



## Truancy arising from walking long distances by ECD learners in the Shamva district, Mashonaland Central province, Zimbabwe

<sup>1</sup>Lucky Mutonhodza 

<sup>1</sup>Madziwa College of Education, Zimbabwe

<sup>1</sup>Primary author: [mutonhodzalucky5@gmail.com](mailto:mutonhodzalucky5@gmail.com)

**Abstract** – Truancy is a complex and heterogeneous problem that results from many factors. These include in-school factors, peer influence, social and familial challenges, unfavourable weather patterns, long distances to school, lack of motivation, and many other variables relevant to the learner. Lack of interest in school activities is another cause of truant behaviour amongst ECD learners. Studies have been carried out on the causes of truant behaviours by ECD learners. Lethargic teaching styles contribute to learners' truant behaviours due to boredom, created by incompetent teachers. Teachers, school heads, and parents must know their children's or learners' behavioural patterns. Teachers should be trained to recognise the learners' behavioural patterns and devise strategies to deal with the arising challenges, since some difficulties trigger ECD learners to play truancy. Teachers should maintain good communication between themselves, learners, and parents, which will help avoid confrontations with learners. By stopping corporal punishment, learner school attendance will improve, and learners' performance will be enhanced. The school needs to provide a conducive environment for teaching and learning. This study adopts a pragmatist paradigm, a qualitative approach through a case study research design. Twenty teachers and twenty ECD learners were selected from four of the district's primary schools and interviewed and observed for data collection. It was unearthed that ECD learners walking long distances to school is a complex and heterogeneous problem that can lead to truant behaviour. It has been recommended that learners must be taught and encouraged to report and individually shun anti-social behaviour like bullying, as these social ills significantly trigger truant behaviours among ECD learners. When an ECD learner is bullied, stressed, disturbed, nervous, harassed, annoyed, pissed off, or is worried, he or she can easily contemplate playing truant. Chronic truancy can effectively contribute to ECD learners dropping out of school altogether.

**Keywords:** ECD learners, Educational performance, Educational systems, Playing truancy

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### I. INTRODUCTION

A NUMBER of studies on truancy amongst primary school learners in rural, peri-urban, and farm schools have been carried out. One major kaleidoscopic issue schools are grappling with, and are confronted with little or no improvement, is effectively dealing with truancy. Learners should always be in school to acquire and reinforce the concepts taught. This current research study aimed to explore the factors that lead to learner truancy and the effects on the educational performance of early childhood development (ECD) learners. In Zimbabwean primary school ECD learners, truancy, or unapproved absences from school, is a serious issue affecting their academic achievement and general development. Socio-economic challenges like poverty, family responsibilities, and a lack of money, as well as problems with the school environment and the interactions between teachers and fellow learners, are some factors that lead to truancy. ECD learners exhibit various indisciplines, including boycotting classes, especially in winter. The researcher observed that most of the studies carried out on truancy among learners were biased towards secondary schools, for example, Magwa and Ngara (2016), Masingi (2017), and Jinot (2018). In addition, literature on truancy by primary school learners, especially those in infant classes, is scant. This observation motivated the researcher to conduct this study to establish and unveil truancy issues among ECD learners.

Magwa and Ngara (2016), in a research study conducted in the Masvingo district on the causes of truancy among primary school

learners, found out that the factors leading to truancy emanate from the family, the school, the individual child, and the community. Non-attendance is among the key problems many rural and farm primary schools face in Zimbabwe. Available information suggests that the rates of truancy in Africa are much higher. In Zimbabwean rural and farm primary schools, truancy is escalating rapidly. Kurebwa and Mabhandha (2015) studied truancy in Shurugwi South Resettlement primary schools in Zimbabwe and found that poverty was the leading cause of learner truancy. Given the extent of the problem of primary school learner truancy and its negative consequences, it is imperative to understand its contributing factors, ugly effects, and possible solutions to mitigate social illness.

Firstly, ECD learners cannot effectively learn when they are famished. Primary school learners are sometimes forced into truancy because of unsatisfied physiological needs. Ndlovu et al. (2023) observed that if the child is deprived of love and belonging by peers and teachers, there is a high likelihood that they will not attend school regularly. If children are undervalued, negatively labelled, and made fun of, they will always decide not to be in school. Young children are forced into truancy by unsatisfied needs. If the teacher does not support young learners in their academic journey, this will cause them to feel demotivated and eventually end up attending school inconsistently. Masando et al. (2023) observed that learners will not attend school in the educational setting if their deficiency needs are not addressed. Mutonhodza (2025) observed that another source of worry is that the distance travelled to school is proportionally related to illnesses like truancy, juvenile delinquency, absenteeism, lateness, and general

indiscipline.

Conflicting relationships with teachers lead ECD learners to play truant. According to that view, the indiscriminate use of corporal punishment and its devastating effects on the learners are one major factor for truancy among ECD learners. Maynard et al. (2013) assert that corporal punishment breeds hostility and creates low self-esteem in ECD learners, resulting in truancy. It is a violent way of retribution that leaves a trail of indelible mental scars in the young learners' minds. Peer influence also leads to truancy. Truant individuals can be influenced by their peers not to attend school and engage in activities outside the school (Zambezi, 2025). Sparks (2010) contends that truancy as early as kindergarten predicts chronic absences in later grades. Poor school attendance is predictive of high school drop-out in later life.

ECD education in Zimbabwe comprises ECD-A and ECD-B, together with Grades 1 and 2, which form the infant school. This is where learners aged 0 to 8 are found. Rio et al. (2024) defined the educational system as the structure of all institutions and the educational opportunities within a country. It includes all pre-school institutions, from family and/or early childhood education to kindergarten, primary, secondary, and tertiary schools. Academic performance refers to the ability to grasp the essentials of a subject, which is reflected in the percentage marks obtained through valid and reliable testing methods (Baliyan & Khama, 2020; Mutonhodza, 2025).

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The problem of primary school learners playing truant is not unique to Zimbabwe alone. Globally, learner truancy remains one of the most significant impediments preventing educational institutions from reaching their stated objectives (Murat & Sakir, 2022). This broad-based view is underpinned by Bronfenbrenner's Bio-ecological Systems Theory and Bowles and Gintis' Correspondence Theory. Bronfenbrenner's theory proves that human behavior results from complex processes involving a system of interactions within the individual and between the individual and various environmental forces in the surroundings. The Correspondence theory by Bowles and Gintis contends that a school is a miniature society. According to Mohapi (2014), learners' truancy is one of schools' most common challenges worldwide. Similarly, Maphosa and Mammen (2011) found that truancy has taken centre stage globally. In the United Kingdom, for example, many reported cases of classroom disruptions were reflected through being noisy, rude, disrespectful, and using foul language (Kagoiya & Kagema, 2018). Murat and Sakir (2022) agree that truancy by primary school learners is also common even in the United States of America. Africa is the hardest hit by truancy amongst primary school learners. This is reflected in studies by Magwa and Ngara (2016), who reflected that Botswana, Malawi, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, and the SADC region face such challenges. Odebo (2019) observed that truancy in Nigerian schools remains a source of great concern to stakeholders. In Kenya, Kagoiya and Kagema (2018) concluded that for policies and reforms in education to succeed, learners must attend school first. Zimbabwe has also been affected by the problem of truancy amongst learners in both rural and urban schools (Magwa & Ngara, 2016; Mugabe & Maposa, 2013; Gutuza & Mapolisa, 2015; Dzimiri & Chikunda, 2018). They found out that in Zimbabwe primary schools, there were many cases of truancy. Truancy is one of the leading causes of class repetition besides academic failure (Murat & Sakir, 2022).

### Causes of ECD learner truancy in farm schools

Researchers have identified school truancy as a complex and heterogeneous problem with many factors.

#### Home factors

Family plays a serious role in the learners' attendance. Adverse socio-economic conditions of the family are among the most significant reasons leading to truancy. Financial problems have a substantial impact in this regard. Giddens and Sutton (2017) contend that the family is regarded as the primary and chief agent of socialisation; therefore, if the family lacks good aspects, it is likely to produce problematic

children who will take these behaviours to school and cause problems. Mutonhodza (2025) identified negative school environments, dyslexia, anxiety, personality traits, phobia, race/ethnicity learning disabilities, parental attitude, parental involvement, and family poverty as causal factors for school truancy. If the family is in disarray, the children tend to exhibit truancy in school (Magwa & Ngara, 2014; Dzimiri & Chikunda, 2018). Kagoiya and Kagema (2018) view poverty in the home as a serious cause of truancy. Most single parents cannot afford to support their children adequately. Therefore, learners from such families lack adequate materials, which may cause them to steal from other learners or teachers, bully others because of frustration, fail to do homework or even class work, and eventually engage in truancy. Magwa and Ngara (2016) contend that failure by parents to meet learners' needs leads to a lack of motivation, which in turn leads to truancy on the part of the learner. Truancy can also be blamed on those parents who neglect the discipline of their children at home (Madziyire, 2010). Maliki (2013) stressed that truancy and drop-out can be caused by difficult terrain and long distances from school, which tempt or force children to withdraw prematurely. Family tensions between the father and mother, fragmented families, and parents' inability to be sensitive to their children may lead to truancy, driving young learners into despair (Akuzum et al., 2015; Ndlovu et al., 2023).

#### School factors

It is not only home factors that can be blamed for learner truancy. School factors also have their fair share in causing learner truancy. Dzimiri and Chikunda (2018) posit that teachers' attitudes play a role in learner truancy. The way teachers' treat learners may lead to school phobia and truancy. Negative comments and labels can also push learners into truancy. The learner may be absent to avoid being in contact with the teacher and fellow learners. Odebo (2019) sends a scathing attack on teachers who curse learners or absent themselves from lessons. This sends the wrong signal, and learners tend to emulate them. Magwa and Ngara (2016) also observed that teachers who are often absent from school for no apparent reason and those who are late for lessons contribute to learner truancy. School administration can be a serious cause of truancy among learners, as it fails to attend to the needs of the learners (Gwirayi, 2010). This is also reflected by Kagoiya and Kagema (2018), who state that a lack of expertise in professional management and proper guidance by school administration can lead to learner truancy. If school rules are too tight and rigid or too loose, this may also cause learner truancy (Dzimiri & Chikunda, 2018).

#### Peer influence

Odebo (2019) believes learners of the same age range tend to emulate one another's behaviours easily. Peers of good behaviours promote the same among their peers and vice versa. Children with less interaction with their parents tend to develop more trust in their friends as they can flow well among themselves and thus bond together (Gutuza & Mapolisa, 2015). Truancy can result from some learners seeing their friends as role models, albeit wrong models. This leads to them emulating their behaviours. Some may play truant for solidarity with their peers. The learners' social environment is a significant determinant of truancy. Learners in a group of peers who are academically unsuccessful, absent, or never go to school, addicted to substances, and commit crimes are highly prone to truancy (Ozbaş, 2010).

#### Learner

Truancy can stem from dislike of school, academic failure, lack of purpose, and lack of self-confidence (Kose, 2014). Health problems are also a primary justification for truancy (Oztekin, 2013; Sonmez, 2019). Reasons such as falling asleep in class and poor social skills also contribute to learner truancy (Mutonhodza, 2025; Zambezi, 2025). Truancy can be associated with poor academic performance and drop-out of school. Learners who are chronically absent from school are more likely to struggle academically and have a greater chance of becoming drop-outs (Attwood, 2006). Learners who are less gifted academically may cite obnoxious reasons like the long distance between home and

school to justify their truancy. Truancy affects learners in the sense that when a learner is absent, his/her fellow learners proceed with learning and leave him or her behind. Such learners find attending school uninteresting and arduous (Mutonhodza, 2024). According to The Standard and Newsday Dec. 8, 2021, about 40% of pupils in ECD classes fail to attend school due to the long distances they must travel to access education. Stanley et al. (2017) concluded that a long distance to school can lead to truancy, poor attendance, drop-out, and poor academic performance. Parents get deeply worried about the safety of their children when the young learners must travel longer distances to school (Mutonhodza, 2025).

### III. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The study explores the causes and effects of truant behaviours by ECD learners in the Shamva district, Mashonaland Central province, Zimbabwe.

### IV. METHODS

#### Research paradigm

This study is premised on the social constructivist theory because it resonates well with the construction of knowledge, which suggests that knowledge is constructed from experience (Mohammed & Kinyo, 2020; Babbie, 2021). Creswell and Creswell (2018, p. 38) claim that the “social constructivists believe that individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work. Individuals develop subjective meanings of their experiences and meanings directed towards certain objects or things. These meanings are varied and multiple, leading the researcher to look for the complexity of views rather than narrowing meanings into a few categories or ideas.” The researcher will listen carefully to what people say or do in their life settings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Adu & Okeke, 2022). The constructive paradigm was useful as it enabled the researcher to uncover, understand, and explain mechanisms that underlie the complex phenomenon of understanding educational systems by exploring the causes and effects of truant behaviours by ECD learners.

#### Research approach

This study utilised the qualitative approach because of its strength in discovering more about genuine and unexplored problems. Creswell and Creswell (2018) and Babbie (2021) define qualitative research as research investigating the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. This approach was chosen because it allowed the researcher to describe non-statistical inquiry techniques and processes to gather data about social phenomena. The findings require an interpretive, naturalistic approach to discuss the findings. The researcher explored the effects of truant behaviours by ECD learners.

#### Research design

This study adopts the case study design. Creswell and Creswell (2018) define a case study as an in-depth analysis of a single entity. The researcher opted for the case study as this study involves a bounded period and a small sample size in only primary schools in the Shamva district. In this study, data were extensively collected in selected primary schools in the Shamva district; therefore, it can be argued that it was bound. The case study method was chosen since it collects extensive data to comprehensively understand the entity studied (Adu & Okeke, 2022; Cohen et al., 2018). In this study, the researcher sought an in-depth understanding of the effect of truant behaviour by ECD learners. The contemporary phenomena were investigated within a real-life context using multiple sources.

#### Participants

Twenty teachers and twenty ECD learners, four from each school, were purposively selected, in concurrence with the argument that a case study selects a small geographical area or a minimal number of individuals as the study subjects (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Eroglu & Kaya, 2021). The participants were selected for their appropriateness in identifying participants for data gathering. Purposive sampling was

used in this study to select the research participants meticulously and cases that would provide rich, relevant, and insightful data in line with the research question (Scott & Usher, 2022). Purposive sampling allowed the study to focus on specific characteristics and experiences crucial to the study's objectives.

#### Data collection instruments

##### Semi-structured interviews

The researcher used interviews to solicit information from teachers on the effects of truant behaviours by ECD learners. Interviews involve numerous crucial questions that make it easier to discover the parts that give meaning to the research. They also allow the interviewer to form an impression of the interviewee or get them to explain a response more thoroughly. In addition, the responses given were immediately received, which means that semi-structured interviews have the advantage of ensuring a high response rate (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Interviews have flexibility in allowing for the expansion of valuable data from the participants. Still, the researcher may not have considered it relevant beforehand (Turin et al., 2024). Thus, semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to add new aspects that may not have been included in the themes covered during the interviews. They enabled the researcher to discover what others feel and think about their way of life. Through what the researcher has heard and learned, he can extend his intellectual and emotional reach across time, class, race, gender, and geographical divisions (Vicki et al., 2018). Interviews tend to be effective and flexible research tools, which assist the researcher in understanding the effects of truant behaviour by ECD learners.

##### Non-participant observation

This study dedicated quite a significant amount of time to observing some of the phenomena related to the current study. Of particular focus was the effect of truant behaviours by ECD learners. Non-participant observation is a research method in which the researcher observes and documents a social setting, group, or individuals without actively participating in the activities or interactions being studied (Creswell, 2021). Non-participant observation was utilised because the researcher aimed to maintain a degree of objectivity, minimise potential biases, or study phenomena where direct involvement might have altered the natural dynamics. While it provides a more external perspective, the researcher still navigated through ethical considerations and ensured the validity and reliability of the observations (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019; Willie, 2024).

#### Procedure

Before going into the field to gather data, the researcher obtained written permission from the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, provincial, district, and school levels to conduct this study. The researcher also explained the purpose of the research to the officials before making appointments with respondents in the sampled schools and before conducting the interviews. The researcher interviewed twenty teachers, four from each sample school. Data saturation was reached at participant number sixteen. The participants were questioned at their schools because it was more convenient. The interviews were approximately 10 minutes long on average. The researcher recorded voice audios and took shorthand notes of the interview proceedings in his notebook. The interview schedule consisted of themes since the researcher used semi-structured interviews. The researcher allowed the respondents to talk about their experiences, taking notes of facial expressions and signs. This allowed the researcher to pose follow-up questions to better assess the participants' understanding of the problems they faced in schools. The researcher contacted the interviewees one week before interviewing them to determine if they were ready to participate in the study. Arrangements were made to interview the participants after working hours and conduct the interview at their stations. Permission was sought from the district education officials for the researcher to meet the participants on school property.

#### Data analysis

This study analysed data thematically. Data gathered through semi-

structured interviews and non-participant observations were analysed and presented thematically and in tables. Interpretations were based on the analysed and presented data. Interpretation was related to the findings and results of existing theoretical frameworks and showed whether these are supported or falsified by the new interpretation (Creswell, 2021). The researcher used reduced data, interpreted it, and derived insights from it by organising, summarising, categorising, and analysing it. Qualitative data from the semi-structured interviews and non-participant observations were organised through the rigorous process of data transcription, coding, categorising, labeling, and identifying themes to be analysed concerning the study's specific objective (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The study utilised other data sources, such as non-participant observations, to avoid bias and enhance reflexivity. Rigorous data analysis techniques were employed by using multiple people in data coding. The researcher debriefed the participants after completing the study to avoid deceit.

#### Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations were meticulously made to prevent harming or wronging others, promote good, and ensure respectful and fair practices. Ethics are a set of moral principles and rules of conduct (Poth, 2023). Ethics in research relates to the application of a system of moral principles. Pham (2018) emphasises that it is vital that researchers respect the constitutional rights, privacy, dignity, and emotional state of their participants and the integrity of the organisation within which the study occurs, which is what the researcher in this study did. Participants had the necessary information to decide whether to participate in the study, including the aims, what would be involved, anonymity, and confidentiality (Pham, 2018). Thus, the researcher was guided by these ethical considerations throughout this study in the Shamva district. The researcher explained the purpose of the study to the participants before the interviews and the non-participant observations. Unclear issues were clarified before the interview, and the participants willingly agreed to participate in the study. The anonymity of the respondents was ensured as all the participants did not disclose their names to protect their identities (Taherdoost, 2022). Confidentiality was assured to protect the participants against harm and to ensure their right to privacy. Guarantee of confidentiality, voluntary consent, the right to withdraw, and contact information were discussed before data collection commenced (Bryman, 2021). The participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study if they felt uneasy with their involvement (Shoozan & Mohamad, 2024).

## V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### Causes of learner truancy amongst ECD learners in Shamva district

The study revealed that school truancy is a complex and heterogeneous problem that many factors affect. These include home factors, in-school factors, peer influence, mass media, unfavourable weather patterns, long distances to school, lack of motivation, and many other variables privy to the learner. Lack of interest in school activities is another cause of truancy. Mutonhodza (2025) concluded that lethargic teaching styles contributed to ECD learner truancy due to boredom, created by deficient stuporous teaching strategies.

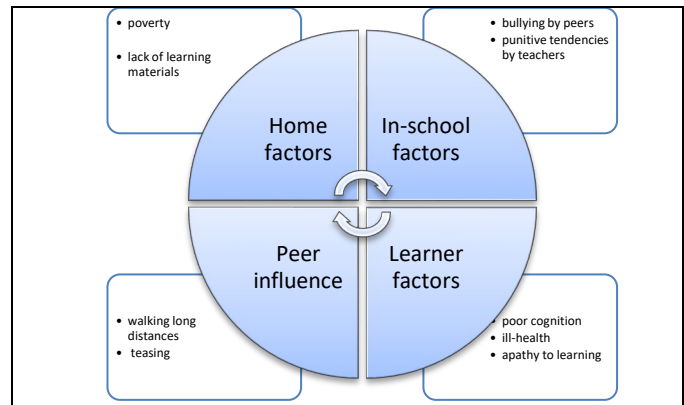


Figure 1: Causes of ECD learners' truancy

As the table above illustrates, all the teachers pointed out that learner truancy can result from many variables. Some factors are beyond the learner's control, for instance, when a learner is absent from school to avoid embarrassment. This stems from socio-economic challenges like poverty and a lack of learning materials. Socio-economic challenges can deter regular school attendance.

#### Drawbacks faced by learners because of truancy

ECD learners face several drawbacks as a result of truancy including a sharp slump in academic performance at the end of the term or year, poor self-esteem, poor self-concept, poor communication skills, disruption in the learning programme, indiscipline on the part of the affected learners, a slump in the learner's ability to learn, laziness, delinquency, cheating, disobedience and it can also eventually lead to school drop-out.

#### Interview results

Regarding this study's findings, school-based factors emanate within the school context. These factors immensely contributed to ECD learner truancy in primary school. ECD learner truancy due to school-based factors was either caused by fellow learners, teachers, the lethargic teaching methods, or the teaching and learning infrastructure of the school. The following school-based factors were identified and contributed to learner truancy. Pathetic school facilities, unhealthy teacher-learner relationship, misuse of the learners' leisure time by teachers, unfavourable weather conditions coupled with poor school infrastructure, labelling of learners, stereotyping learners, harsh treatment of learners, exposing learners' weaknesses and also bullying by fellow learners were some of the contributory factors to the high level of learner truancy especially during winter and rainy seasons where learners have to share the scarce accommodation through a scheme called hot siting. A lack of positive relationships between ECD learners can ultimately lead to learners feeling increasingly disconnected and less inclined and compelled to attend school. Academic performance declines due to continuously missed lessons, which hinders learners' academic progress and increases the likelihood of poor grades. According to Malcom et al. (2011), learner truancy has received little attention compared to other educational studies. Teachers reported that lateness was the first stage before learners became chronic absentees. Teachers mentioned lateness as an underlying reason for learner truancy. One learner stated that being late caused him to be a chronic absentee.

#### ECD Learners

*"When it is the tobacco season, I will be needed at home to assist with the routine chores of looking after the seedbeds and chasing away animals from the tobacco fields"* (Learner A).

Bullying and abuse were also identified as the main causes of learner truancy. It is also a finding of this paper that bullying is closely related to domestic violence at home. In one school, two boys who were identified as notorious bullies were reported to be from family backgrounds where domestic violence is a daily norm. Some learners confirmed that they could not come to school as they were bullied notoriously on their way home.

*"I could not go to school because my older friends teased, mocked, and called me using derogatory names from school. They kicked and punched me in the face if I attempted to register my displeasure" (Learner L).*

*"I could not come to school because my friends speak ill about my poor parents, who have recently separated, leaving us vulnerable. My mother is ridiculed as a shameless sex worker. I also hesitate to tell my teachers as I think it will worsen things" (Learner T).*

*"When the weather is not friendly, I do not go to school because of my chronic illness" (Learner G).*

*"I stay with my grandma, who is too old to monitor what I do, so I can boycott classes whenever I feel like" (Learner V).*

*"The distance to school is too much for me, yet my cognition is poor. I have low self-esteem in class because of my uniform's poor state and outlook, so I decided not to attend school" (Learner R).*

Bullied learners admitted they sometimes had to steal money from their parents to push away their bullies. It was also the finding of this research study that learners subjected to bullying were threatened with death if they reported to their teachers or parents. According to this finding, staying away from school was the only option, as confirmed by the victims above. In all these schools, there were no clear policies on bullying. Learners reported that bullying ranged from beating, disrespect of privacy, taking one's money or lunch box, and ridicule, a finding which resonates (Magwa & Ngara, 2016). Teachers must maintain discipline at school so that ECD learners can learn freely.

#### Teachers' responses

Teacher X suggested that *"schools should support learners struggling with truancy so that they can effectively overcome the challenges embedded in truancy by ECD learners."*

Another ECD teacher suggested that *"there is a need for increased social and psychological support since truancy leads to feelings of isolation, social difficulties and behavioral problems."* (Teacher C).

Another seasoned teacher in the ECD section said,

*"Most of the truant behavior results from home factors and home backgrounds" (Teacher D).*

This is stressed by the point that the family is the primary agent of socialisation.

Another one said, *"Absent parents contribute to uncontrolled learner truancy. The learner decides when to attend school and when not to."*

One of the parents had to say, *"I was nearly tempted to transfer my child to another school because he was ever absent from school, as he feared being bullied. Teachers must maintain discipline at school so that our children can learn freely" (Teacher S).*

*"Our school turns away learners for non-payment of school fees. Coupled with a lack of stationery, learners decide to play truant" (Teacher M).*

*"Poverty is the main contributor to truancy. It leads to difficulties in learning" (Teacher A).*

#### Limitations faced by facilitators in dealing with truancy

Teachers reported no standard procedures and measures to deal with truancy. Some teachers reiterated that a lack of policy on controlling absenteeism led to learner truancy. In most cases, parents who are not actively involved in their children's education feel less obliged to enforce attendance. Kourkoutas and Wolhuter (2013) observed that the largest obstacle in South Africa in dealing with learner truancy is how to address it.

*"It is easy for us to control learners who arrive late for school, but we do nothing to them, as there is no policy to deal with lateness and truancy. These learners also know that even if they arrive late for school or bunk classes, nothing can be done to them, especially because punishing learners to instill discipline is disallowed. There are no alternative measures to instill discipline on the part of the learners" (Teacher P).*

This implies that the ECD learners adopt the behaviour patterns and dynamics of the broader community within which the school is located. Attitudes and perceptions influence teachers in how and what they teach the community within which it is located.

*"Late coming plays a negative role in promoting learner attendance, and unfortunately, most parents are unaware that their children arrive late" (Teacher K).*

*"We live in a farm area; hence, learners' attendance is disrupted by farming activities" (Teacher H).*

Thus, school is in many ways the mirror of society. Another teacher attributed ECD learner truancy to rampant gold panning activities in some parts of the district.

*"ECD learners play truant because of bad influence from older peers." (Teacher Z).*

*"Some ECD learners play truant to avoid punitive tendencies by some teachers towards learners who are not performing according to the expectations" (Teacher M).*

The lifestyle in the community where the ECD learners come from tends to spill over into the school, since a school is a miniature society. Obadire and Sinthumile (2021) observed that the learners' surrounding community has an unimaginable influence on the learners' conduct.

#### Impact of truancy by ECD learners in school.

Van Wyk (2020) opines that an effective discipline system for educators and learners is the hallmark of an effective educational organization. Therefore, classroom disruption due to learner truancy becomes a major impediment to learning. In support of this, Lorgat (2003) posits that in schools where discipline is a problem, the culture of teaching and learning tends to move into a downward spiral. Jacobs (2015) also contends that learner behaviour plays a major role in academic achievement and social development. A learner's behaviour can affect his/her ability to learn and the learning environment of other learners. This has negative effects not only on the individual learner but also on those around him/her. Masando et al. (2023) observed that truancy negatively affects learners' lives because they cannot get the necessary knowledge to transition to the next grade. Truancy affects all levels of learning.

Truancy leads to the disruption of teaching and learning activities. Such disruption then interferes with the teacher's ability to teach effectively. This happens because the teacher must stop the lesson to deal with the disruptive learner(s). The result is that this takes away from the valuable time needed to instruct the rest of the class (Jacobs, 2015). According to Lochan (2010), when classrooms are characterised by learner truancy, the teaching and learning environment is adversely affected due to the loss of valuable teaching time.

Furthermore, truancy can hurt the learners' self-esteem (Omote et al., 2015). Consequently, this leads to learners' poor performance, tarnishing the school's image (Enefu et al., 2019). As mentioned above, truancy leads to low academic achievement or school performance. This can also be blamed on laziness, truancy, delinquency, cheating, and disobedience (Enefu et al., 2019). Parents rush to blame their children's poor performance on the teacher and the school. ECD learner's truancy leads to schools failing to meet their targets, affecting their internal efficiency and putting the school in a bad light before society. Truancy leads to academic decline because of missed lessons. Truancy has serious social and psychological repercussions. It leads to a reduction in learning opportunities and, subsequently, employment opportunities.

#### Strategies for minimising truancy by ECD learners

The issue of reducing learner truancy is given an important place in policy documents in the field of education. Strategies that can be used to reduce the prevalence of truancy in schools are meant to enhance positive behaviours in the schools/classrooms. Teachers are expected to play an essential and leading role in curbing truancy involving ECD learners. Teachers, school heads, and parents must know their children's or learners' behavioral patterns. Teachers should be trained to recognise unruly behaviors and devise strategies to deal with the problems. Schools should maintain good communication between teachers and learners, which will help avoid confrontations between teachers and learners. By stopping corporal punishment, learner attendance will improve, and learners' performance will be enhanced. The school needs to provide a conducive environment for teaching and learning. The study unearthed that the distance travelled to school has some measure of relationship to ills like juvenile delinquency, truancy, lateness, and indiscipline (Mutonhodza, 2025).



Dube and Orpinas (2009) stated that feeding activities within the school are one of the activities that have been initiated to reduce truancy. This is so because when a learner comes from a family that does not have food, they will prefer going to school rather than staying at home where there is hunger. This activity, in the actual sense, is implemented deliberately to attract the learners who are fond of staying home due to poverty in their homes. As already alluded to, poverty is another prime factor that weighs heavily on the rank leading to pupils' truancy; therefore, developing such an invention would help learners from poverty-stricken homes (Schlebusch et al., 2022). Similarly, Dube and Orpinas (2009) indicated that sponsorship of vulnerable children has been another measure in most schools where the government or any organisation caters for their user fees to allow them to acquire education regardless of their prevailing circumstances. It has been observed that school fees have been a major challenge for children who cannot afford to pay, and as a result, they will resort to not coming to school for fear of being embarrassed by the teachers for not paying, which will, in turn, be a drawback to their school attendance. Therefore, providing sponsorships to the underprivileged children could reduce the rate of truancy in schools. School managements need to take a more supportive approach to addressing learner truancy. Habbozya (2022) explains that parents need to contact school management, counselors, and other staff members to find ways and means of helping the learners attend school without problems, for additional help. This may even show further engagement. Schools must study and report truancy data, which may help them study truancy patterns and common features. In school, they must raise awareness about many issues that affect the welfare of the learners, and truancy is no exception. It is imperative to target and address the root causes of truancy involving ECD learners, such as lack of resources, poverty, chronic illnesses, and other socio-economic challenges.

## VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

The researcher makes the following recommendations to primary school teachers, curriculum designers, and policymakers regarding the issue of truancy by ECD learners. Teachers and parents must know their children's or learners' behavioural patterns. Based on the findings, this study recommends that schools and all stakeholders in education need to make a firm decision to stop truancy among learners. They must provide guidance and counselling to the learners so they can resist peer pressure and offer many interesting school activities, such as various sports. Teachers should respect young learners' dignity and rights without prejudice and strive to eliminate unprofessional behaviours such as insults, ridicule, and derogatory remarks towards learners. Learners must be taught and encouraged to avoid anti-social behaviours like bullying, and must be taught and encouraged to report incidences of bullying in schools. Teachers must use corporal punishment as a last resort when dealing with indiscipline amongst learners because corporal punishment is a violent way of retribution. Parents must organise transport to and from school for their learners who may be forced to walk many kilometers to school, and teachers must be creative so that young learners get motivated to learn, and they will not suffer from boredom. Workshops and seminars must be organised regularly to create awareness of the prevalence of some forms of indiscipline in schools. Teachers need to be equipped with the necessary support to help them keep good truancy records and impart the necessary life skills to the learners. There should be enough security and protection for the learners at school, so their peers do not take advantage of them. Teachers should keep an informative social record, stop beating learners who come to school late, reduce the punishments, and be friendly. The ECD section should create a more supportive and positive school environment, encouraging learners to attend school regularly. The findings are expected to help education policymakers use acceptable school disciplinary procedures.

## VII. CONCLUSION

As alluded to by the research participants, the main causes of truancy involving ECD learners include home factors, in-school factors, peer pressure from fellow learners, learners' attitudes, and walking long distances to school. Literature shows that the cause of learner truancy involving ECD learners is due to many variables. Truancy by ECD learners gives rise to poor self-esteem, poor self-concept, poor communication skills, and disruption in the learning programmes. Teachers face several limitations when dealing with truant behavior involving ECD learners. Several strategies were suggested in a veiled attempt to curb truancy by ECD learners. Teachers are expected to play an essential and leading role in curbing truancy involving ECD learners. Several recommendations have also been given. It is recommended that teachers respect the dignity and rights of young learners without any prejudice. It is vital to involve and engage parents and guardians in coordinated truancy management programmes that can help improve learner attendance.

## VIII. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

There are no conflicts of interest in this study.

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