with their students to reduce truancy.
2. There should be effective supervision of lecturers' activities to reduce the tendency of postponement of lecture or sudden change of lecture venue.
3. Guidance and counselling activities should be scaled up, since majority of the undergraduates are still transiting from late adolescence to young adulthood.
4. The faculty should organize regular orientation programme that focus on creating awareness on delinquent behaviour like truancy.
5. The Faculty of Education should improve upon the conditions of the lecture venues.

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