Prevalence Truancy is Associated with Attitude, Family and School Environment Factors

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Abstract: Truancy is a major issue that often plagues a country's education system. This phenomenon is also the highest contributor to student misconduct cases, especially in Malaysia. The purpose of this study is to identify the relationship between three main factors, namely student attitudes, family relationships and school environment in influencing truancy among students. A total of 148 students consisting of upper secondary school students in an east coast secondary school in Peninsular Malaysia was selected as respondents in this study. The results of this analysis process show that factors such as student attitudes, family relationships and school environment have a significant relationship with truancy among students. Schools in particular and the ministry in general should make these factors the main agenda in formulating programs and activities to curb this issue from continuing to plague the national education system. In fact, the role of parents is no exception in efforts to curb these symptoms from continuing to occur among students at school.

Keywords: truancy, attitudes, family relationships, school environment

1. Introduction

Education is an important medium in developing human capital and the formation of student discipline (Veloo & Kim, 2014; Abdul Kalam, 2016; Wulandari, 2018). The increase in disciplinary misconduct among students is seen to be increasing lately and has become a phenomenon that worries all parties (Abdul Kalam, 2016). Despite various efforts made by most countries to increase student attendance to school but the level of truancy remains high (Keppens & Spruyt, 2020). The truancy is a critical global issue and often attract scholars to study the causes and short-term and long-term effects on educational institutions (Ramberg et al., 2018; Mahmud et al., 2019). According to Ramberg et al., (2018), truancy is often associated with negative factors on school performance. The truancy is among the disciplinary issues among school students who are increasingly serious and plaguing education in Malaysia (Veloo & Kim, 2014; Nawawi et al., 2017).

Truancy is a violation of student misconduct that often occurs in schools and is a problem that worries many parties, whether parents, schools, departments or the government (Lontou, 2016). Every year the increase in truancy increases and worries the authorities (Veloo & Kim, 2014; Abdul Kalam, 2016). According to statistics, truancy is at the top of record in disciplinary misconduct throughout 2017 covering 1.4% (67,053 students) out of five million primary and secondary school students in Malaysia (Parliament of Malaysia, 2018; Mahmud et al., 2019). In fact, based on the official statement of the Ministry of Education Malaysia to the media shows that schools in the state of Kelantan are listed among the highest recorded to have higher student discipline problems (New Straits Times, 17 August 2017). This data is supported by a study conducted by Mahmud et al., (2019) on 27,497 school children aged between 13 years to 17 years in Malaysia. The findings of the study found that the prevalence of truancy among adolescents in Malaysia is 29.4%. Empirical studies on school students in Malaysia also show a truancy rate of around 20% to 40% (Ishak & Low, 2013; Mijinyawa et al., 2015).

There are various different concepts that have been used by scholars in describing and determining the meaning of absenteeism such as truancy, absenteeism, unexcused absence, unauthorized absence, and dropout (Ramberg et al., 2018). Truancy means the absence of students to undergo any activity that has been set by the school for no reason and does not get permission from the Headmaster or Principal where it is categorized as absent from school or class (Veloo & Kim, 2014). This means that truancy is the absence of students to school without obtaining official permission and documents from the school (Claes et al., 2009). According to the guidelines issued by the Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE), truancy disciplinary offenses are measured based on the official record of student attendance to school (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 1995). Following the increasing truancy, the MOE

has implemented an initiative by introducing a Student Attendance System (e-Attendance) to monitor and record student absences more systematically and effectively (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2019).

2. The Influence of Motivation, Training and Job Suitability on Employee Performance

Causes of Truancy

The act of truancy is a psychological implication of adolescents expressing their feelings when faced with failure in school (Berg, 1992; Wijetunge & Lakmini, 2011). Truancy is usually caused by peer factors, family factors, teacher attitudes, self factors and school facilities (Abd Jamil, 2009; Gase et al, 2016). According to Ramberg et al., (2018), truancy is a complex issue in which this phenomenon stems from a variety of factors including individual, family, social, psychological aspects and school factors themselves. Youths in the lower socio-economic category are often associated with truancy as they often face domestic and neighborhood violence, unhealthy housing environment, lack of school needs, housing and transportation problems as well as security problems to attend school (Kearney et al., 2019). Based on the study of Mahmud et al., (2019) found that truancy among secondary school students in Malaysia is associated with drug abuse, smoking, distance from parents, being a victim of bullying, age and gender. In general, truancy stems from three different key structures, namely individual, family and school factors (Reid, 2005; Keppens & Spruyt, 2020).

According to the study of Veloo and Kim, (2014), the individual self-factor of students is the strongest factor affecting students' tendency to truancy and followed by family factors. Individual behavior is found to be a strong element of a truancy tendency among students (Pengpid & Peltzer, 2019). Internal behaviors such as anxiety and depression can cause students tend to engage in truancy (Pengpid & Peltzer, 2019). According to Baker et al., (2019), increased depression, anxiety and stress will have a negative impact on an individual's external behavior. This is because truancy can be conceptualized from part of the problem behavior theory (Jessor & Jessor, 1997). Among the causes of student absenteeism are due to the attitude of the student, namely late waking up, worried about being late to school, not getting a doctor's confirmation letter due to illness and not being able to concentrate during learning sessions at school (Veloo & Kim, 2014).

Most researchers admit that among the main factors that cause truancy among students apart from individual factors are due to family factors (Wulandari, 2018). Past studies have also shown that students from low-income families are frequently involved in truancy (Attwood & Croll, 2006). The drop out of this group to attend school as a result of marital breakdown and marital conflict, resulting in psychological effects on adolescents and lack of monitoring from parents (Mahmud et al., 2019). According to the study of Mahmud et al., (2019) again, adolescents who face the problem of parents not living together or divorce has a higher prevalence rate of 1.4 times more likely to truancy compared to adolescents living with parents sitting together.

The third major factors are the weakness of the school environment such as autocratic and strict administration in schools, unattractive and boring classrooms, poor relationship between parents and schools, poor and inefficient learning and curriculum process, lack of facilities in schools are influential factors students fall into truancy (Suleman et al., 2017). Unhealthy environmental factors in schools also contribute to truancy such as bullying culture among students causing victims of bullying to be traumatized and afraid to attend school (Laftman et al., 2017; Modin et al., 2017; Pengpid & Peltzer, 2017). The situation will be more critical to the victim of mental bullying in terms of mental and can also result in physical injury (Saidu et al., 2019).

Truancy effect

It has been proven that truancy has a negative impact on student education (Keppens & Spruyt, 2020). Truancy acts have many negative effects on students and open the door to other negative behaviors such as smoking, drug abuse, bullying and so on (Laftman et al., 2017; Modin et al., 2017). Even truancy actions will also cause problems with the quality of learning, dropouts and failures in school examinations (Neelam, 2013). Empirical studies have found that the most significant effect of truancy will have a negative impact on students' academic performance where there is a strong positive relationship between truancy and the risk of dropping out or leaving school early (Attwood & Croll, 2006; 2015; Rocque et al., 2017; Pengpid & Peltzer, 2019). In addition, truancy is also associated with various problems and negative behaviors such as smoking, alcohol consumption and drug abuse (Flaherty et al., 2012; Pengpid & Peltzer, 2019). Even previous studies have shown that truancy can be associated with an increased risk in later criminal tendencies (Bennett, Mazerolle, Antrobus, Eggins, & Piquero, 2018; Rocque et al., 2017).

The consequences of dropping out of schooling will make it difficult for students to find employment and will increase the unemployment rate in the country (Levin et al., 2007; Sum et al., 2009; Attwood & Croll, 2015).

Students who are often truancy often exhibit poor learning performance as well as have low self-confidence and ambitions (McCray, 2006).

Concepts and Models

Pengpid and Peltzer (2019), associate Truancy with a variety of external behaviors based on the Problem Behavior Theory introduced by Jessor and colleagues. Truancy is part of a category of high-risk behaviors related to adolescent problems that are not agreed by society (Jessor & Jessor, 1997). According to Jessor and Jessor (1997), Problem Behavior Theory explains the concept of social-psychological based on three systems of psychosocial influence, namely the Personality System, the Perceived Environment System and the Behavior System. All adolescent behaviors that are triggered as a result of person-environment interaction (Jessor & Jessor, 1997). Social Learning Theory is the process of learning from observation and making a person a model of behavior in which environmental and other factors influence behavior (Bandura & Walters, 1977). According to Bandura and Walters (1977), among the factors influencing student behavior are self-behavior, environment and cognitive interaction. Based on this theory, truancy, bullying and hanging out are behaviors that can be controlled through rewards as well as external reinforcement. Behaviors such as skipping classes, bullying, hanging out are categorized as aggressive behaviors of adolescents who show they are protesting about dissatisfaction with something (Bandura & Walters, 1977).

The objective of this study is to identify the relationship between factors such as attitude, family and school environment to the significant relationship with truancy. Past studies have shown that factors such as attitude, family and school environment have a significant relationship with truancy (Veloo & Kim, 2014; Abdul Kalam, 2016; Nawawi et al., 2017; Wulandari, 2018; Mahmud et al., 2019; Pengpid & Peltzer, 2019; Keppens & Spruyt, 2020). Therefore, the research hypotheses tested in this study are:

H_1:   There is a significant relationship between student attitudes and truancy among   students.
H_2:   There is a significant relationship between family relationships and truancy among   students.
H_3:   There is a significant relationship between the school environment and truancy among   students.

3. Method

This survey study involved respondents consisting of students from the East Coast Secondary School of Peninsular Malaysia with a population of 1914 students. This study uses a quantitative approach in which a total of 240 sets of questionnaires was distributed to study respondents involving upper secondary students. This quantitative method provides the advantage of gathering a large amount of information at one time, involving low cost and ease of operation (Hofstede et al., 1990; Creswell, 2008). This study uses Simple Random Sampling as a sampling method. A total of 148 sets of questionnaires was returned by the respondents with the respondent response rate was 62%.

The questionnaire instrument used to obtain data in this study is from the How and Yahaya (2007) questionnaire through the measurement of a five-point Likert scale. The results of the analysis of the reliability of the instrument of this study found that the reliability value of the instrument is high that is the value of Clobach Alpha is the attitude of students (0.76), family relationships (0.83), school environment (0.81) and truancy (0.82).

4. Result

Based on Table 1, a total of 148 respondents was involved in this study consisting of 56 male students (37.8%) and 92 female students (62.2%). Overall, respondents are students from being occupied four (74 students: 50%) and five (74 students: 50%) and they are the majority ethnic Malays (147 students: 99.3%). A total of 134 (91%) respondents are from families with income B40 that is the group with a household income with an average monthly income below RM4000. Meanwhile, almost 74 (50%) respondents came from families categorized as income groups under the Malaysia's Poverty Line Income (PLI) below RM1000.

Table 1: Characteristics of respondents

Demographic		N	N (%)
Sex	Male	56	37.8
	Female	92	62.2
Age	16	74	50
	17	74	50

Ethnicity	Melayu	147	99.3
	Cina	-	-
	India	-	-
	Others	1	0.7
Number of siblings	≤ 4	75	50.7
	5-7	55	37.2
	8-10	4	9.5
	11-13	3	2.0
	≥ 14	1	0.7
Family Income	≤ RM500	15	1.1
	RM501-RM1000	59	39.9
	RM1001-RM2000	35	23.6
	RM2001-RM4000	25	16.9
	≥RM4001	14	9.5
Course	Pure science	33	22.3
	Economics	13	8.8
	Commerce	17	11.5
	Account	14	9.5
	Arts and Health	3	2.0
	Languages and Literature	46	31.1
	Others	1	0.7
		21	14.2

While Table 2 shows the results of hypothesis testing for H_1, H_2 and H_3. The results of the analysis confirmed that the factors of positive attitudes of students (r = -. 28, p <.01), family relationships (r = -. 25, p <.01) and school environment (r = -. 25, p <.01) has a significant negative relationship with students 'intentions for truancy.

Table 2: Pearson correlation values between the variables of the factors influencing truancy

Variables	Family Relationships	School Environment	Truancy
Attitudes	.30**	.36**	-.28**
Family Relationships		.55**	-.25**
School Environment			-.25**

p > .05, *p < .05, **p < .01 (2-tailed)

The test results of these three hypotheses show that the higher the positive attitude, the better the family relationship and the school environment will reduce the students' intentions and encouragement towards truancy.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this study are in line with previous studies that show factors such as attitudes, family relationships and school environment influence truancy among students (Veloo & Kim, 2014; Abdul Kalam, 2016; Nawawi et al., 2017; Wulandari, 2018; Mahmud et al., 2019; Pengpid & Peltzer, 2019; Keppens & Spruyt, 2020). The influence of truancy has affected the involvement of school students with the truancy obtained from the results of the study that has been analyzed. All three factors presented have a significant impact on truancy. This is evidenced when respondents agree with the involvement of school students on the truancy caused by student attitudes, family relationship factors and school environment factors. The level of effectiveness of school administration in playing a role in reducing truancy among students (Ramberg et al., 2018). According to Pengpid & Peltzer (2019), protective factors, parental or guardian supervision and peer support can reduce truancy among students. The lack of parental support in the effort to prevent truancy can increase the tendency of students to be trapped in truancy. Interventions at the individual, school and community levels have been shown to effectively reduce truancy problems (Keppens & Spruyt, 2020). The school also needs to deal with this problem prudently when dealing with students who commit truancy offensesPunishment alone without involving psychological approaches such as counseling can cause emotional tension in adolescents. The effect of this emotional tension

will cause students to refuse to attend school for fear of confronting the discipline teacher (Veloo & Kim, 2014). This will lead to the failure of individuals in controlling their own emotions will cause them to react negatively to the environment (Baker, 2010).

The current challenges with the improvement of educational technology, competency-based education and virtual learning further distance the interaction between teachers and students will affect the learning environment and structure (Jukes & Schaaf, 2019; Kearney, 2016; Kearney et al., 2019). Therefore, all parties, including peers, parents, schools, the government in collaboration with external agencies need to work together towards addressing the issue of truancy misconduct among school students. A dynamic strategic approach involving all parties is important in curbing these symptoms and continue to plague the country's education. Among the approaches and programs that can be implemented are holding counseling sessions, collaboration between the police, parental involvement and more effective monitoring by the school as well as the frequency of meetings between parents and teachers.

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