

# Interest and Absenteeism as Predictors of Senior Secondary School Students' Achievement in Economics

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## Abstract

*This study examined the influence of Interest and Absenteeism on senior secondary students' achievement in Economics. Three research questions were raised and answered in this study. Three instruments duly validated were used for data collection in this study. They are Students' Interest Inventory (SII) [r-value 0.72], Students' Absenteeism Scale (SAS) [r-value 0.75] and Economics Achievement Test (ECAT) [r-value 0.68]. A total of 180 senior secondary I students drawn from five co-educational schools in Ijebu-North Local Government Area of Ogun State responded to the three instruments that were used for the study. The results of the test reveal in terms of the specific contributions of the predictor variables, Absenteeism contribute the highest (8.5%  $R = 0.291$ ) and Interest (4.8%  $R = 0.219$ ). The predictor variables jointly and significantly predict students' achievement in Economics, contributing 11% of the total variance observed in the achievement. The educational implications of the results to Economics teachers, students, parents as well as government were discussed.*

**Keywords:** Interest, Absenteeism, Achievement, Economics

## Introduction

Economics is one of the Social Sciences taught in senior secondary school. As an elective subject, it is concerned with human behaviour such as how people earn their living and makes choice between alternatives to satisfy their wants. Paul, Amanze, Immaculata & Obinna-Akakuru (2018) cited Dwivedi, (2004) submitted that Economics is the study of how society decides what, how and for whom to produce goods which are physical commodities such as steel and strawberries and render services which are activities such as message or life concerts consumed or enjoyed only at the instant they are produced. He went further to say that the question of what, how and for whom to produce is either answered by a central planning agency or the price mechanism depending on the economic system practiced by a country. National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004) goes further to outline the specific objectives of Economics as to include equipping students with the basic principles of Economics necessary for useful living and higher education; preparing and encouraging students to be prudent and effective in the management of scarce resources; and raise students respect for the dignity of labour and their appreciation of economic, cultural and social value of the society while enabling them to acquire knowledge for the practical solution of the economic problems of the society, Nigeria, developing countries and the world at large. Adu and Adeyanju (2013) opined that the teaching of

Economics provides a learner with the opportunities to live meaningfully within the changing economic world.

Despite these laudable objectives of teaching Economics, it has been observed that students' performance in Economics as not been encouraging, and the poor performances of students' in secondary schools and most especially in Economics pose a persistent challenge to educators and researchers who have tried to identify the factors that might be responsible for these poor results (Alade, Nwadingwe & Igbiosa, 2014, Adu & Adeyanju, 2013). Several studies such as Ibanga (1997) and Anuka (2002) in Financial Accounting, Ifamuyiwa (1998) in Mathematics, Okpala (2001) in Physics, Adu, Adeyanju and Sobola (2011) and Adu and Adeyanju (2013) in Economics have tried to identify the causes of poor performance in school subjects and each have come out with its own findings. According to Paul et al. (2018), Economics students fail to gain mastery of Economics subject matter. Students' who as a result of its enticing name register for the subject at the external examination, eventually lose interest as the subject is viewed as difficult and ambiguous in nature. In spite of all these findings, students' performance has not improved significantly to justify the efforts of previous research studies. This situation, therefore, calls for more research directed at identifying the problem associated with students' achievement in Economics, hence this study want to establish if students' interest and absenteeism will influence students' achievement

in Economics.

In the literature, there are many definitions within the scope of absenteeism. For example, Lannegrand-Willems, Cornefroy and Lecigne, (2012) defined absenteeism as, "a student being absent in school with or without an excuse". Robinson (2009) considered absenteeism by describing behavior and defined it as "not attending the school with or without an excuse, miss some classes or being late for class". Regardless of the reason for absence, the fact is that the student is missing a portion of the academic process. Additionally, students who were absent with excuse, such as students staying away from school for a long time due to health problems, have difficulty in adapting when they return to school and may develop a habit of absenteeism without excuse. In other words, when "absenteeism without a legitimate reason" is removed from the scope of the problem, the disruption in children's learning process and other problems that may be experienced in the future should not be ignored.

According to Akanimoh, Olanloye and Abiodun, (2015), Absenteeism in school is a serious predicament which is influencing a large amount of students' achievement and the education sector in Nigeria. Attendance in school is important because students are more likely to succeed in academics when they attend school consistently (Pascopella, 2007). It is difficult for teachers and students to build skills and progress if large numbers of students are frequently absent. In addition to falling behind in academics, students who are not in school on a regular basis are more likely to get into trouble with the law and cause problems in their communities (Hocking, 2008). On the other hand, sustained absences may affect retention as it may degenerate into truancy (Lotz & Lee, 1999; Barker & Jansen, 2000). Hence, continued loss of instruction or poor academic achievement among students with high absenteeism is essential characteristics of students who may later drop out of school (Mayer & Mitchel, 1996). Absenteeism is not only an indicator of low academic achievement but also a strong indicator of diminished social and life success (Williams, 2010). Absenteeism makes it difficult to create a solid foundation in terms of discipline and sense of responsibility.

In the past decade, a number of studies have

examined the relationship between students' attendance (or absenteeism) and academic performance, generally finding that attendance does matter for academic achievement (for example, Durden & Ellis (1995), Devadoss & Foltz (1996), Chan et al. (1997), Marburger (2001), Rodgers (2001), Bratti & Staffolani (2002), Dolton, Marcenaro & Navarro (2003), Kirby & McElroy (2003). Also, most studies have found relationship between absenteeism and course performance (Marburger, 2001; Akanimoh, Olanloye & Abiodun, 2015, Demir & Akman Karabeyoglu, 2015). This implies that, high rate of students' absenteeism will result in a corresponding low academic achievement.

Although there are various reasons for absenteeism, one of the most important of these reasons is "not liking the school" (Pehlivan, 2006). If the school is cold, not secure, or if there is a climate of tolerance for bullying, students will prefer not to be in school (Clark, 2008; Corley, 2012). In particular, conflicts with peers and teachers, exposure to bullying, and dislike of teachers are important causes of absenteeism (Eastman, Cooney, O'Connor & Small Eastman, 2007; Reid, 1999; Gentle-Genitty, 2008). In a school environment where students do not feel a commitment to school, they would not want to attend, resulting in increased feelings of alienation. As Hamm and Faircloth (2005) stated, commitment to the school is formed by the student's perceptions about respect, love and values they receive in the school. In the school environment where there is a perceived value and an emotional commitment, there will be a sense of security. Therefore, in such a school environment, students' attendance and participation increases.

Similarly, Akanimoh, Olanloye and Abiodun, (2015) in their study cited Baderin (2005); Bowen, (2005); Reid (2005) submitted that some studies carried out by these scholars have established that students who attend classes more regularly seem to be more successful in their studies than those who frequently absent themselves and the relationship between class attendance and performance in class, confirmed that student absenteeism resulted in lower grades.

Students interest in Economics is another variable for consideration in this study because one of the various identified reasons for absenteeism is students "not liking the school" (Pehlivan, 2006) and loss of interest has been observed by Paul et al. (2018)

that Economics students haven't registered for the subject at the external examination, eventually lose interest as the subject is viewed as difficult and ambiguous in nature. Several studies concerned with the effect of interest factor on academic performance in secondary schools have yielded positive results (**Ogunjinmi, Salami & Oyedare, 2015**) **but much as not been done in relation to Economics as a subject.** Interest could be defined as the focusing of the sense organs on or giving attention to some person, activity, situation or object. It is an outcome of experience rather than gift. It could either result or cause motivation. It could also be regarded as a pre-determinant of one's perceptions that is, what aspect of the world one is mostly likely to see always (McClernmey, Dowson, Young and Nelson, 2005). It could also be viewed as a condition in which an individual associates the essence of certain things or situation with his/her needs or wants. Schiefele (1998) maintained that one's interest is rekindled or killed through participation, experience, familiarity, study and work. It is what one perceives in these engagements that shape interest. Interest according to Schiefele (1998) is a feeling of identification with a person and some conditions, things or other persons. It has been variously defined as a kind of consciousness accompanying and stimulating attention, a feeling, pleasant or painful directing attention, the pleasurable or painful aspect of a process of attention, and as identical with attention of itself (Schiefele & Krapp, 1996). Thus it may be said, "I attend to what interests me". The term is also used to indicate a permanent mental disposition (Schiefele & Krapp, 1996).

Adeyemo (2005) stated that "the importance of interest in whatever a person does cannot be underestimated". Interest has to do with a learners' predisposition to react positively in certain ways towards certain aspects of the environment and interest is usually developed in relation to and remained allied to more basic motives. Interest reaction to any situation depends on the situation's potential or actual fulfillment of personal needs and goals. When it comes to making choices of subject to sit for in external examination at the secondary school level, interest is of considerable importance. Hence, it becomes imperative to carry out the study to examine the influence of students' interest and

### **Statement of the Problem**

The trend of poor achievement in Economics in Secondary schools has been of serious concern to scholars and researchers. It is then necessary to find lasting solutions to the factors inhibiting excellent performance in the subject. Therefore, this study sought to examine the predictive power of interest and absenteeism on students' achievement in Senior Secondary School Economics.

### **Research Question**

In order to guide the study, the following research questions were raised:

1. To what extent will students' interest predict students' achievement in Economics?
2. To what extent will students' absenteeism predict their achievement in Economics?
3. To what extent will students' interest and absenteeism (when taken together) predict their achievement in Economics?

### **Methodology**

The study adopted a survey design. Simple random sampling procedure was adopted to select four secondary schools from the total population of the schools in Ijebu-North Area of Ogun State and a sample of 180 students from the Local Government Area was selected. Senior Secondary School Two students were purposively selected for this study. The choice of SS 2 was to ensure good coverage of syllabus in Economics.

Three instruments duly validated were used for data collection in this study. They are Students' Interest Inventory (SII), Students' Absenteeism Scale (SAS) and Economics Achievement Test (ECAT). Both SAS and SII are four-point Likert scale type and the students were asked to indicate their feelings by ticking any of "Strongly Agree", "Agree", "Disagree" and "Strongly Disagree" format of the questionnaire. The questionnaires were given to experts for suggestions and comments before coming up with the final versions. The reliability coefficient of SII is 0.72 while that of SAS is 0.75. Item Analysis was carried out on ECAT the initial pool of 90 items objective test generated and the thirty (30) items that survived the analysis was finally administered to the students as the Economics

Achievement Test with reliability coefficient of 0.68.

The researcher through the assistance of the subject teachers administered the questionnaires and the achievement test on the students in the selected schools. The data collected were analyzed inferentially using linear regression as well as multiple regression analysis at 0.05 level of significance.

**Results**

The results of the study were presented in

**Analysis of Variance**

Source	df.	S.S	MS.	F.	Sig. of F.
Regression	1	1376.449	1376.449	8.934	0.003
Residual	178	27423.796	154.066		
<b>Total</b>	<b>179</b>	<b>28800.244</b>			<b>P&lt;0.05</b>

The result from table 1 indicated that interest have low relationship with economics (R=

0.219). The table also shows that interest significantly predicted students' achievement and accounted for 4.8% of the variance observed in the achievement. The F. ratio of 8.934 from the table of analysis of variance confirmed that the regression is significant.

**Analysis of Variance**

Source	df.	S.S	M.S.	F.	Sig. of F.
Regression	1	2445.447	2445.447	16.517	0.000
Residual	178	26354.797	148.061		
<b>Total</b>	<b>179</b>	<b>28800.244</b>			<b>P&lt;0.05</b>

The table shows that absenteeism significantly predicted students' achievement, responsible for 8.5% of the variance observed. The F. ratio of 16.517 from the table of analysis of variance confirms that the regression is significant.

**Research Question 3:** To what extent does students' interest and absenteeism (when taken together) predict their achievement in Economics?

questions were raised:

**Research Question 1:** To what extent will students' interest determine students' achievement in Economics?

**Table 1: Multiple Regression of ECAT on SII**

Multiple R	=	0.219
RSquare	=	0.048
Adjusted R2	=	0.042
Standard Error	=	12.412

**Research Question 2:** To what extent will students' absenteeism predict their achievement in Economics?

**Table 2: Multiple Regression of ECAT on SAS**

Multiple R	=	0.291
RSquare	=	0.085
Adjusted R2	=	0.080
Standard Error	=	12.168

**Table 3: Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis**

Multiple R	=	0.333
RSquare	=	0.111
Adjusted R2	=	0.101
Standard Error	=	12.027

**Analysis of Variance**

Source	df.	S.S	M.S.	F.	Sig. of F.
Regression	2	3196.458	389.699	11.049	0.000
Residual	177	25603.786	159.413		
<b>Total</b>	<b>179</b>	<b>28800.244</b>			<b>P&lt;0.05</b>

The above results show that the two predictor variables significantly predict achievement of students in Economics. Contributing 11% of the total variance observed in achievement in the study while 89% of the variance was accounted for by the variables not considered in the study. Also, the F ratio of 11.049 from the analysis of variance shows that the regression is statistically significant.

### Discussion

The study examined the influence of two predictor variables on students' academic achievement in senior secondary school Economics. The finding shows that interest significantly predicted students' achievement and accounted for 4.8% of the variance observed in the achievement. This finding that interest is in support of the researcher's expectation because a person can only succeed in anything he/she has interest in. And the result is also in support of the findings of Ogunjinmi, Salami and Oyedare (2015), Adeyemo (2005), Scheiefele (1998), Schiefele and Krapp (1996) who in different studies found that interest can be used to predict academic achievement. They all unanimously agree that interest is significantly related to academic achievement.

The result of the study also reveals that absenteeism significantly predicted students' achievement, responsible for 8.5% of the variance observed. This finding agreed with the researcher's expectation that attendance in school is important because students are more likely to succeed in academics when they attend school consistently. It will also be difficult for teachers and students to build skills and progress if large numbers of students are frequently absent. In addition to falling behind in academics, students who are not in school on a regular basis are more likely to get into trouble with the law and cause problems in their communities. For instance, Enomoto (1997), Marburger (2001), Bowen (2005), Baderin (2005), Reid (2005), Pascopella, (2007), Hocking, (2008), Akanimoh, Olanloye and Abiodun (2015) found a positive relationship between absenteeism and academic achievement in their separate studies.

The result also shows that the two predictor variables (interest and absenteeism) jointly and significantly predict achievement of students in Economics. This result that interest and absenteeism are effective predictors of academic achievement in

Economics agreed with the researcher's expectation because there is relationship between interest and absenteeism. Although there are various reasons for absenteeism, one of the most important of these reasons is "not liking the school" (Pehlivan, 2006). If the school is cold, not secure; or if there is a climate of tolerance for bullying, students will prefer not to be in school (Clark, 2008; Corley, 2012). In particular, conflicts with peers and teachers, exposure to bullying, and dislike of teachers are important causes of absenteeism (Eastman et al., 2007; Reid, 2000; Gentle-Genitty, 2008). In a school environment where students do not feel a commitment to school, they would not want to attend, resulting in increased feelings of alienation. As Hamm and Faircloth (2005) stated, commitment to the school is formed by the student's perceptions about respect, love and values they receive in the school. In the school environment where there is a perceived value and an emotional commitment, there will be a sense of security. Therefore, in such a school environment, students' attendance and participation increases. However, the inability to have a perfect prediction in this study could be due to the error of measurement and the non-inclusion of other variables (as only 11% of the variance observed in the achievement is accounted for by variables considered in this study) that could predict academic achievement of students.

### Conclusion

The major findings of the study are that the predictor variables (separately and jointly) influence students' achievement in economics. And of the two variables, absenteeism has the higher predictive power. Based on the outcome of this study, it was concluded that interest and absenteeism are strong predictors of academic achievement in Economics, as such special attention should be paid to them if there will be improvement in student achievement at the secondary school in external examinations.

### Recommendations

These findings have important educational implications for Economics teachers, parents, students and government. Economics teachers should adopt method of teaching that will stimulate and sustain students' interest towards the subject. There is also the need to create awareness on the negative effects of absenteeism on students' academic achievement. It is recommended that schools focus on increasing students' commitment to school in order to

reduce student absenteeism. Efforts must be in a direction to convey the message that students at the school are considered important as students as well as individuals. Necessary efforts should be made by the Government to provide infrastructures that will make the school environment fascinating for students as well as sustain their interest in schooling. Parents must also of necessity inform and encourage their wards on the importance of education and regular attendance at school.

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