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### SPECIAL ISSUE

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Technology Application in Primary Schools: Stakeholders views on the use of Calculators in Chinhoyi Urban.

*Emmanuel Chinamasa*

Teacher Evaluation by Pupils: Case of "O" Level Mathematics Student – Teachers in Bulawayo urban.

*Emmanuel Chinamasa, Morden Dzinotizayi, Mathias Sithole*

Factors contributing to Teacher truancy in two Secondary Schools in Bulawayo. *Emmanuel Chinamasa, Ezekiel Svigie, Simbarashe Munikwa*

The Relevance of 'O' Level Mathematics in Nursing: A Survey of Practicing Nurses' Experiences in Zimbabwe.

*Matirwisa Kuneka, Emmanuel Chinamasa*

Secondary School Teachers' and Pupils' Views on the use of Mathematics Textbooks with Answers in Mazowe District.

*Lawrence Muregere, Emmanuel Chinamasa, Newton Hlenga*

Factors affecting Lecturer Research output in new Universities in Zimbabwe.

*Emmanuel Chinamasa*

Examinations Question Specialized Marking: A Quantitative Analysis of Inter-marker Reliability Mode at Chinhoyi University of Technology.

*Emmanuel Chinamasa, Cribert Munetsi*

Computation errors on measures of Central Tendency by Masters Students: Implications for Andragogy.

*Emmanuel Chinamasa, Cribert Munetsi*

Technology Utilisation: A survey of Computer Literacy levels among Health Personnel at Chinhoyi Provincial Hospital.

*Constance Madya, Emmanuel Chiramasa*

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## FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO TEACHER TRUANCY IN TWC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN BULAWAYO.

*Emmanuel Chinamasa, Chinhoyi University of Technology, Ezekiel Svogie, Mpopoma High School, & Simbarashe Munikwa Chinhoyi University of Technology*

### **Abstract**

*This report presents findings from a case study of teacher truancy in two high schools in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe. Qualitative data from case studies exploring teacher truancy were followed by quantitative data using surveys. A cluster sample of 118 teachers and census of 70 class monitors and 9 education officers provided information for the study. This was complemented by documentary analysis of teacher reports and schemes. The study found that teacher truancy was highest among mathematics teachers. Truancy was in the form of early departure from lesson (75%), lateness (64%), digression to story telling (46%) and absence from school (41%). Early departure and digression was common for the low ability classes while late coming was popular in high ability classes. A chi-square test confirmed no association between teacher truancy and subject taught.*

*Factors contributing to teacher - truancy were in the flaw of the recruitment and education system, prescriptive class deployment and lack of pedagogical teacher support system. Study recommends the use of consultative class deployment, teacher supervision workshops for heads of departments and empowering of class monitors and parents to complain against teacher truancy.*

**Key words:** teacher, truancy, mathematics teaching, pedagogics

### **INTRODUCTION**

Teacher truancy is a problem which cannot be ignored in the management of secondary schools. It is of particular concern to the deputy head whose key result area is to "supervise teachers' attendance and punctuality" as required by the Ministry of Education and Culture (1993: 25). This study considers a teacher's unauthorized absence, late arrival and early departure from a lesson as a truant act. As a head of mathematics department and deputy head, the researcher was disturbed by teacher truancy which had the highest frequency in mathematics. The problem was aggravated by the scarcity of literature on teacher truancy management in Zimbabwe.

The generic term “truancy” refers to any intentional unauthorized absence from a teaching – learning situation. The term typically describes students’ absence from a learning session without authority. Focusing on learners’ truancy presents a biased perception of the problem which leaves teachers and school heads protected by school authority immunity. The observation that teachers are also playing truancy form the basis for the current study which addresses itself to mathematics teacher truancy in high density group B secondary schools characterized by high enrolments and double sessioning.

**Effects of teacher truancy manifest in any of the following problems:**

- disturbing noise from an unattended class, pupils’ indiscipline, teacher – pupil conflicts and student dropouts from the subject of the truant teacher.
- At times teachers increase the application of corporal punishment to silence complaining pupils.

Comparative studies on teacher truancy by Harvard University and World Bank in 2004, cited by Basu (2006) report the following teacher truancy rates: India 25%, Bangladesh 16%, Zambia 17% and Uganda 27%. The studies also revealed that Head teachers are on the lead; they are on average truant 5% more than ordinary teachers. Even though no statistics are available on teacher truancy in Tanzania, The Sunday Mail (15 – 21/ 02/ 2009) reported that in one case 16 teachers were canned 4 lashes each by the local Tanzanian police for lateness and truancy.

### **Context**

In Zimbabwe, teachers are recruited by the Ministry of Education. The school head declares a vacant post to the district staffing officer who recruits and posts the teacher to the school on behalf of the ministry. At times when a school head declares a post for a mathematics teacher, the ministry sends in an agriculture or Geography teacher with an introductory letter instructing the school head to “make internal arrangements.” Very few school heads have the courage to return inappropriately qualified teachers. The result of the internal arrangements is that pupils are taught by unqualified teachers.

Elephant High and Hippo High are two group B secondary schools in Zimbabwe high density suburbs in Bulawayo. They operate a morning and afternoon session for formal students and an evening session for adults. During the period study was being conducted Elephant high had 13 classes of form one, 12 classes each for forms two to four, and large 'A' level mathematics classes. It had 11 teachers teaching mathematics. Hippo high school had 12 teachers for mathematics. The two schools combined had a teacher establishment of 118.

Teacher deployment in these schools is horizontal. For example a mathematics teacher deployed for all form 3 classes in the morning session that term teaches 3A1 to 3A6. the teacher ends up with an average of (6 classes x 6 periods = 36 periods) per week. Each class had an average of 45 pupils resulting in the teacher expecting to mark 270 mathematics exercise books per day. Pupils are streamed by academic ability and placed so that in each session there is one or two classes that are considered "bright". The horizontal deployment was used to ensure that each teacher had a share of the different abilities of children in the school.

Like any other government school, the two schools do not have teachers' offices. All teachers operate from the staff- room. The set-up facilitates teacher supervision since the staff room is near the deputy head's office. The master time table is in the staff-room and the siren or bell is rung at the end of each lesson to coordinate teacher movements. Taken for granted, the system works very well on the assumption that, teachers are present, punctual and willing to teach.

### **The Research Problem**

This study is anchored on Jean-Rousseau (1712-1778) philosophy which proposes that man is naturally good but corrupted by the environment. From this perception, teachers are regarded as professionals responsible to their pupils in their subjects.

A good teacher is interested in his/her subject. The interest is the internal drive for the teacher to be resourceful, interested in his/her pupils and teaches to show off his/her abilities. From this angle the study regards teacher truancy as a result of factors within the school system, which require investigation and action to reduce their negative influence on teachers and their teaching.

The researcher's reflection on his twenty years teaching experience as a mathematics teacher, head of department and deputy head in different secondary schools, shows disturbing incidents of teacher truancy. There were high frequencies from mathematics teachers. Duty master, duty prefects and class monitors' weekly reports indicated many cases of teacher nonattendance and lack of punctuality. Reviews of parents- teachers' association (PTA) meetings reflect complaints from parents about teacher truancy. During consultation days the researcher responded to parents' complaints about teacher truancy on behalf of the school.

The problem is aggravated by the fact that, literature on leadership and educational management has little on teacher truancy as if to condone it.

Teacher truancy results in pupils being neglected and school administration accused of insufficient teacher supervision. At times pupils drop mathematics before registering for examinations or register but do not write the examinations because they will not have completed the syllabus. The overall view is that teacher truancy discredits the school and creates unnecessary pupils disciplinary problems.

### Research Question

In this study we posed the following research question: *what factors contribute to mathematics teacher truancy?*

### Significance of the study

This study merits accommodation in the literature of mathematics education and educational management on the following basis:

1. it is addressing a problem that affects the teaching of mathematics and smooth running of schools.
2. Recommendations are intended to improve practice in teacher supervision, deployment, teaching and working conditions for teachers.
3. it is a source of feedback to educational management policy makers.

### Literature Review

One may wonder why researchers can initiate studies on teacher truancy when policy Circular P.58, "The enforcement of discipline among members of the unified teaching service" (dated 10 June 1983) is silent about it. This is a valid observation, but policies are continuously revised, particularly if they do not address emerging operational problems such as teacher truancy. An attempt to reduce teacher truancy by the Ministry of Education and Culture (1993:94) was in form of a school head initiating a misconduct charge against a teacher who absents himself/ herself from duty for a period in excess of 30 days. However, I feel that 30 days absence is too long a period to address teacher truancy at school level.

Some authors have raised their voices against teacher truancy. For example, Banana (1983) emphasizes that, "Teachers influence the development of children's personality and character." They need to be role models in all respects. Ozigi (1995) supports the idea when he says children learn more by example than prescription, hence teachers are required to live and practice what they preach. Safaya and Shaida (2005:86) reiterated the teacher's role as children's model when they assert that "the teacher fashions the child in the shape of his own image." One can infer that, if truancy is bad for pupils, it should be equally bad for teachers.

Chu (2008) regards teacher truancy as an unethical practice. The author argues that teachers are paid to teach and the largest share of national budget goes to teachers' salaries, hence they must teach when expected to. According to Scott (1994), teacher truancy violates all three perspectives of educational accountability, viz:

1. answerability to one's clients (moral accountability)
2. responsibility to oneself and one's colleagues (professional accountability)
3. answerability to one's employers (contractual accountability). What emerges so far is that, teacher truancy is an undesired immoral act.

Literature portrays mathematics as a unique subject requiring unique teachers. To this end Haylock (2001) found that:

1. Mathematics teachers' insecurity in the subject, compel them to lean heavily on commercial textbook content, examples and exercises without explanations.
2. Teachers were affected by mathematics anxiety, feelings of inadequacy in mathematics, helplessness and fear of embarrassment in front of a class.

Haylock (*ibid*) suggested four factors which contribute to the development of the teacher feelings mentioned above:

1. The teacher's view that mathematics is characterized by questions whose answers are either right or wrong. The answer expose teachers' content inadequacy particularly when children have textbooks with the expected answers.
2. The feeling that, there is one proper or correct procedure of solving particular problems threatens a teacher who is not sure of the method.
3. Pupils expect the teacher to know the unique procedure for each question.
4. Mathematics language is too technical, too specific to the subject and not reinforced through everyday language.

Head and Taylor (1997) attribute teachers' disabling feelings (fear and anxiety) to their inappropriate training. They explained that mathematics teacher training does not prepare them for uncertainties such as how a teacher should react when he/ she fails to get the answer in the answer book.



These findings might explain in part why Jaji (1994) found some important topics being left out by teachers and the levels of presentation and mastery not consistently in line with the mathematics curriculum itself. Chivore (1995:25) informs this study that teacher deployment is the responsibility of the school head which can be delegated to the deputy head and heads of departments. To reduce teacher frustrations Chivore (ibid) advised heads to consider the following teacher variables: experience, subject specialization, age, gender, academic and professional qualifications for deployment purposes. These considerations assume that teachers are available and that the school head has not been instructed to make internal arrangements. School heads usually use the prescriptive approach to deploy teachers for examination classes. This is popular for key subjects like mathematics and English language at grade seven, 'O' and 'A' level. Prescriptive approach disregards the teacher's preference and self-evaluation.

Nhumbu (1999) identified teacher deployment as an externally induced stress among teachers. Zindi (2002) concurred by considering prescriptive deployment as a source of teacher stress. From these sentiments one can infer that prescriptive teacher deployment can encourage teacher truancy as a way of avoiding a mathematics class perceived as a threat to the teacher's academic competency. Chu's (2008) study reports that Indian teachers complained of being pulled out of their classrooms by government as all-purpose state workers for census data collection, updating voter's rolls, running vaccination programs, running polling stations during council and parliamentary elections. Such calls are also common teaching – learning disturbances in Zimbabwe. They are considered more as state service than truancy.

Literature regards teacher truancy in schools as a problem. It identifies mathematics as a subject which induces fear and anxiety in teachers. Factors such as a mismatch between a teacher's qualifications and class deployment were identified as an external source of teacher stress which could lead to truancy. However literature on teacher truancy in Zimbabwe is scant.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

Qualitative data collection and analysis using case studies to explore teacher truancy was followed by quantitative data collection and analysis using a survey to generalize findings. The study started off as an investigation into teacher truancy and shifted its emphasis to mathematics teacher truancy due to its high frequencies in that subject in the two schools.

## Instruments

Data collection was facilitated by use of instruments in three categories:

1. A teacher truancy monitoring checklist was designed for this study. It recorded the teacher as absent, late or early leaving on a day to day basis. This was complemented by duty prefects, duty master and class monitors' weekly reports encouraged by Ozigi (1995). Researcher looked for teacher absence, late arrival, early leaving and digression from lesson in each class report.
2. The following documents were analyzed:
  - Pupils' exercise books analyzed for the quantity of the day to day exercises
  - Teacher's scheme books were used to establish content coverage and evaluation
  - Lesson observations reports were analyzed for teacher competency, methods variation, head's recommendations and teacher's responds.
  - Departmental minutes revealed the nature of induction, staff development agenda, teacher contribution and problems experienced.
  - Parents' complaints log- book identified truant teachers that parents complaint about
3. A teacher questionnaire was designed to solicit factors motivating mathematics teacher truancy and strategies to reduce it. This was ideal for collecting important practioner perspectives on teacher truancy. Teachers were requested to describe incidences in which they were involved in acts of truancy. Questionnaires were ideal due to the sensitive nature of the information sought.

## Population and Sampling

The distribution of teachers at the two schools was shown by subject departments table below:

Table 1, Teacher distribution by subject department

N = 118

Subject Department	Number of Teachers			Sample Size
	Elephant	Hippo	Total	
Languages	16	9	25	18
Humanities	14	15	29	20
Mathematics	11	12	23	16
Sciences	9	7	16	12
Commercials	8	6	14	10
Practical	7	4	11	8
Totals	65	53	118	93 (79%)

This is a finite population of teachers in subject groups. Each school was considered a cluster with unique characteristics influencing teacher truancy hence cluster sampling was used to select participants. First was proportional sampling from subject to subject then simple random sampling within each subject. A sample of size  $n = 93$  (79%) was raised. This was considered statistically large enough for findings to be generalized to schools of similar establishments and representative of teachers' views. Cluster sampling catered for the major variations between and within each subject group. Some of the teachers were involved in teacher truancy, some witnessed and discussed incidences of mathematics teacher truancy, and hence they had the required knowledge and experiences.

### **Data Collection**

Data were collected in two phases. During the first stage, qualitative participant observation was carried out at the two high schools. The main researcher was acting deputy head at Elephant High in 2003 and substantive deputy head at Hippo High in 2004.

During class monitor orientation the researchers trained monitors to write weekly reports on teacher truant variables. Teachers were informed of this monitor's role. When a teacher did not turn-up for a lesson, monitors were asked to call at the deputy head's office. From records of such incidences, the researcher established the nature and distribution of teacher truancy in the schools.

The researchers collected all mathematics pupils' exercise books and teachers' scheme-books for teachers who had high truant rates each term. After considering all findings from monitor reports, lesson observation reports and departmental minutes, the researcher discussed the observations with the teachers. This was done to develop and benefit the teacher. Discussion interviews were focused on factors contributing to teacher truancy and possible strategies to reduce it.

The researchers designed and administered a questionnaire for teachers in the two high schools. Completed questionnaires were analyzed for completeness, answering of key questions, motivating factors, strategies and incident cases.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Permission to carry out the study was sought and granted by schools' responsible authorities. Pseudonyms, Elephant and Hippo are used to protect the integrity of the schools and teachers involved as advised by White (2005). Each school got a copy of the report and findings were

presented to teachers in the two schools. Discussion of findings with individual teachers benefited participants. Findings are presented as group data to protect individual respondents as suggested by Melville and Goddard (1996).

### Findings and Discussion

The study presents a synthesis of work done from 2003 to 2004 involving 118 teachers, 93 of them also completed the questionnaire in the survey.

**Table 2, Subject department and teacher distribution by experience  
N = 118**

Subject Department	Teacher Experiences in years					Totals
	0-4	5-10	11-15	16-20	21 plus	
Languages	1	1	6	10	7	25
Humanities	3	2	14	5	5	29
Mathematics	8	5	3	4	3	23
Science	7	4	1	4	0	16
Commercial	6	7	1	0	0	14
Practicals	2	2	5	1	1	11
Totals	27	21	30	24	16	118

The table shows a relatively high staff stability with veteran classroom practitioners whose experience is above 10 years being in the majority 70 (59%). This could be attributed to the schools being in urban area. It should be noted that teacher distribution by experience for mathematics, science and commercial is positively skewed. The majority (70%) have experience below ten years. It may be explained by a higher mobility rate of such subject teachers compared to languages and humanities teachers. Relatively mathematics teachers in the two schools were inexperienced, (35%) had less than 4 years experience.

**Table 3, Subject Department and Nature of Teacher Truancy. N = 267**

Subject Department	Nature of Teacher Truancy				Totals
	Absence	Lateness	Digression	Early Departure	
Languages	9 (7,55)	16 (11,96)	7 (8,49)	10 (14)	42
Humanities	7 (6,29)	8 (9,96)	6 (7,08)	14 (11,67)	35
Mathematics	10 (10,79)	20 (17,08)	12 (12,13)	18 (20)	60
Sciences	8 (8,27)	9 (13,09)	8 (9,30)	21 (15,33)	46
Commercial	8 (8,99)	16 (14,23)	14 (10,11)	12 (16,67)	50
Practicals	6 (6,11)	7 (9,68)	7 (6,88)	14 (11,33)	34
Totals	48 (41%)	76 (64%)	54 (46%)	89 (75%)	267

The table shows findings for March 2003 combined with those for March 2004, before intervention programmes were implemented from April. Table also shows observed frequencies and expected frequencies in brackets.

Teacher truancy was highest in mathematics, followed by commercials and sciences. The most popular form of teacher truancy was early departure particularly for the last two lessons of each day for the afternoon session. Class monitor reports reveal that it is the weaker classes that teachers neglect. This finding supports Chisaka and Vikalisa (2003) who observed that teachers absented themselves from lessons, allocated inadequate notes and inadequate books to low ability groups. Lateness was common from the "bright" classes while digression to story time was popular with the average and low ability classes. Teachers and class monitors concurred that female teachers were the main culprits for digression and early departure

Table 3 results suggest an association between nature of teacher truancy and subject department. A hypothesis test at (5%) level of significance  $v = 15$  degrees of freedom, has chi – square calculated  $X^2_{\text{calc}} = 16,96 < X^2_{\text{crit}} = 25$ . The Null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) was accepted confirming no association between the nature of teacher truancy and subject departments. The observed variations are there by chance factors.

### **Factors contributing to teacher Truancy**

Parents, education officers, teachers, pupils and other school administrators pointed out that teacher truancy is influenced by:

- The fact that, the majority of young teachers are not committed to teaching, they joined it as a last resort and consider it a while – up time activity.
- Nepotism, corruption and patronage during teacher recruitment resulting in under-qualified personnel finding their way into the classrooms.
- The school heads have a marginalized role in teacher recruitment. Besides declaring the vacant post, school heads have little say in the choice of the teacher.
- The fact that, teachers like any other civil servants in Zimbabwe are guaranteed of jobs for life. They can neither be charged nor discharged for truancy.
- Teachers exploit the limited pupil and parental empowerment to complain against their neglect of duty.
- Teachers lack direct accountability for the outcomes of their school products.
- The declining economy and the proliferation of paid private tuition detract teachers from their main jobs. Teachers were also accused of deliberately slowing their pace in syllabus coverage to ensure

that, more pupils turn up for vacation school which pays extra for their services.

- Inappropriate teacher deployment in mathematics, resulting in "O"-level holders teaching "O"-level pupils.
- Challenging pupils using textbooks with answers scare lowly qualified teachers

These sentiments suggest that teacher truancy is influenced by flaws in the education system characterized by low teacher authority and accountability. Seven factors contributing to mathematics teacher truancy were ranked by participants as follows:

**Table 4, Factors contributing to mathematics teacher truancy ranking.**

Factor	Frequency	Rank
Lack of teacher support	73 (78%)	1
Inappropriate deployment	60 (65%)	2
Pupil streaming	52 (56%)	3
Large class size	49 (53%)	4
Limited teacher experience	37 (40%)	5
Lack of teacher preparation	32 (34%)	6
Time-tabling	28 (30%)	7

Lack of teacher support could have earned the first position from the consideration that mathematics teachers are inexperienced, the majority 8 out of 23 (35%) have less than 4 years experience. They require teacher development enhanced by supportive and encouraging constructive criticism from seniors. Teacher development initiatives were reported missing in the two schools. Teachers complained of judgmental reporting as reflected in this extract of a mathematics teacher's lesson observation report by a head of department.

*Mr. X's mathematics content is shallow, he failed to use square – root tables to evaluate*

$$\sqrt{3,7} = 1,9235 \quad \sqrt{37} = 6,0828 \quad \sqrt{370} = 19,2353 \quad \sqrt{3700} = 60,8276$$

*I had to intervene during the lesson to protect pupils from the teacher's misconception. I suggest that Mr X be deployed from form three to form one next term.*

The head of department's intervention in front of form three pupils and the redeployment destroyed the teacher's confidence and hopes for development. A sense of guilt and failure is developed in the teacher by such reporting. This incident could have been exploited by using the calculator to find  $\sqrt{37000} = 192.35$  and  $\sqrt{370000} = 608,276$  then deduce

patterns by noticing that the figures 19235 and 60828 are the same. It is the position of the comma that is changing. This could be an assignment in which pupils are challenged to develop square-root tables.

An analysis of mathematics department minute books revealed no agenda for teacher development. Meetings focused on policy issues such as the number of exercises, texts and problems to assign per week or term.

On deployment school heads blamed the staffing officers for inappropriate teachers. According to school policies, the new teacher should not destabilize existing teacher deployment but take the teaching load of the teacher he/she is replacing.

One teacher explained how streaming contributed to her truancy in these words: "*The class is boring to teach. Pupils stare at you without asking questions or responding to any. They are happy without mathematics. If I don't go, they do not make noise to attract me or the administration.*"

Teachers also noted that one of the factors was that there were no incentives for teaching well. Their hard work went unnoticed. It appears that salaries were not among factors contributing to teacher truancy. The finding supports Adams (1987) who claimed that a motivated committed staff will create a good school in spite of deficiencies in buildings equipment and finance.

#### Strategies to reduce teacher truancy

On the basis of these findings, the study recommends the following strategies to reduce teacher truancy in general and mathematics teacher truancy in particular:

1. School heads should carry out staff audits mid-term and make their staff requests for the next term before the end of each term.
2. Consultative deployment can be used so that a teacher is allocated a class he/she can have confidence to teach.
3. Induction can be used as training need identification so that suitable interventions can be designed to help mathematics teachers in subject delivery.
4. Teacher supervision should emphasize teacher development rather than fault summative evaluation.
5. Lesson observation reports should highlight teacher strengths and weaknesses which should be followed by training interventions.
6. Heads of departments require workshops on staff-development.
7. Inexperienced teachers teaching bright, average and slow- learner classes require support from senior teachers.

8. Departmental meetings are encouraged to discuss lesson delivery strategies for topics suggested by teachers to address teachers' problems.
9. Empowering class monitors to report teacher truancy reduced the rate of late coming and early departures.
10. Privately discussing each teacher's nature of truancy as part of the deputy head's role of staff counseling appeals to the teacher's moral standards.



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