

THE NATURE OF TRUANCY AND THE LIFE WORLD OF
TRUANTS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

by

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DECLARATION

Student Number: 801-254-7

I declare that *The nature of truancy and the life world of truants in secondary schools* is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

.....

SIGNATURE

(Mrs M M Moseki)

.....

DATE

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SUMMARY

The nature of truancy and the life world of truants in secondary schools

by

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Truancy is one of the problems that exist in schools and affect learners' performance. The aim of the current study was to determine how truancy manifests and also to explore the life world of truants in secondary schools.

From the literature review, the two types of truancy, namely blanket truancy and post-registration truancy were described. Various programmes and approaches used in truancy intervention were explored.

An empirical investigation was undertaken with a sample of 758 Grade 10 learners from three secondary schools. The results indicated that significantly more males than females engaged in truancy. There is also a significant dependency between learning problems and truancy.

The results of the study were analysed and recommendations for intervention and for further study were made.

Keywords

truancy	parental involvement
blanket truancy	bullying
post-registration truancy	school phobia
cognitive style	anti-social behaviour
anti-social behaviour	whole-school development

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CHAPTER 1: PROBLEM, AIMS AND PLAN OF STUDY

1.1 Introductory orientation

Truancy is about learners who have not been attending school regularly as required by the school, parents and even the authorities. Truant behaviour is a problem for the individual, the family, the school and society in general.

The funding allocations for public schools are made available on the assumption that there will be learners in schools to be taught. Truancy has negative financial implications such as the waste of public resources due to large number of truanting learners. Other negative implications include loss of learning opportunities, poor academic performance and eventual dropout.

Truancy may have both short and long-term effects on society. There is evidence that truancy is linked to delinquent behaviour and juvenile crime (Collins, 1998:38; Reid, 1999:25). It is reported that 80% of the prisoners in the United States of America were once truants and that the percentage of juvenile offenders who started as truants is increasing (Gale Research, 1998). Truancy is associated with subsequent marital and psychological problems in early adulthood and is a predictor of multiple problems (Fogelman & Hibbert, 1990:179). Malan (1972:144) also argues that the rate of truancy has negative implications for manpower development.

1.2 Problem analysis

1.2.1 The pre-scientific problem awareness

The researcher first witnessed incidences of truancy in the period 1990 to 1996, when she was the guidance counsellor at a secondary school in Pudumong in the North-West Province. One of the common truancy reduction measures used was to lock the school gates during lessons and open them during break and after school hours (researcher's personal experience). Despite the limited impact on truancy reduction, the approach of locking gates is still common and evident in some secondary schools. The researcher found locked gates while visiting some of the schools in the Northern Cape Province. Gates were locked to prevent trespassing, especially by gangsters, to control late coming and to stop learners from dodging classes.

Since 1997, individual cases of learners with attendance problems have been referred to the present researcher through the Education Support Service in the Francis Baard District of the Northern Cape Province. These learners were mostly adolescents in secondary schools. What became evident upon interviewing these learners was that truancy occurs over an extended period before it can be identified. Furthermore, other learners keep playing truant without being referred for counselling, and parents claim that they were unaware of their children's truant behaviour. Some learners wearing school uniform could be seen roaming the streets during school hours.

Truancy continues to be one of the growing problems that educators identify amongst learners (Kwon Hoo, 2003). There are some initiatives that suggest that truancy causes concern in South African schools and that it is considered to be an issue that demands attention. For instance, the Truancy Reduction Project that was initiated at Mannenberg in the Western Cape (Fox, 2000) and charging a parent in Pretoria for not ensuring that a child attends school regularly, as stipulated in the South African Schools Act, 1996 (Act No. 84 of 1996) (Grey, 2000). In addition, one of the urgent activities that is listed in the Implementation Plan for Tirisano is to monitor attendance trends (Department of

Education, 2000:28). In the Northern Cape, the Member of the Executive Council for the Department of Education confronted truants and reprimanded some learners for being late for school (Monare, 2003).

Unlike in the past, schools in this country are currently admitting learners from all nationalities and language groups in line with the legislation (South African Schools Act, 1996). In some instances, this leads to the migration of learners to schools which were previously restricted for a particular racial group. Learners may attend any school, while some even travel long distances daily to attend schools away from home and might even go to those schools via the central business district (researcher's personal experience).

Attempts are made to ensure that learners attend school regularly. Various systems and procedures are in place at schools to record attendance. In South Africa, all schools are compelled to record the attendance of learners in class registers on a daily basis. Schools are at liberty to devise additional measures for keeping and monitoring attendance records and certain schools do "spot checks" in order to track absence during lessons. Despite these recording and monitoring procedures, learners continue to play truant on an almost daily basis.

The observations and experiences stated above stimulated further thinking and questions regarding truancy. For instance, one may ask why learners are unwilling to attend school regularly. Another question is about the accuracy of class registers. Records reflected on class registers remain questionable since they do not specify whether the absence was authorised or not. There is also a failure to acknowledge that learners may leave school after having been marked as being present on class registers.

As stated earlier, schools in South Africa are no longer racially segregated. A change in the racial composition of learners suggests that another perspective or picture of attendance, and truancy in particular, is needed. Thus, further research is needed to find out whether or not there are any changes in the pattern of truancy. It appears that the

circumstances around the phenomenon of truancy are generally not well understood. A lack of proper understanding may lead to poor management of truancy.

1.2.2 Exploring the problem

1.2.2.1 Incidence and nature of truancy

(a) South Africa

In the study conducted by Malan (1972:144), 2 738 out of 69 908 pupils were identified by their teachers as truants. It is important to mention that this figure may actually have been higher, given the fact that registers do not always provide reliable data on absences (Masithela, 1992:45) and that learners can play truant without being caught. Masithela (1992:33) observed that learners tend to miss lessons during the first and second periods, as well as during the last five periods. The tendency of missing certain lessons towards the end of the school day shows that some form of "hidden truancy" is prevalent, and that pupils can be marked present in the register but fail to attend all lessons (*ibid*:45). On the other hand, they may come late and be marked absent or be somewhere on the school premises not attending certain lessons or periods, but still be marked as being present on the class registers. Smith, P.A. (1996:30) also argues that learners continue to play truant, but acknowledges that his sample was composed of Afrikaans and English-speaking learners only.

More researchers became interested in the phenomenon of truancy in recent years. In this regard, a team of researchers conducted a survey that focused on the roles played by teachers, peers and parents in truancy, as well as the truants' perceptions of the relevance of their schooling (Mashiane, 1997:4). This group study appears to bridge the gap of limited information on truancy that Smith, P.A. (1996:82) identified. This research further indicates a tendency of increasing truancy rates in higher standards (Mashiane 1997:57) and therefore confirms similar claims by Howe (1995:30). Some of the studies conducted in South Africa suggest that truancy does occur, but are less clear about "hidden truancy", and, therefore, the picture of the nature of truancy remains incomplete. Furthermore, the applicability of the previous studies may be limited to the previous era

and their relevance or validity in terms of a transformed education system could also be limited.

(b) Some overseas countries

Most of the research conducted abroad seems to provide information regarding the nature and extent of truancy in secondary schools. Results of a study conducted at a school in London from 1985 to 1987 revealed that 70% of the sampled pupils admitted truanting during the three-year period (Stoll, 1990:22). In the study that involved nine secondary schools, 66% of the 765 fifth-year pupils admitted truanting (*ibid*). Figures on truancy in 150 English secondary schools revealed that 31% of pupils in years 10 and 11 admitted that they played truant or skipped lessons (O'Keefe & Stoll, 1995:12).

Gray and Jesson (1990:25) report about the major national survey results of truancy in English secondary schools. According to this study, 23% of all fifth-year pupils were involved in truant behaviour and they were less likely to stay on in full-time education. Furthermore, schools facing serious problems of truancy tend to be in the inner city rather than in other areas (*ibid*). On the other hand, Collins (1998:26) reports that absentee rates vary between schools in the London Education Authority.

Munn and Johnstone (1992:4) found that out of a sample of 50 Scottish secondary schools, 18% of the pupils (11% in June and 7% in November) were classified as truants and were mostly from the senior years. These figures exclude truants within the school day, as "14 schools reported that they did not keep period attendance records" (*ibid*).

Truancy has long been a subject for research in various parts of the USA. According to Nelson (1972:98), 64% of the 591 students surveyed identified themselves as class truants. Learners habitually play truant each day in Los Angeles, Pittsburgh and Milwaukee (Black, 1996:33).

Bos, Ruiters and Visscher (1992:392) found that the average rate of truancy in 36 schools in the four Dutch cities studied was 4.4% and that truancy increases with the level of the class in almost all schools.

Some researchers further indicate that truancy does not necessarily mean missing the whole day of school, but found that it could be in the form of missing a part of a day or particular lesson (Kilpatrick, 1998:31; Reid, 1999:91).

1.2.2.2 Factors associated with truancy

(a) South African research

The factors associated with truancy are many and varied. Research reveals that the interaction of individuals' characteristics, family circumstances, socio-economic and school factors causes truancy among children in South Africa (Smith, P.A., 1996:49).

As far as school factors are concerned, educators are said to cause truancy by modelling inappropriate behaviour such as dodging classes (Masithela, 1992:33) and by not behaving in an exemplary manner (Mashiane, 1997:76). This suggests that educators do play a role in causing truancy. Peers may also serve as models in reinforcing undesirable behaviours amongst other learners. Khoza (1997:71) found that peers who are involved with truants often end up playing truant.

Another aspect of school that appears to cause truancy could be the learners' perception of the relevance of the subjects taught to the world of work. According to Seerane (1997:83-85), some truants perceive their school subjects to be less important and they do not know what careers to follow after completing school.

It is notable that several variables are involved in the development of truant behaviour. One could ask why some learners attend school regularly and never miss school without valid reasons, while others do not. Malan (1972:149) argues that the factors contributing

to truancy are not the same for each learner because of the uniqueness of each individual. He further asserts that the extent to which an individual offers resistance to contributing factors may play a major role in the generation of truant behaviour.

(b) Studies conducted abroad

When seen from a psychological viewpoint, truancy may be symptomatic of learners who are insecure and have low academic achievement levels and low self-esteem. Lewis (1995:37) states that attendance difficulties may broadly result from a combination of "pull" and "push" factors. Pull factors are personal and social aspects that "pull" a learner out of school. The pull factors may be related to the psychological indices mentioned by Reid (2002:11), such as maladjustment, a lower general level of self-esteem and academic self-concept, anxiety and lower career aspirations.

Factors that "push" learners away from school include academic and classroom aspects such as inapproachability of the teaching staff, incomprehensible teaching style and inappropriate classroom management. Other factors relating to the school and the classroom include bullying, the curriculum, boring lessons (Reid, 1999:91), teachers' humiliating remarks (Porteus, Clacherty, Mdiya, Pelo, Matsai, Qwabe and Donald 2000:11), poor record-keeping and school organisation (Bimler & Kirkland, 2001:90; Coldman, 1995:29).

According to Pappas (1996:1), truancy is often symptomatic of family dysfunction, since the parents of truants tend to be permissive, undisciplined and unavailable. Some authors believe that truancy is associated with a poor socio-economic background, including poverty, poor housing and unemployment (Bell, Rosen and Dynlacht, 1994:204; Tyerman, 1958:222). Some researchers state that there is a link between truancy and delinquent behaviour (Collins, 1998:38; Brown, 1998:298-299; Reid, 1999:25).

1.2.2.3 Truancy differentiated from school phobia

There is a need to distinguish between truancy and school phobia. The concept "school phobia" describes a learner who is unwilling to attend school and stays at home with the knowledge of parents (Wicks and Nelson, 2000:123). A learner's problem often starts with a vague complaint or reluctance to attend school and progresses to total refusal to go to school. Blagg (1992:121) asserts that school phobia may be induced by fear-arousing aspects of school, such as fear of failure caused by anxiety about meeting the standards. Fear may also be related to worries about the health and welfare of parents (Blagg, 1992:123). On the other hand, a learner who plays truant misses the whole school day or lessons without the knowledge of parents or caregivers. Furthermore, a truant tends to be involved in various forms of anti-social behaviour (Blagg, 1992:121).

Milner and Blyth (1999:18) acknowledge the difficulties involved in studying the prevalence and pattern of truancy and in comparing current and past school attendance or absence. The difficulties are partly compounded by the variations in the definition of truancy itself (Boyd, 1999:22; Gabb, 1997:2) and the multifaceted nature of truancy (Edward and Malcolm, 2002:1; Reid, 1999:17).

The problems associated with studies on truancy should, however, not prevent further research from being conducted. Solutions should be found, or the causes at least eliminated, because truancy is regarded as a serious problem with socio-economic implications. A preliminary review of the literature reveals that truancy is a major problem for schools and society, and a most powerful predictor of juvenile delinquent behaviour (Van Petegem, 1994:272; Wiehe, 2000).

Reid (2002:2) maintains that the amount of money spent on truancy reduction initiatives proves the extent of truancy. The Northern Cape Education Department recognised the negative effects of truancy and the importance of regular attendance for the improvement of matriculation results when envisaging appointing truancy officers (Diamond Fields Advertiser, 12 April 2002).

1.3 Statement of the problem

Data on the extent and nature of truancy in schools are often based on information obtained from class registers. This information may be inadequate or almost incomplete and limits the understanding of the phenomenon, thus making it difficult to develop appropriate intervention strategies. More insight on how truancy manifests is needed to provide a base on which to suggest, plan and develop effective intervention strategies. Therefore, further research is needed to enable education officials, schools, parents and other professionals to manage learners with attendance difficulties more efficiently. This study serves to bridge the information gap regarding the **nature of truancy** and to provide a picture of **the life world of truants in secondary schools**.

1.4 Aims of the research

1.4.1 General aim

The aim of the research is to describe truancy in general, as stated in the literature, and to conduct an empirical study in order to determine how truancy behaviour manifests in secondary schools and what the life world of truants looks like. The findings can then be used to inform and guide future practice.

1.4.2 Specific aim

The specific aim of the study is to gather information that will be used to guide the whole school community, educational psychologists, social workers and other stakeholders in terms of the relevant interventional approaches and procedures that can be used for reducing truancy.

In order to realise the above aims, the following questions are set to direct the research:

- What are the extent and degree of truancy in terms of the frequency and number of learners involved?
- What is the pattern, type or nature of truancy?
- Which are the factors contributing to truancy (i.e. predisposing and perpetuating factors)?
- Which learners are more likely to play truant?
- Where do truants go when not at school or in class?
- What measures are used to monitor and manage truancy?

1.5 Research method

The study will comprise two methods, namely, a literature study and an empirical investigation. A study of the literature will derive information on studies about poor school attendance and procedures employed to manage or reduce truancy from books, research articles, journals and other resources.

A quantitative research design will be used in the empirical investigation. This investigation aims to gather data by means of a questionnaire that will be given to all learners in Grade 10 in three randomly selected secondary schools.

1.6 Demarcation of research

Due to financial and time constraints, the present research is confined to the secondary schools in Francis Baard, one of the four districts of the Northern Cape Education Department. This district is located towards the south of the Northern Cape Province. All schools are situated in Kimberley, the province's capital city. A list of all secondary schools was compiled to allow for the random selection of three schools, which form part of this study. This sample was mainly chosen on the basis of cost implications and accessibility.

1.7 Explanation of concepts

In this section, a number of concepts that are relevant to this research are defined.

1.7.1 Truancy

Reids (1999:1) asserts that the term "truancy" is often misused and can be applied both generically and with a local meaning. In the different parts of Great Britain, truancy is known as "dodging", "skipping off", "mitching", "skiving", "bunking-off", and "going missing", respectively. Whitney (1994:49) defines truancy as "absence that has not been authorised by the school and where leave has not been given or approved". Another definition is provided by Collins (1998:2), who states that truancy is about pupils who have been registered with a school but identified as not attending school when the law says they should. This definition includes absences from a particular lesson or lessons, known as "post-registration truancy" (Gabbs, 1994:5; Stoll, 1990:23).

The concept **blanket truancy** refers to absence from the whole school day, which is usually reflected on the class register, while **post-registration truancy** occurs when the learner is marked present but fails to turn up at a lesson or lessons (Stoll, 1990:23).

In this research, the term "truancy" is broadly defined as unauthorised absence from school. The definition is adopted with the assumption that absence with the knowledge and permission of the school and parents or guardian does not constitute truancy. Since the study seeks to explore the type of truancy as manifested at secondary schools, both concepts of truancy (blanket and post-registration) are relevant and will be investigated.

1.7.2 A truant

A truant is a "child aged 6 – 17 years old who absents himself or herself from school without a legitimate reason and without permission of his or her parents or the school official" (Schaefer and Millman, 1981:335). This definition is accepted, although with a slight modification in order to accommodate some secondary-school learners in South

Africa whose age ranges may be above 17 years. For the purpose of this research, a truant refers to a learner who, after being registered at a school, absents himself or herself from school or lessons without a legitimate reason or permission from parents or the school official.

1.7.3 Secondary school

A school that admits or registers and educate learners in Grades 8 – 12 (i.e. the old Standards 5 – 10) is known as a secondary school.

1.7.4 Life world

In this research, the term "life world" refers to the psychological context that is made up of elements such as interpersonal aspects, the family, school and the broader community. According to this definition, the life world involves the personal and external world of the learner. The personal world refers to intrinsic factors. The external world is made up of the broader educational systems, the home environment and the community where the child spends his time when not at school. Relevant intervention strategies would be easier to suggest if the contextual issues related to the phenomenon under investigation are understood.

1.8 Research programme

The research comprises five chapters, as follows:

CHAPTER 1

In this chapter, the background information on the seriousness and implications of truancy are discussed. The chapter also includes an analysis of the problem, the problem statement, aims of the study, description of the research method, demarcation of the study and definition of the concepts.

CHAPTER 2

Chapter 2 entails a review of the literature on types of truancy and the causes of truancy or contributing factors in different countries, including South Africa. Different approaches that the various countries and schools use to manage truancy will also be discussed.

CHAPTER 3

This chapter deals with research designs and methods. A discussion of the research problem, the aim of the empirical investigation, the research tools used in the study and the selection of the sample will be included. Details of the compilation and administration of questionnaires as well as an analysis of data will be presented.

CHAPTER 4

In this chapter, the results of questionnaires will be presented. The results will be analysed to find answers to the research questions.

CHAPTER 5

The chapter entails a summary of the research findings, conclusions and recommendations. A summary of the results from the literature study and the limitations of the study will be included.

1.9 Conclusion

This chapter focuses on the background and analysis of the problem, as well as the aims of the study. An attempt will be made to explain the research method used, the demarcation of the study, relevant concepts and planned programmes of the research.

The next chapter will contain the review of the literature on the types of truancy, factors contributing to truancy behaviour, the rate and extent of truancy and the strategies used to manage truancy.

CHAPTER 2: TYPES OF TRUANCY, CAUSAL FACTORS AND APPROACHES USED IN THE MANAGEMENT AND REDUCTION OF TRUANCY

2.1 Introduction

According to Tyerman (1958:217), truancy has been a problem to all concerned with education since the 1870s. Approximately 750 children were charged for truancy in England and Wales in 1954 (*ibid*: 220). This figure could have been an underestimation as it was based on learners who were referred to courts, and therefore represented mainly incorrigible truants (*ibid*). Furthermore, the figure gives a general picture of truanting children in one country only, and without an indication whether it was absence from certain lessons or whole school day absence. Truancy is currently a problem in most communities. In the document on monitoring the transition to democracy in South Africa, concern was expressed about truancy among school children in the townships (United Nations Economic and Social Council, Commission on Human Rights, 1996).

The extent and nature of truancy are best understood in terms of whether it implies absence for the whole day or during a particular lesson. This chapter deals with how blanket and post-registration truancy manifest, the causal factors and various measures of reducing truancy in secondary schools.

2.2. Blanket truancy

2.2.1 Perspectives in various countries

England and Wales

Norman (2001:49) states that 50 000 children play truant on a normal school day in England. The number of truants increases steadily with age and most truants are found at secondary schools (*ibid*). This confirms past research findings about the existence of truancy in secondary schools in some parts of England. Gray and Jesson (1990:25) gathered information on the incidence of truancy from the youth cohort survey of

England and Wales. The result of their survey shows that 6% of final-year secondary school learners reported to have played truant for several days or weeks at a time. Malcolm, Wilson, Davidson and Kirk (2003:50) state as follows: "In 1999, the Audit Commission noted that at least 40 000 of the 400 000 learners absent from school are truanting".

According to Smith, M. (1996:235), schools in Hertfordshire experience truancy, although at varying levels. This suggests that we need to look at particular schools and not rely on the overall figures, which are often reflected on the quarterly returns, if we want to know more about the phenomenon of truancy.

Scotland

In a study done at 50 Scottish secondary schools, it was found that 30% to 33% of learners had been playing truant at least once in the survey week (Munn and Johnston, 1992: 38). These schools were requested to provide both the overall attendance rate and the numbers of learners (*ibid*).

Australia

Haddon (1996:110), citing a comprehensive study conducted in Victorian secondary schools in Australia, states that 40% to 60% of learners of compulsory school age reported that they engaged in truancy. Cohen and Ryan (1998:12) state that about 10 000 learners in Tasmania play truant at least one day a week.

The Netherlands

The research done at 36 schools in four Dutch cities indicates that the average level of truancy at all schools was 4.4% (Bos, Ruiters and Visscher, 1992:393). The average percentage of allowed absence was 4.7%, therefore suggesting that learners in most schools are just as often absent with a valid reason as without one.

United States of America

It appears that truancy is a problem in American schools, although at varying levels. According to Black (1996:33), approximately 2 500 and 4 000 learners play truant on a daily basis in Pittsburgh and Milwaukee, respectively, while 300 000 of the 1.6 million students in Los Angeles are habitual truants. This shows that some learners stay absent without permission every day and that a day never goes by with a recording of 100% attendance. Truancy is so much of a concern that the Department of Education has prepared a manual that gives schools some guidelines on how to reduce it (United States Department of Education, 1996).

South Africa

Many of the research studies on truancy in South Africa seem to be focused on whole school-day absence. Another feature of the research is that there is no mention of the exact national figures of truanting learners. The most recent studies were conducted during 1992 and 1997. The sample used for the research was collected from schools that comprised black learners. Masithela (1992:2-5) conducted his study on truancy at the time of political turmoil when a culture of learning and teaching was almost non-existent in the black schools in some urban areas of South Africa. According to Masithela (1992:32), late coming and leaving before the end of the school day were commonly observed tendencies.

In a study conducted by Mashiane (1997:49), 47% of the 1 194 learners that responded to the questionnaires were truants. He also found that there were more truants in Grade 11 than in Grade 10. Earlier research findings confirm that truancy has long been a common feature at schools in South Africa (Nel, 1975:97; Smith, P.A, 1996:17). The truants studied by Smith were learners at an industrial school, whose placement was based on their demonstration of compulsive truancy. All studies reported that there was generally a high rate of absenteeism. It is therefore apparent that some learners play truant, but there is no mention of the extent of post-registration truancy.

There is an indication that learners play truant in many communities. Innumerable cases of truants can go undetected because some are likely to be absent on the day of data collection. In a research conducted in South Africa, Brown (1998: 298) reports that 38% of adolescents in a higher socio-economic community admitted having been involved in occasional truancy, while 6% of the learners studied said they played truant frequently. Educators indicate that truancy remains a great problem (Du Toit: Personal communication, 10 September 2003; Du Plessis: Personal communication, 9 September 2003).

2.2.2 The rate of truancy in terms of gender

Some of the overseas researchers state that there is no difference in the levels of truancy reported for males and females (Gray and Jesson, 1990:26; Haddon, 1996:110; Smith, M., 1996:226; Stoll, 1994:36; Whitney, 1994:59). Recent research on truancy in the seven local education authorities reports that the number of learners in secondary schools admitting truancy was almost equal for boys and girls (Malcolm et al., 2003:31). Coldman (1995:68) also states that the variation that exists in truancy levels of males and females is slight. It is, therefore, apparent that some researchers are in agreement with regard to the truancy levels of male and female learners.

Earlier research that was conducted in South Africa suggests that more males than females tend to play truant (Malan, 1972:144; Van Niekerk, 1969:7). These research findings are inconsistent with available recent research in some of the secondary schools in South Africa where no significant difference was found between male and female truants (Mashiane, 1997:49).

Coldman (1995:68) warns against making assumptions and generalisations about the existence of gender difference in truancy levels. He argues that observed findings might result from the fact that some schools have more males than females, particularly when one is dealing with a large sample.

What the above studies suggest about truancy levels of males and females is that the difference might be slight, if it does exist. Furthermore, observed differences may be influenced by other variables, such as the enrolled number of male and female learners in a sample.

2.2.3 Truancy rate according to the geographical location of the school

Serious truancy is said to be more prevalent in inner-city secondary schools in England (Gray and Jesson, 1990:26; Stoll, 1990:23). Munn and Johnstone (1992:4) also found that the Scottish schools with the highest percentage of unauthorised absence were all in the inner city.

Coldman (1995:69) asserts that claims that truancy is a problem mainly experienced in inner-city schools are disputable, since another survey showed that the truancy level is high even in the suburban, rural and industrial areas of England. It may therefore be purely speculation, without much supporting evidence, to suggest that inner-city schools experience higher levels of truancy. Hard evidence needs to be gathered, where possible, in order to verify the claim that inner-city schools experience higher rates of truancy.

According to some researchers, truancy levels also appear to differ from school to school, since they may be more prevalent in some schools than in others (Black, 1996:33; Bos et al., 1992:385; Gray and Jesson, 1990:26; O'Keefe and Stoll, 1995:12). It is therefore apparent that the levels of truancy seem to vary from country to country, and, in some cases, also in terms of geographical locations within a city or town.

The literature indicates that blanket truancy is common in many secondary schools and that, in some cases, learners play truant on a daily basis. The levels of blanket truancy can also vary according to regional locations within the same country. In the next section, the evidence regarding the level of post-registration truancy drawn from the literature will be discussed.

2.3 Post-registration truancy

Very little information is given in the literature about national trends of post-registration truancy in countries where research on truancy was conducted. Most of the studies conducted in the United Kingdom, Australia, the United States and some parts of Europe mainly appear to be either school-based or done on a small scale.

2.3.1 The extent of post-registration truancy

Gray and Jesson (1990:26) report that about 10% of the final-year secondary school learners in England admitted that they played truant during particular lessons. On the other hand, 6% of the learners were involved in blanket truancy, meaning that the rate of post-registration truancy was higher. Stoll (1990:23) conducted research at nine secondary schools and found that the rate of post-registration truancy was high at one the schools.

Smith, M. (1996:228) also found that the post-registration truancy figure was high in the 12 Hertfordshire schools that took part in the research, even though attendance levels appeared to be good. According to Stokes and Walton (1999:88), 20% of the 1 379 learners in Grades 9 to 11 at five schools in Leeds admitted that they engaged in post-registration truancy.

2.3.2 When are learners likely to stay away from lessons?

According to Coldman (1995:31), about 15% of all truants go absent after registration and those learners do not all miss the same lessons. Kilpatrick (1998:31) found that the absence rate increased rapidly during the day and was highest during the afternoon. It is therefore apparent that learners are more likely to leave after being marked present in the register, and to skip some of the afternoon lessons. This research shows that learners may attend all morning lessons but decide not to return to class after recess.

2.3.3 How often do learners engage in post-registration truancy?

Coldman (1995:31) asserts that truants "bunk" lessons several times per week. Most learners commonly use the term "bunk" when they refer to playing truant. At times, the word "skipping" is used instead when learners are absent from school or lessons without permission (see section 1.7.1, par. 1). Learners can therefore "bunk" certain lessons more than once per week. Some learners can be classified as occasional truants in the sense that they "bunk" class about once every two weeks or choose a different class each time Kilpatrick (1998:31). In research conducted at one school in Tasmania, it was found that a group of learners tended to be "skipping" a single class about once every two weeks, selected a different class each time and would hide in or around the school when absent from that class (*ibid*).

There is also an opinion that truancy could start with a small number of missed lessons and escalate rapidly (Pasternicki, 1993:6). Research done at one secondary school in Australia shows that an improvement in attendance as shown in class registers may be a change to post-registration truancy (Kilpatrick, 1998:33). This means that, if the register does not indicate records of attendance during lessons, learners who engage in post-registration truancy will be marked present as if they were in class for the whole school day. Learners may then come to school on a regular basis, but bunk some lessons without being marked absent. One would then look at the register and think that attendance has improved when it has, in fact, changed to post-registration truancy. What is evident thus far is that post-registration truancy can easily develop into blanket truancy if it is not easily identified and appropriately managed, and that when a register shows marked improvement in attendance it may in fact be indicative of "hidden truancy".

In South Africa, some schools have devised their own ways of recording lesson absence and often conduct "spot checks" in order to manage post-registration truancy (Du Toit: Personal interview, 10 September, 2003; Du Plessis: Personal interview, 9 September, 2003). On the other hand, certain schools rely only on using class registers received from

the Department of Education. However, class attendance registers and return forms make no provision for the collection and reporting of data on post-registration truancy (researcher's observation, 2003).

2.3.4 Which lessons are most learners likely to "bunk"?

There are various ways of determining the lessons most learners are likely to "bunk". Some knowledge of the extent of truancy per subject is derived from research questions which asked learners to state their most favourite and least favourite school subject (Smith, M, 1996:231). Sometimes educators' returns on discrepancies between the daily attendance sheet and actual in-class attendance are used (Kilpatrick, 1998:29). On the other hand, Bos et al. (1992: 383) asked educators to complete a standard form to record the actual as well as the expected number of learners present per subject during lessons and used these data to calculate truancy percentages.

Kilpatrick (1998:30) found no correlation between absence and school subjects at a school in Tasmania. This study therefore gave no indication of the subjects learners avoid by playing truant. According to Bos et al. (1992:390), some of the Dutch learners tend to play truant during lessons which they regard as less difficult or important, but prefer not to miss subjects they find difficult.

Survey results collected from eight schools in London, Liverpool and Manchester between 1985 and 1994 reveal that Mathematics and Science are lessons that are most frequently missed by both male and female learners (Le Riche, 1995:19). In a study conducted by Smith, M. (1996:231), Mathematics was considered the least popular subject and, in fact, ranked first among the most unpopular subjects. Mathematics and English were least favoured by learners in some schools in Leeds (Stokes & Walton, 1999:90).

Recent research conducted in some secondary schools within the London Education Authority (LEA) indicates that learners play truant during certain lessons. However, the

sampled subjects often make no mention of the particular school subjects or lessons missed. For instance, Malcolm et al. (2003:33) state that learners skip lessons, but only gave the following answer by a learner: "Sometimes when I'm at school I go to the first lesson but don't go to the second and third, if it's boring and friends are leading me on at the time". What the above quote suggests is that it may be difficult to determine particular subjects that learners are most likely to skip because learners also succumb to the influence of friends and boredom and may not always skip the same lesson.

Research shows that secondary-school learners in South Africa do engage in truant behaviour occasionally, and sometimes on a regular basis (Brown, 1998:298), although no figures appear to be reported about the real extent of post-registration truancy.

The information cited in this section of the literature review indicates that some secondary-school learners engage in post-registration truancy. It has also been found that post-registration truancy may go undetected or unrecognized, since truants do not all miss the same lessons (Coldman, 1995:31; Stokes & Walton, 1999:90). Post-registration truancy might even be higher than it is assumed to be. The data further show that learners are selective in the sense that they choose to skip some lessons for various reasons, which will be elaborated upon later in the next section.

Given the complexity of the way in which truant behaviour can manifest, it may be reasonable to suggest that attendance rates indicated in a class register should be viewed with caution, particularly when it comes to post-registration absence.

2.4 Do learners engage in both types of truancy?

Some researchers state that post-registration truancy is more common (Coldman, 1995:30; O'Keefe and Stoll, 1995:11; Stokes and Walton 1999:90; Whitney, 1994:59), although many truants engage in both types (Milner and Blyth, 1999:18). According to an earlier study of English secondary schools, 26% of the students admitted to their engagement in post-registration truancy, while 14% said they engaged in both types of

truancy (Stoll, 1995:36). There is therefore an indication that a certain number of learners engage in both types of truancy in some schools.

2.5 Where do learners go when not at school or attending lessons?

In order to understand and manage the phenomenon of truancy better, the authorities need to know where truants spend their time when not attending school or lessons. Learners appear to engage in various activities while truanting. It was found that some watch television at home while not at school (Le Riche, 1995:25), and either remain in the school building or leave the school premises altogether when not attending lessons. According to Stokes and Walton (1999:89), 25% of the learners report that they went to their own homes or friends' homes, while 45% kept their destinations secret by choosing the "other" category. Given the figures mentioned above, it is possible that more learners spend time in homes watching television than assumed; some go to local shops or town' while others engage in activities they will not easily disclose.

Research information collected from a group of schools indicates the existence of various types of truancy. Perhaps it would be possible to get some objective information about the destinations of truants from other classmates or friends instead of posing direct questions to those who admit to have played truant. It is evident that explaining the nature of truant behaviour is a complex exercise, particularly when it comes to post-registration absence.

What can be said about the phenomenon of truancy with reference to the literature is that learners can miss the whole school day or certain lessons and classes, or both. Further, skipping the whole school day or class could be "occasional", thus concealing the extent of the problem. The extent of both blanket and post-registration truancy is further hidden when class registration is inappropriately done and when period or lesson attendance records are not kept.

2.6 Perspectives on factors that contribute to truancy

Many perspectives on factors that make learners play truant are based on images and certain assumptions researchers have about the learner. Carlen, Gleeson and Wardhaugh (1992:85) identified four of those perspectives. Each of them focuses on some researchers' theories about the main cause of truancy, as discussed in the section below.

2.6.1 Personality aspects

According to this perspective, truancy relates to variously identified personality aspects of the learner (Carlen et al., 1992:85). Personality is defined as the individual's psychological, physical and spiritual characteristics that determine his behaviour in contexts in which he finds himself (Meyer and Viljoen, 2003:11). Therefore, the contributing causes of truancy are intrinsic and located within the learner. Some of the personal attributes of truanting learners that have been identified in the literature are the following:

2.6.1.1 Anxiety and fear

In a South African study aimed at predicting truancy, Nel (1975:125) found that truants tend to be more anxious, and experience more stress related to frustration than non-truants. It appears that this study is consistent with research finding where High School Personality Questions (HSPQ) test results revealed that truants are more sensitive and emotionally less stable than non-truants (Malan, 1972:147). This further confirms earlier research conducted among truants in England, which showed that truants tend to be insecure and anxious (Tyerman, 1958:223).

The concept of anxiety is often associated with psychoanalytical theory. According to the psychoanalytical theory of Freud, reality anxiety is fear about the actual dangers in the environment (Meyer and Viljoen, 2003:61). In terms of this theory, truancy can be regarded as a response that a learner adopts in an effort to avoid a potentially anxiety-provoking situation or event. A learner's fear of a threatening situation at school makes him play truant. Truancy is therefore a flight response or defense mechanism. According

to Gillis (1992:13), young people tend to use defense mechanisms when dealing with awkward situations, some of which are discussed in the next sections.

2.6.1.2 Poor social skills

Poor social skills and a lack of confidence are also factors that contribute to truancy (Edward and Malcolm 2001:2). Lewis (1995: 37) asserts that boredom, isolation and lack of friends may be pull factors that pull a learner off school. As stated in the previous chapter, pull factors are personal aspects within the learner, which may include shyness, a tendency to become easily distracted or bored, and perhaps an inability to make friends. It appears that an inability to cope with the demands of making friends triggers a strong impulse to escape from the anxiety-provoking situation, thus leading to truancy. This means that some learners respond to a socially challenging or emotionally threatening situation at school by playing truant.

2.6.1.3 Low self-esteem

Research indicates that certain personality traits, including lower levels of self-esteem, make some learners more prone to absenteeism than their peers Reids (2002:11). However, research conducted by Sommer and Nigel (1991:389) failed to show a link between truancy and low self-esteem and to some extent confirmed results obtained earlier in South Africa, where truants studied by Malan (1972:147) tended to be more assertive and dominant than the population.

2.6.1.4 Anti-social behaviour

Truancy is mentioned as one of the behaviours that are associated with conduct disorder (Sue, Sue and Sue, 1997:482). Conduct disorder is a diagnostic label used to describe children and adolescents who display a persistent and repetitive pattern of antisocial behaviours that violate the right of others (*ibid*). Antisocial behaviours that an individual with conduct disorder displays include defying authorities, lying, fighting, cruelty to animals and people, as well as truant behaviour. Reid (1999:77) asserts that research shows that feelings of alienation from school and higher levels of anti-social behaviour are some of the characteristics displayed by many truants. This suggests that anti-social

behaviours make some learners more vulnerable to social alienation, in that an individual is likely to be rejected if his behaviour is socially inappropriate, and if he is disruptive. Therefore, a well-behaved learner can easily make friends and suffer little isolation, and is more likely to cope with the stresses of schooling. The inability to cope with stresses of schooling, personality problems and social isolation are some of the factors that are identified as driving learners to play truant (Bimler and Kirkland, 2001:91).

2.6.1.5 Scholastic failure

Truants tend to perform poorly in examinations. Gray and Jesson (1990:26) state that, in England, secondary-school learners who admitted that they have once engaged in serious levels of truancy were likely to report low levels of exam performance. According to research conducted earlier in South Africa, about 30.7% of truants failed the final Grade 8 examination, compared to 11% of the population (Malan, 1972:144). A recent study conducted in some secondary schools in South Africa reveals that more truants than learners who are not truants failed three times or more (Mashiane, 1997:58). That is, learners who play truant are more likely to have repeated a certain grade at school. This study suggests that truants are mostly learners who are likely to fail their exams and be retained in a grade. Van Petegem (1994:278) asserts that poor school results often precede obstinate truancy even though research evidence suggests that there is no direct relationship between intelligence and truancy.

2.6.1.6 Learning problems

Reid (2002:12) reports that regular non-attendees are found among learners whose numeracy and literacy scores are two or more years behind their peers in primary school.

According to Le Ritchie (1988:78), a lack of academic success creates a sense of frustration and a constant fear of failure. It appears that learners who experience difficulty with schoolwork often play truant in an attempt to evade frustration. In some cases, learners may have begun to experience difficulty with schoolwork while still at primary school. An inability to cope with academic expectations and demands can contribute to truancy in secondary schools.

Truancy appears to be a response to frustration and anxiety associated with difficult lessons. In many instances, lesson difficulty contributes more to post-registration truancy than blanket truancy (Hallam and Roaf, 1995:18; Kilpatrick, 1998:30). According to Smith, M. (1996:229), 80% of learners in a study conducted at twelve secondary schools in Hertfordshire stated that lesson difficulty was the major reason for post-registration truancy.

Truancy is linked to a lower level of academic self-concept, since these learners tend to perceive themselves as having less ability than their peers (Reid, 1999:77). On the other hand, disaffected learners who were also truants attributed their success and failure to relative effort instead of ability (Solomon and Rogers, 2001:339). These learners further attributed their failure or success at school to the effectiveness of their learning strategies. It is important not to generalise the findings cited above, as the authors also state that "an individual has a sense of self-efficacy in relation to particular activities and particular goals in specific context" (*ibid*: 348). That means that, in cases where the learning environment is perceived to be supportive and conducive, learners will be more likely to attribute their failure to lack of effort from their side.

Van Petegem (1994:278) cautions us against indiscriminately regarding poor self-concept as contributing to truancy by stating that "pupils playing truant have a negative self-image only with regard to the school and as far as the school is considered as important". It is therefore mainly in cases where learners regard schooling or education as less important and when their academic self-concept becomes negative as a result of poor scholastic achievement that truancy is likely to occur.

Poor academic performance displayed by the majority of truants needs to be attended to in order to avoid eventual dropout. Wells (1990:4) cites research findings that support the view that low achievement score, scholastic failure and class repeating are factors that lead to school dropout. It appears that some learners become disillusioned with school when they cannot cope with the work or succeed. These learners either become disruptive

in class or play truant. A sense of frustration resulting from inability and poor achievement could even trigger sympathy from those learners who are relatively able. The following quote cited in Reid (2002:15) provides an example of how learners are likely to respond to poor scholastic performance:

"I feel sorry for truants. It must be awful being so dull that you can't read or write and are afraid of coming to school in case a teacher sees you".

2.6.1.7 Cognitive style

It is not enough to assume that learners have difficulty with schoolwork and play truant as a result, without investigating how they learn and process information. Research information on cognitive style provides us with insight into how some truants learn.

Cognitive style is defined as a consistent and typical manner in which an individual organises and processes information (Riding and Read, 1996:81). There are two basic dimensions of cognitive style, namely the Wholistic-Analytical style, which indicates an individual's preference for processing information either as a whole or in parts, and the Verbal-Imagery style, which shows a tendency to represent information during thinking either verbally or in mental images (Rayner and Riding, 1996:447). Rayner and Riding (1996:447) conducted research on learners who have a condition that is known as school refusal. Learners who have such a condition refuse to attend school but stay at home when not in school, complain about headaches, stomach pains or nausea and show signs of anxiety and depression (Egger, Costello and Angold, 2003:1). In addition, such children tend to be compliant and well behaved, and, unlike truants, they stay at home with the parents' knowledge. Some children tend to display characteristics of both school refusal and truancy (Egger et al., 2003:1).

Rayner and Riding (1996:447) undertook a study on learners with school refusal and found that they also have a well-established history of truancy. The study revealed that these learners tend to process information holistically (*ibid*:449). This research therefore indicates that the cognitive styles of many truants tend to differ from those of learners

who are not truants. Furthermore, an implication of the study is that if educators fail to accommodate the different cognitive styles in their teaching, escapist behaviour in the form of truancy is likely to occur.

2.6.1.8 Poor habits arising from initially legitimate reasons

In some instances, a learner stays away from school as a result of poor health or a need to look after a sick family member. This pattern of absence may be common in the current era of the HIV/AIDS epidemic where a learner's initial absence is legitimate and may not be considered as truancy. However, such absence may lead to the generation of a pattern of non-attendance that is unacceptable, particularly if it is unauthorised.

The effect of HIV/AIDS is evident in some parts of our country. During a follow-up visit by the education officer to the home of two siblings who were persistent absentees and typical cases of learners indirectly affected by the pandemic at one primary school, another five learners were found truanting and claimed that they were experiencing problems at home (Nodoba: Personal communication, 11 September, 2003). The initial absence of the two siblings might have been authorised on the grounds of being justifiable, but later developed into absenteeism, which is actually truancy and which subsequently became "contagious".

The above single case of particular absentees has implications for our understanding of the phenomenon of truancy. Firstly, official absence may lead to a habitual pattern of absenteeism that can turn into truancy. Thus, a long period of absence needs to be followed up and monitored. Secondly, the initial reason that a learner gives for asking permission for absence may be legitimate, but this does not mean that the learner's continual absence is for the same reason. Furthermore, absenteeism that is initially official may later turn out to be unjustifiable and officially unrecognized, thus qualifying the learner's absence to be categorised as truancy. Therefore, learners must be made aware of circumstances under which absence is officially allowed or excused and of their responsibility with regard to notifying the school about personal problems and other concerns.

2.6.2 School factors

There is a theory that proposes that truancy is caused by various aspects of the school (Carlen et al., 1992:86). This theory explains truancy as a response to an inadequate education system. It appears that this theory is based on the perception that the schools and the education system in general are lacking, and thus force some learners to reject the very education that is thought to give them a better future. Proponents and supporters of this perspective would therefore argue that what is happening in the schools and the education system in general is what actually makes learners become truants.

Inadequacies could be those located in the physical environment, the school climate – in terms of the learning and teaching atmosphere – and the curriculum, if it is seen as being irrelevant and not accommodating diversity. The perceived inadequacies in the school might alienate some learners and thus make them feel excluded and become truants.

It is also possible that some learners may have certain attitudes towards aspects of the school such as the buildings, particular subjects and educators. Learners may also perceive their value system as contradictory to the values espoused by the national curriculum and thus find that curriculum irrelevant. These contradicting values and attitudes towards the school can create a sense of disaffection that manifests in the form of truancy in some learners.

The various factors within the school that most researchers have identified as contributing to truancy are discussed in the next section.

2.6.2.1. Dilapidated school buildings and poor facilities

In an attempt to find ways of combating truancy, Reid (1999:224-225) looked at evidence of research into effective schools and found that, among other factors, school buildings that are clean and well cared for are likely to make learners feel welcome. Attractive school buildings and a good atmosphere seem to create a sense of pride and belonging in learners. Hallam and Roaf (1995:16) state that an unattractive school environment, which is characterised by poor toilet facilities, a lack of proper ventilation and heating and dilapidated buildings is unlikely to encourage school attendance.

In a school-based action research on truancy, learners reported that they played truant because of anxiety caused by inadequate facilities such as toilets, changing and storage places (Pasternicki, 1995:3).

An unattractive school environment caused by poverty and violence in some communities may lead to apathy and subsequently contribute to a higher rate of truancy. In neighbourhoods where the rate of violence is high, schools are likely to be vandalised and have broken windows and fences. Sometimes windows are broken accidentally, while people may also steal some of the building materials and fences. Leventhal and Brook-Gunn (2000:320) cite research studies that indicate that higher rates of residential instability are associated with adolescent juvenile delinquency, property crime and other behavioural problems, including truancy.

2.6.2.2 School size

According to Cohen and Ryan (1998:2), school size tends to affect the rate of truancy negatively, in that data collected from Tasmania (Australia) show that larger schools have higher rates of absenteeism. Further, a study of 175 rural high schools in the USA shows that larger schools tend to have high rates of truancy and misbehaviour (*ibid*). School size is likely to affect the school by making it difficult to control disruptive behaviour, particularly when there are more learners than the educators can manage.

2.6.2.3 Movement between classes during lesson changes

In many instances, learners are expected to move between blocks of buildings to attend different lessons. This practice is common in subjects that involve practical work, for example, when learners have to go to a science laboratory. According to Hallam and Roaf (1995:16), walking long distances between the different classrooms during lesson changes may provide opportunities for skipping lessons.

2.6.2.4 Classroom management

Another aspect that affects regular attendance during lessons is classroom management and the way in which attendance is monitored. Administrative inefficiency in terms of registration and poor classroom management can contribute to lesson skipping (Haddon, 1996:110; Lewis, 1995:38; Pastenicki, 1995:3; Reynolds et.al., 1980:91). Classroom management requires a great deal of dedication and commitment from both the learners and the educator.

Ayers and Grey (1998:7) state that class and group dynamics and the interaction between learners and educators have an effect on classroom management. Classes may be composed of learners with different personalities and characteristics, including those who are difficult to control and therefore likely to corrupt or disrupt others. Disruptive learners are often those manifesting behavioural problems, such as frequent fighting, lying, carrying or using a weapon, and truancy (*ibid*:54). Educators may find it difficult to manage classrooms with learners who display disruptive behaviour and other behavioural difficulties.

Schools need to ensure that classrooms are organised and managed well in order to prevent learners from losing interest and resorting to truancy. Coldman (1995:29) states that it is in badly organised classrooms that it is easy for learners to be marked present at the beginning of the lesson but to skip the remaining part of the lesson. He also points out

that about 15% of the truants go absent upon registration and that the learners will not all miss the same lessons. Chaotic movements during the lesson and inconsistent enforcement of the code of conduct are some characteristics of badly managed classrooms. These are therefore tendencies that need to be avoided, since they encourage truancy and can also impact negatively on the efficiency of registration. The following comments by a learner when asked to suggest ways of improving attendance show the role played by classroom management:

- Behaviour of teachers: "talk to pupils rather than tell them off"
"The teacher could be a lot calmer"
"In some lessons the teacher forgets to take a register"

(Smith, M., 1996: 233)

2.6.2.5 Bullying

Bullying is defined as the behaviour that occurs when one or more individuals repeatedly inflict physical, emotional or verbal abuse on another (Fried and Fried, 2003:23). Physical abuse involves actions such as fighting, throwing an object at someone or taking someone's money or lunch; verbal abuse may include name-calling, or an intimidating text message sent by mobile phone; emotional bullying may involve pointing, laughing at or socially isolating another child. Sexual bullying is also said to occur between male and female or can be male-to-male, but also female-to-female, for example, ridiculing a girl whose breasts jiggle when she runs (*ibid*:63).

Insight into the phenomenon of bullying is important, not only due to its effect on the lives of victims, but also its effect on bullies. Research found that bullies engage in academic misconducts that include cheating and skipping school, while victims have higher rates of absenteeism (Dake, Price and Telljohann, 2003:174). It is also important to mention that learners who are both victims and bullies are most likely to play truant (Dake et al., 175).

Given the fact that both the victim and the bully are likely to have behavioural problems that include truancy, it may be necessary to look briefly at the predisposing factors within a learner, as reviewed in the literature. Dake et al. (2003:174) suggest that certain psychological and social aspects of some learners tend to make them prone to bullying. Psychological factors identified in both victims and bullies include symptoms of depression, anxiety and suicidal ideation (*ibid*:175). Harsh home or family environments such as less-responsive and less-supportive parents are some of the social aspects that are also linked to bullying behavior. The likelihood of becoming a bully tends to decrease in an environment where an open parent-child communication and a positive adult role-model exist in the lives of children (*ibid*:176). Violence and other abusive behaviours displayed by adults in the family tend to predispose some learners to bullying through a process of modelling. It is apparent that situations where bullying occurs tend to create an environment that is conducive to the development of truant behaviour.

2.6.2.6 Educator-learner relationship

As it was stated earlier, learners tend to play truant due to lesson difficulties or a dislike of certain lessons. Negative attitudes displayed by some educators may drive certain learners out of the school. Researchers found that insults and humiliating remarks by educators lead to school non-attendance (Black, 1996:36; Edward and Malcolm, 2002:2; Porteus et al., 2000:11; Smith, P.A, 1996:54). What these authors reveal is that both blanket and post-registration truancy occur because some learners avoid certain teachers. In a study of 14 secondary schools in seven local education authorities (LEAs) in various parts of England, 16 learners attributed their truancy to problems with teachers (Malcom et al., 2003:33). It is therefore possible that in instances where learners feel humiliated, the school environment might be perceived to be hostile. A hostile school environment, therefore, produces flight responses in the form of truancy in some learners.

When learners show a tendency of disliking a lesson, it might be that that particular educator responds negatively to those learners. This leads to poor relationships between the two parties. This poor educator-learner relationship can also occur as a result of what

is regarded as intentionally disinventing practice. According to Mashiane (1997:17), an educator functions at the level of intentionally disinventing when he or she goes out of his or her way to send messages that destroy a learner. Learners may find such educators, and subsequently the school, repulsive and may become truants (*ibid*:74). Another practice that contributes to truancy is shouting at learners in class (Black, 1996:36; Seerane, 1997:89) and in some instances the negative remarks may even appear in the learners' books (Porteus et al., 2000:11).

Black (1996:36) also indicates that derogatory remarks may lead to truancy and eventually encourage school dropout, particularly if the initial causes of occasional absenteeism are not investigated. Further, lack of follow-up on cases of truancy seems to perpetuate the problem.

2.6.2.7 Teaching or instructional approach

The contribution an educator makes in perpetuating or causing truancy is not only related to how he or she treats or relates to learners. The educator's instructional approach and his or her feelings towards his or her work may be one of the factors that cause some learners to play truant. An enthusiastic educator instills enthusiasm and motivation in learners. On the other hand, a demoralised educator who shows little interest in his or her work discourages learners. Furthermore, the educator's attitude towards his or her work could either be negative or positive, is contagious and often affects the learners (Donald, Lazarus and Lolwana, 1997:115). Enthusiastic educators may be perceived to have positive attitude towards their work and are more likely to be keen to vary their instructional approaches. With regard to cognitive style, described by Rayner and Riding (1996:447) and cited earlier in this chapter, a teaching style which is restricted to one approach tends to exclude some learners. It is possibly difficult for some learners, particularly the low-ability groups, to compensate, which results in a likelihood of resorting to truancy. Van Petegam (1994:276) acknowledges the effect of teaching style by stating that incongruence between teachers' approach and what the learners are

interested in leads to a decline in motivation, and consequently, a tendency towards truancy.

Cullingford (1999:65) asserts that truanting learners find school work "boring" due to the teaching and learning styles that are practised in large classes. The chances of using a variety of instructional approaches and attending to special educational needs are minimal when classes are large. It is in large classes that truants tend to feel neglected (*ibid*).

According to Coldman (1995:33), research shows that 36% of truants state that lessons they bunk are of no relevance to their lives. Learners blame the school for their absence (Whitney, 1994:59), since the highest percentage of truants state that lessons are irrelevant. It is also apparent that when educators lack empathy and are intolerant or unable to accommodate differences in the levels of academic attainments, lower achievers are likely to play truant and eventually drop out of school. Inflexible approaches to teaching and inconsistent management of behaviour provide opportunities for learners to play truant. In actual fact, what is discussed in this subsection is indicative of some of the systematic factors that contribute to truancy in secondary schools. In a classroom environment where educators react negatively to low achieving learners or have the same expectations of all learners, those learners who cannot meet the expectations may feel rejected or less valued and consequently play truant.

2.6.3 Family and other social factors

This perspective explains causal factors in terms of various identified features of truants' families and of communities of which known truants were presumed to be members (Carlen et al., 1992:86). The following family variables were found amongst truants:

2.6.3.1 Socio-economic status of parents

Research conducted in South Africa shows that some family circumstances are factors that contribute to higher rates of truancy (Malan, 1972:14; Nhlapo, 1997: 95). It was recently found that truants tend to come from larger families where parents have a lower level of education and pursue lower socio-economic occupations (Fox, 2000; Nhlapo, 1997:93; Porteus et al., 2000:10).

The research findings cited above are consistent with some of the studies conducted abroad. For instance, Pitchard, Cotton and Cox (1992:5) found that more truant's fathers (15%) were unemployed than non-truants' fathers (9%). Overseas researchers indicate that truants predominantly come from poor families living in overcrowded houses and economically deprived families (Cohen and Ryan, 1998:2; Edward and Malcom, 2002:2; Gabb, 1994:3; Le Ritche, 1988:78; Reid, 1999:92; Tyerman, 1958:222).

Despite the link several researchers found between truancy and poor socio-economic circumstances of the family, Collins (1998:2), warns that truants should not be seen as coming from a particular social class. South African research conducted by Brown (1998: 298) also suggests that truancy is one of the behavioural problems found amongst adolescents in higher socio-economic communities.

2.6.3.2 Marital status of parents

Another family variable that has been found to contribute to truancy is unstable family relationships, which include, divorce, parental separation and marital conflicts (Bell, Rosen and Dynlacht, 1994:204; Haddon, 1996:109; Hallom and Roaf, 1995:14; Smith, P.A., 1996:53). When the relationship between parents breaks down, there is a likelihood that children will live with one parent or in an extended family structure. Hence, it was found that few truants are living with at least one biological parent (Nhlapo, 1997:93).

The recent increasing trend towards one-parent families also manifests as the result of other factors, such as death, teenage pregnancy or single parenthood by choice (Reid, 1999:299). Given that some deaths may be linked to HIV/AIDS-related diseases, the number of one-parent and "absent-parent" families is more likely to increase. As the number of single-parent families increases so does the number of children with problem behaviour, including disruptive truants (*ibid*).

Wilcox (2003:59) emphasises the link between non-involvement in single parenting and misbehaviour, and also elaborates further on the aspect by discussing the process she regards as "parental monitoring". What this means is that, in single-parent families, monitoring and supervision become burdensome or the parent tends to lack the ability to monitor and supervise children. This does not suggest that single parents are unable to play their supervisory role, but implies that it could be easier if both parents take part in the monitoring process.

2.6.3.3 Poor parental involvement and supervision

Parental involvement is an intentional act whereby a parent makes an effort to relate and interact with the child. Parental involvement includes monitoring and helping with homework, attending school conferences and functions and providing a supportive learning environment (Crawage, 1992:37). When parents experience problems in their own lives that are related to intimate relationships and other external factors, they tend to focus less on their children. This can eventually lead to less involvement or a total lack of interest in the children, and subsequent problem behaviour.

Lack of parental interest, support or involvement in the learner's education is also associated with truancy (Cohen and Ryan, 1998:2; Smith P.A, 1996:53) and many truants receive little or no parental support and encouragement (Reid, 1999:47). Nhlapo (1997:94) found that parents of truants are less interested in their children's schoolwork and encourage competency in children to a lesser extent.

According to Hall (2002:1), learners tend to do better at school and come to class prepared when parents pay attention to their homework and actually ensure that homework is done. Doing schoolwork is likely to be a pleasure to some learners, while for those experiencing academic difficulties it is an unpleasant activity, particularly if parents or guardians are not helpful. Learners who have learning problems are more likely to miss classes in order to avoid getting into trouble with incomplete homework (Malcolm et al., 2003:33).

2.6.3.4 Peer influence

In some instances, truancy starts with peer influence and tobacco smoking (Wilcox, 2003: 68-69). The research conducted by Smith, P.A (1996:59) shows that some truants abused drugs due to peer pressure. According to a study by Khoza (1997: 62), the friends of truants attend school less regularly than those of learners who are not truants. Learners who play truant attend school only to be with friends and tend to hang around less with their peers who like school (Khoza, 1997: 68).

What is cited here is suggestive of the apparent consensus among some researchers that some learners begin to play truant purely to please friends. Such learners might be those with a personality that makes them vulnerable to the pressure of peers.

2.6.3.5 Violence and drug use

We can also try to think of the level at which contributing factors could be addressed by looking at other social problems truanting learners are likely to cause. Masithela (1992:43) found that truancy levels tend to increase when some learners engage in violence, carry weapons and make other learners fear school. It is further reported that gangsters in Mannenberg, a suburb in the Western Cape Province of South Africa, abuse and use truants in drug dealing (Fox, 2000). What this literature study indicates, is that truancy encourages the formation of gangs and can also result from fear of bullies who are gangsters. Therefore, truancy may have an indirect link with violence.

Truants are more likely to be involved in alcohol, tobacco and other drug use; they tend to bond with drug-using peers; and often use drugs while bunking class (Hallfors et al., 2002:206). An earlier study by Piltchard et al. (1992:6) also reveals that truants are significantly more often involved in drug and solvent misuse than non-truants.

The effect of violence on truancy is illustrated in a study that examined the effects of neighbourhoods and family processes on the social and academic performances of adolescents. This study uses the neighbourhood social disorganisation model to explain the neighbourhood characteristics' indirect effect on parenting (Bowen, Bowen and Ware, 2002:470). According to the authors, negative peer behaviour, lack of neighbourhood support, violence and crime are indicative of neighbourhood social disorganisation. Neighbourhood organisation is indicative of the presence of peer and adult role-models, supervision and monitoring. Bowen et al. (2002:472) state that there is research evidence that suggest that parents' ability to use supportive parenting strategies partly depends on the levels of stress and social support experienced in their external environment. Neighbourhood support may include the presence of institutional resources and the informal assistance of other adults who can provide information and feedback on effective parenting strategies that help to regulate adolescent behaviour. The presence of violence, crime and negative peer culture in neighbourhoods can cause emotional stress, which makes parenting tasks more difficult (Bowen et al., 2002:484).

What is indicated here is the suggestion that violence and negative peer culture also indirectly contribute to truancy in terms of creating stress and thereby making parents less able to respond to the emotional needs of their adolescent children.

2.7 Approaches used in the management and reduction of truancy

2.7.1 Personality aspects

2.7.1.1 Tutoring and mentor systems

The previous section of the literature study reveals that truancy, particularly post-registration truancy, is associated with lesson difficulty. When learners experience learning problems it is necessary to provide support that will help to maximise their chances for academic success, thereby reducing the opportunities for playing truant. Cohen and Ryan (1998:3) maintain that learners should be provided with counselling and additional tutoring services as a means of reducing truancy. Academic support can be offered to groups or individual learners. Tutoring is particularly important, since some truants in the study by Malan (1972:145) indicated that they received no assistance and had little time to do their homework at home.

The initiative introduced by the British government includes the Excellence in Cities Programme, which led to the creation of 1 500 learning mentors' posts in Excellence in Cities' secondary school (Reids, 2002:8). Learning mentors are school-based employees who work with educators in supporting learners and providing extra help in order for learners to overcome learning barriers inside and outside school (*ibid*). The initiative cited above is part of the activities of the country's Behaviour Improvement Programme.

The Social Exclusion Unit regards early intervention with children's learning problems as an effective approach (Milner & Blyth, 1999:19). Educators in South African primary schools are expected to provide evidence of intervention that was used to assist learners experiencing learning difficulties (researcher's personal experience). This approach of dealing with learning difficulties may be regarded as some form of early intervention that could curb truancy resulting from lesson difficulty. According to Hallam and Roaf, (1995:33), learners can also be motivated to learn if they are given tasks that are appropriate to their educational needs.

2.7.1.2 Counselling and therapy

Truanting learners who show signs of having emotional problems relating to poor social skills receive individual and or group therapy (Davis, 1999:2; Harworth and Bardsley, 1999:163). According to MacIldowie (1999:122), attendance increased by 7% in two schools in Kent when the Education Welfare Officer's intervention measures included counselling sessions. Edward and Malcom (2002:2) assert that a learning environment that provides support for emotional and social needs is likely to raise the achievement of learners who are at risk of playing truant. The effect of this kind of support is evident in a study of a project at Swanley School, where MacIldowie (1999:123) reports that the attendance pattern of eight of the 12 learners improved significantly as a result of regular support.

It appears that individuals are likely to benefit from sessions where they listen to others with similar experiences and problems. For instance, the Attendance Officer at Calhoun Intermediate School District reports that the dropout rate decreased from 10% to 2% when students became involved in the Absence Addict Programme, a support group that is modelled after Alcoholics Anonymous (Rocho, 2003:2).

2.7.2 The school

It is important to mention that strategies and initiatives that are used at the level of the individual learner also impact on the school in general. The approaches that are discussed in this section mainly address issues pertaining to reducing the impact of school factors as a step towards the management of truancy.

2.7.2.1 Using reinforcement and reward systems

Like all other human beings, learners who play truant are likely to improve or change their behaviour if they are rewarded for desirable behaviour. MacIldowie (1999:123) found that developing and dispensing incentives for regular attendance were more effective than applying sanctions to truants. Gerrard, Burhans and Fair (2003:6), report that an analysis Epstein and Sheldon did of 12 schools in some parts of the USA in 2002 shows that rewarding learners for improved attendance had a positive impact on both overall school attendance and chronic absenteeism.

2.7.2.2 Using a variety of instructional approaches

Instructional approaches that promote active exploration challenge learners to think about their own learning while using other media, such as music, movement and art, to enable them to optimise their own cognitive development and to take active control of their own lives (Donald et al., 1997:122). Instructional approaches such as cooperative learning that promotes interaction between the learners and the educator is a key to a healthy environment (*ibid*:123). It is a healthy learning and teaching environment of this kind that truants need. Cooperative learning activities can also promote the acquisition of social skills, which may be lacking in most learners who tend to play truant.

The use of music, art and movement ensure that kinesthetic learners are accommodated. The role instructional approach plays in contributing to lower levels of truancy is expressed in the following response provided by learners when requested to suggest how schools could improve attendance:

- Lessons: “more practicals and discussions in order to make lessons more relevant to everyday situations”
“Make lessons more fun and interesting”
“More interesting ways of teaching”

(Smith, M., 1996: 233)

2.7.2.3 Effective monitoring, registration and recording of attendance

Researchers emphasise the need for effective recording and monitoring as one of the starting points (Howe, 1995:30; Lewis, 1995:38; Reid, 2002:129; Social Exclusion Unit, 1998:2; Whitney, 1998:26; Whitney, 1994:73;). Some researchers propose the use of a computerised or electronic registration system as a tool for monitoring truancy levels (Cohen and Ryan, 1998:3; MacILdowie, 1999:124; Norman, 2001:47; Reid, 1999:33; Social Exclusion Unit, 1998:3; Stokes and Walton, 1999:91). It is reported that attendance improved by 19% to 23%, while post registration was completely eliminated, when electronic registration was combined with electronic pagers for parents of truants in a six-week project undertaken at Smithhill's Comprehensive and Borough Council (Social exclusion Unit, 1998). Norman (2001:48) also reports that electronic registration helped to reduce truancy in three schools.

Some authors maintain that the use of electronic registration helps to reduce truancy where there is strong leadership and a consistent recording and monitoring system (Cohen and Ryan, 1998:3; Norman, 2001:48). This suggests that schools that are likely to benefit from a computerised system are those whose principals are consistent and have strong leadership attributes.

Computerised registration is said to help identify particular groups of truants, the lessons that are being missed or possible causes of truancy (Social Exclusion Unit, 1998:3). Learners are less likely to play truant when they know that attendance is being closely monitored. For instance, absenteeism was reduced to zero by the end of the week as "students became convinced that computers could see them leaving school" (Stokes and Walton, 1999: 91).

The Department of Education and Training in the State of Victoria, Australia, provided all schools with the Computerised Administrative Systems Environment in Schools (CASES) to enable the identification of absentees who need support (Millar, 2003:1). The CASES challenges schools to report and compare their attendance rates against the

statewide benchmarks as well as to develop strategies for addressing the problem of non-attendance. In other words, schools are encouraged to be competitive, not only in reducing levels of absenteeism, but also in providing absentees with intervention, thus directly or indirectly dealing with the root of the problem.

2.7.2.4 Welcome back to school

It is also important to ensure that learners feel welcome back to school after a period of absence in order to prevent further absence. As Howe (1995:30) puts it, "unless the path back to school is clear, anxious children will often seek to postpone return, thereby increasing the potential problems". According to MacIldowie (1999:123), the attendance patterns of eight learners improved when one of the strategies included being welcomed back and when their teacher helped them to catch up with the work.

2.7.2.5 Student welfare

It is not only the administrative issues that are important in reducing truancy. The welfare or wellbeing of a student is also important. The need to look at student wellbeing is echoed by Donald et al. (1997:24), when stating that schools should work towards promoting whole and healthy development in both students and the environment. In other words, problems must be "cured" and prevented, and schools must strive towards developing supportive environments. According to Cohen and Ryan (1998:3), the provision of school-based support services in the form of pastoral care counselling can help to reduce truancy. Lewis (1995:38) also suggests that pastoral systems and additional tutoring for learners who are identified as having poor literacy skills can reduce aspects of the school that tend to push them out of school. Reid (1999:108) suggests that the introduction of homework clubs and homework policies can help learners to develop their learning skills and lead to improved academic performance.

2.7.2.6 Life-skills education

The healthy development of learners can also be ensured through other preventative measures, such as teaching them life skills. According to Donald et al. (1997:96), life skills empower individuals to "engage and cope successfully with life and its challenges" and promote psychosocial competence. That is, schools must build the resiliency of their learners through life-skills education and thereby reduce the effect of vulnerability towards truancy in "at-risk" learners.

Reid (1999:137) and Lewis (1999:130) assert that personal and social education programmes should not only help learners with skills that enable them to cope effectively with school and the world of work, but should also include truancy as a theme in their content. One sees a similarity between life-skills education and personal and social education in that both emphasise the teaching of coping skills. Reid (1999:138) maintains that truancy as a topic should be included or related to themes of the PSE (Personal and Social Education) programmes such as discipline, disruptive behaviour, bullying and codes of practice. On the other hand, the Victoria Education in Australia help youths in secondary schools with issues such as bullying, drug use, truancy and depression by providing student welfare coordinators in schools (Millar, 2003).

2.7.2.7 In-service training

Stoll (1995:85) reports on the training course funded by the Grant for Education, Support and Training (GEST), which was presented by the Truancy Unit of the University of London. The course targeted educators and staff who were responsible for and interested in attendance and truancy (*ibid*). The course mainly dealt with clarification and explanation of the concepts of truancy (blanket and post-registration truancy), and presented models schools could use to combat truancy (*ibid*:88-89).

Another area in which in-service training can be offered is through school organisation development. De Jong (2000:158) describes organisation development as "a strategy for

managing change, which is aimed at facilitating development of people and the organisation as a whole for the purpose of optimising human fulfillment and increasing organisational capacity". The Teacher In-service Project's intervention at Modderdam High School is a typical example of school organisation development that helped to decrease the level of truancy in South Africa (De Jong, 2000:163-4). The author identifies nine major areas of improvement in the school, which include, amongst others, security, physical conditions, relationships between staff and learners, relationships between learners, relationships between school and parents, management and governance, quality of teaching and a sense of identity and community. It is said that by erecting a fence in order to improve security, the truancy level also decreased. The Modderdam High School project provides a typical example of the application of an ecosystem perspective where change in one element brought about changes in the entire system.

2.7.3 Inter-departmental cooperation and government initiatives

While some schools use their own initiatives to combat truancy, others rely on the involvement and support of external agencies, including the government. On the other hand, some communities and countries may decide to manage truancy differently due to the differences in needs, resources and circumstances. An announcement by a government official that funding to the value of \$11.25 million would be reserved for combating poor attendance in some secondary schools (Norman, 2001:48) shows the extent of the commitment towards truancy reduction by the government in the United Kingdom.

The United States Department of Education prepared a manual to combat truancy, in collaboration with the Department of Justice, which provides guidance to school officials and other stakeholders (United States Department of Education, 1996). The manual also includes, as examples, cases of anti-truancy programmes that were successfully implemented in nine cities. For instance, the Stop, Cite and Return Program, Truancy Abatement and Burglary Suppression (TABS) and Truancy Habit Reduced Increasing

Valuable Education (THRIVE) are said to have not only reduced the truancy rate, but also daytime burglary by about 33% in Rohnet Park, Malwaukee and Oklahoma City, respectively (US Department of Education, 1996).

In 1999, the British government launched a strategy document, "Tackling Truancy Together", thus indicating the collaboration that could take place between the schools, police and magistrates in tackling truancy (Falconer, 2001). The document specifies what all the role-players needed to do in order to address the problem of truancy.

Further examples of multi-disciplinary approaches to truancy include earlier attempts, such as the Staffordshire Truancy Initiative in Hanley (Haigh, 1994:23). This initiative involved collaborative work between schools, the Education Welfare Officers, members of the local community, the local radio station, the Bus Company and local shopkeepers (ibid:24). Regarding the Staffordshire initiatives, shopkeepers displayed a "Truancy Free Area" sticker besides asking the question, "Shouldn't you be at school today?" and recording the name, school and conversations that took place with persistent truants in a referral form (ibid:24).

2.7.4 Acting fast on learner absence

In some instances, truancy reduction efforts focus is on early detection and include efforts such as the Stay in School Program, which targets students in middle school or what is known as the intermediate phase, and the Community Service Early Intervention Program that targets truant during the freshman year (US Department of Education, 1996). Meanwhile, with regard to Operation Save Kids, the school targets students with three unexcused absences instead of waiting for the problem to get worse (ibid). Another notable feature of these programmes is that support in the form of counselling for the youth and parenting skills training, and, in some instances, short-term family counseling, are also provided.

2.7.5 Ordinances

Truancy in the United States is also addressed through the law. According to Pappas (1996:1), some cities have enacted daytime loitering ordinances and anti-truancy laws. Truants are referred to the juvenile traffic court and may have their driver's licenses delayed, suspended or revoked. The police officer is authorised to take the truants' right-hand fingerprints where satisfactory evidence of identity is lacking and in this way to deny them the driving privilege. The loitering ordinance not only improved attendance rates in the whole school district by 2.2% in one year, but also helped to reduce the high school dropout rate by 57% (*ibid*: 2). In addition, a school is expected to send a list of truants to the police agencies for cross-referencing and contacting the youth and their families, and in return the police supply the schools with a copy of the loitering/truancy warning notices. Schools place these legal documents in the student behaviour files and use them to establish a pattern of truancy, and, subsequently, to work with the students. Addressing truancy through ordinances such as those discussed above appears to require well-trained staff and proper coordination between role-players.

2.7.6 Attendance or truancy officers

The full-time services of attendance officers help schools to reduce truancy. According to MacILdowie (1999:121), the appointment of officers had an immediate and lasting effect on attendance in Kent schools. It must be emphasised that the effect was particularly felt when the officers picked up truants on their first day of absence. Gerrard, Burhans and Fair (2003:6) also maintain that assigning a truancy specialist to serious cases of truants and their families does increase attendance rates.

2.7.7 Prosecuting parents

In some instances, measures of tackling truancy are punitive when parents are seen to have abdicated the responsibility of ensuring that their children attend regularly. Grey

(2000:1) provides evidence of parents who were charged for failing to ensure that their children attended school regularly.

2.7.8 Awareness campaigns

Websites make the public aware of truancy and inform parents and learners about the need for regular attendance (Parents and School, You ask about Truancy: 2000; Child and Youth Heath: 2003).

2.7.9 Whole-school development

Given that there are various predisposing and precipitating factors that are associated with truancy, the whole-school approach might be more relevant for truancy reduction. Atkinson (2001:32) suggests a whole-school approach involving both the Education Welfare Staff and the school in raising the awareness of the importance of attendance and schools' responses to attendance-related systems. According to Swart and Pettipher (2001:33), the whole-school development approach actively involves all role-players and systems of the school instead of merely looking at the teachers' classroom practices. Further, one of the core principles and strategies of whole-school development is the establishment of collaborative networks between the school and the community (*ibid*). The whole-school approach is applied in situations where different systems collaborate and interact in facilitating changes within the school and where all aspects of a school are taken into consideration when addressing problems in the school. The elements of a collaborative system can include parents, learners, educators and other resourceful members of the community (government and non-governmental organisations as well as community-based organisations). The whole-school approach could also be regarded as entailing a multi-agency approach to problems, including truancy reduction.

The initiatives aimed at reducing truancy that relate to the whole-school approach vary. Some of the truancy reduction projects implemented in some countries could be regarded

as being in line with the whole-school approach. The following is a brief account of few examples of such projects:

England, Wales and Scotland: Success stories of collaborative efforts at schools in the United Kingdom, particularly LEA, are varied. Twiggs (2002) states that 12 000 children, 68% of whom are of secondary-school age, were picked up in just four weeks when police and schools worked together in patrolling places where youngsters tend to hang out. The Social Exclusion Unit (1998:3, chapter 1) reports about the reduction in crime attributed to truants in 1994 when the police and education staff patrolled shopping malls, and shopkeepers refused to serve school children found in shops during school hours.

Recent reports show evidence that truancy sweeps that involve collaborative efforts of the Education Welfare officers, the school officials and the police work best by not only increasing the rate of attendance, but also getting students that have not been seen for months back to school (Twiggs, 2002).

United States of America and Canada: There are various examples of initiatives of truancy management efforts that involve collaborative work between law enforcement agencies and the schools in America (Davis, 1999). The following are some of the cited programmes:

- The Community Service Early Intervention Program in Marion County is a team effort where school officials and outside service agencies provide support, guidance and counselling to potential truants in Grade 9. Another requirement is parental participation, while learners who have successfully completed the programme are used to counsel and tutor other youths in the programme.
- Abolish Chronic Truancy (ACT) works in the same manner as a neighbourhood watch programme and relies on the whole community to combat truancy. Although mainly involving the special deputy district attorney, educators and school administrators, the team tracks attendance in the school building by analysing the problems of at-risk students and families, and suggests intervention strategies prior to prosecution.

South Africa: The Truancy Reduction Project, involving the school community and the Department of Safety and Security in Cape Town, managed to bring children back to school during the first two months (Fox, 2000). On the other hand, attendance officers appointed in the Francis Baard District and stationed in Kimberly work with social workers of the Department of Social Welfare in their truancy reduction measures (Nodoba, 2003: Personal interview). These appear to be the only initiatives that are directly aimed at reducing truancy in this country that have been publicly announced and are therefore known to the author of this research.

Earlier in this chapter, it was mentioned that reduced truancy was witnessed at a secondary school in Cape Town as a result of measures directed at improving safety. Given that this and one of the initiatives cited above consider safety to be a priority, one is tempted to believe that many communities in this country regard truancy as a problem that can also be addressed by the police in collaboration with schools. However, no formal links are encouraged through legislation.

In South Africa, the document of the Department of Education, "The National Policy on Whole-School Evaluation" (Department of Education, 2002:3-4), contains principles that espouse the whole-school approach. This suggests that the impact of whole-school development is yet to be experienced in South African schools with high rates of truancy.

2.8 Conclusion

The above review of the literature shows that unauthorised absence from secondary schools occurs mainly in two ways, namely, blanket truancy and post-registration truancy. Post-registration truancy is more common than blanket truancy. Furthermore, learners tend to play truant as a result of factors within themselves, as well as due to extrinsic factors. Different approaches can be used to reduce truancy.

This chapter provided an overview of the extent of the problem, contributing factors and the different approaches that various communities use in managing and reducing truancy. The next chapter will focus on the methodology used in collecting data for this research.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of the study is to investigate the phenomenon of truancy and then to characterise the nature and associated factors, to ensure appropriate management thereof. It is envisaged that, with more insight, effective intervention strategies can be implemented. Furthermore, secondary-education decision-makers may take results into account when school-attendance policies are reviewed.

The review of the literature presented in the preceding chapter reveals that secondary-school learners continue to play truant and miss the educational opportunities provided by compulsory school regulations. Learners who play limit their own chances of acquiring the necessary skills to prepare themselves for future employment. We also looked at the different types of truancy, casual factors and various approaches that have been used to reduce truancy. This chapter describes the way the empirical study is planned and conducted, and will focus on the following aspects:

- The general and specific research problems, and hypotheses
- The research method

3.2 Research problems and hypotheses

3.2.1 General research problems

The researcher is concerned about the fact that learners continue to stay away from school by either skipping the whole school day or by skipping certain lessons without permission from the school authorities and parents. Learners who play truant defeat the aims of our constitution and the vision of the education system, which is based on preparing learners for effective citizenship and employability. The following are the main problems that the present researcher is confronted with:

- How truancy manifests itself in secondary schools. In this regard, the researcher wants to know –
 - i. how often learners skip (a) school or (b) certain lessons (classes) without excuse;
 - ii. which factors contribute to making learners prone to truancy; and
 - iii. where learners go when they are not at school or in class.
- What can be done about the problem of truancy.

Significance of the study

It is hoped that the information obtained from this research and the literature will extend our knowledge of the phenomenon of truancy, and provide data on which effective truancy intervention strategies could be based.

In order to find solutions to the problems she is confronted with, the researcher formulated specific research problems and several hypotheses that will be empirically tested. According to the literature reviewed in the preceding chapter (see section 2.2.1), secondary-school learners in all socio-economic sectors of society play truant from school and lessons. Male and female learners equally skip the whole school day and lessons (see section 2.2.2). Further, it is indicated that several factors in learners' environment contribute to truancy. That is, personal, school, family and societal factors are related to truancy. Practical considerations made it impossible to base the investigation on all aspects of these factors. Hence, a choice had to be made as to which research questions and hypotheses to include in this study. It was decided that questions and hypotheses that relate to problems that can be addressed by working collaboratively with the learner, educators and parents would be used. Therefore, in this study, only hypotheses that are linked to following will be tested:

- Demographic data: gender (see section 2.2.2)

- Personal aspect: learning problems (see section 2.6.1.6)
- Family factor: (a) parental involvement in children's education
(see section 2.6.3.3)
 - (b) Parents' expectations regarding schoolwork
(see section 2.6.3.3)
 - (c) People with whom the learner lives
(see section 2.6.3.2)
- School factor: educator-learner relationship (see section 2.6.2.6)

3.2.2 Specific research problems and hypotheses

The study is based on the following research problems and hypotheses:

Research problem 1

Is there a significant dependency between *gender* and (a) skipping school or (b) certain lessons (classes) in the last 12 months?

It has already been stated in the literature review that overseas research that found no significant difference between the truancy levels of male and female learners was confirmed in one study that was conducted locally (see section 2.2.2). However, another argument regarding truancy and gender was based on the role of ratio between male and female enrolment as the possible factor that could influence the results. Given the apparent uncertainty regarding which gender is more likely to play truant, the researcher decided to investigate the issue further. Information on this variable is also important, since it will influence intervention strategies.

Hypothesis 1

Ho1: There is no significant dependency between *gender* and (a) skipping school or (b) certain lessons (classes) in the last 12 months.

Ha1: There is a significant dependency between *gender* and (a) skipping school or (b) certain lessons (classes) in the last 12 months.

Research problem 2

Is there a significant dependency between *learners having learning problems* and (a) skipping school or (b) certain lessons (classes) in the last 12 months?

There is evidence that more truants than non-truants perform poorly in examinations and have often failed three times at school (see section 2.6.2.5). Academic failure may result from a variety of causes, including learning problems. Learners who experience difficulties with schoolwork while at primary school tend to play truant in an attempt to evade frustration and anxiety (see section 2.6.1.6). These are usually the learners who perform two or more years below their peers in language and numeric literacy assessments. In this regard, truancy could be associated with learners who have learning problems.

Hypothesis 2

Ho2: There is no significant dependency between *learners having learning problems* and (a) skipping school or (b) certain lessons (classes) in the last 12 months.

Ha2: There is a significant dependency between *learners having learning problems* and (a) skipping school or (b) certain lessons (classes) in the last 12 months.

Research problem 3

Is there a significant dependency between *family structure in which the learner lives* and (a) skipping school or (b) certain lessons (classes) in the last 12 months?

The literature study reveals that family structure is one of the factors that make learners prone to truancy (see section 2.6.3.2). It is argued that the supervisory role and monitoring of children become more difficult when played by one parent, and this often leads to non-involvement.

Given the above evidence of the effect of family structure indicated in the literature, the researcher's interest was to find out about the significance of the dependency between the people with whom the learner live and the truancy level.

Hypothesis 3

Ho3: There is no significant dependency between the *family structure in which the learner lives* and (a) skipping school or (b) certain lessons (classes) in the last 12 months.

Ha3: There is significant dependency between and *the family structure in which the learner lives* and (a) skipping school or (b) certain lessons (classes) in the last 12 months.

Research problem 4

Is there a significant dependency between *parents expecting the learner to do well in school* and (a) skipping school or (b) certain lessons (classes) in the last 12 months?

Under normal circumstances, each parent that sends a child to school has expectations for the child to do well, and eventually complete schooling. Some parents encourage children

to achieve better and even assist them with schoolwork. This may not be the case with parents of truants. According to the review of the literature, truants' parents encourage their children to be competent to a lesser degree (see section 2.6.3.3). Hence, the researcher wanted to investigate how significantly dependent the parents' expectations are on the level of truancy.

Hypothesis 4

Ho4: There is no significant dependency between *parents expecting the learner to do well in school* and (a) skipping school or (b) certain lessons (classes) in the last 12 months.

Ha4: There is a significant dependency between *parents expecting the learner to do well in school* and (a) skipping school or (b) certain lessons (classes) in the last 12 months.

Research problem 5

Is there a significant dependency between the *degree of parent's involvement at school* and (a) skipping school or (b) certain lessons (classes) in the last 12 months?

Parental involvement plays a major role in the academic success of children. Parents are also legally bound to ensure that their children of compulsory school age attend school regularly (Reid, 1999:289). Ways in which parents become involved include the following:

- Talking with the child regularly about what was learnt at school, supervising homework and helping with other schoolwork.
- Arranging parent-educator meetings and implementing agreements reached.

- Supporting the child by attending sports and extramural activities at the school.
- Enforcing children's attendance at school.

According to Van der Merwe (1996:309), South African parents have a history of not being involved in their children's formal education. For instance, a parent may be interested in schoolwork, but fail to be involved due to a lack of capacity and necessary skills or even as a result of a lack of feedback and communication regarding what homework the children are expected to do and what role parents should play in support of the children. Given that in the literature (see section 2.6.3.3), poor parental involvement is identified as one of the factors contributing to truancy, the researcher expects research results on this aspect to add value to information that will be suggested for reducing truancy. In this regard, hypotheses were formulated to guide the investigation.

Hypothesis 5

Ho5: There is no significant dependency between the degree of parent's involvement at school and (a) skipping school or (b) certain lessons (classes) in the last 12 months.

Ha5: There is a significant dependency between the degree of parent's involvement at school and (a) skipping school or (b) certain lessons (classes) in the last 12 months.

Research problem 6

Is there a significant dependency between *how interested parents are in schoolwork and (a) skipping school or (b) certain lessons (classes) in the last 12 months?*

Parental interest in the child's schoolwork could go a long way in motivating the learner. The literature review (see section 2.6.3.3) revealed that more learners tend play truant

when their parents are less interested in their schoolwork, hence it became necessary to investigate the significance between parents' interest in schoolwork and skipping school and/or lessons.

Hypothesis 6

Ho6: There is no significant dependency between *how interested parents are in schoolwork* and (a) skipping school or (b) certain lessons (classes) in the last 12 months.

Ha6: There is a significant dependency between *how interested parents are in schoolwork* and (a) skipping school or (b) certain lessons (classes) in the last 12 months.

Research problem 7

Is there significant dependency between *learners having a good relationship with teachers* and (a) skipping school (b) certain lessons (classes) in the last 12 months?

An educator is second to the parent only as the mediator and promoter of the learner's holistic development. The educator therefore also has a unique role to play in ensuring that a healthy learning environment prevails in the classroom. Learning becomes fun and enjoyable when the educator's instructional approach accommodates the diverse learning needs and styles of the learners (see section 2.6.2.4). A teaching and learning process that is built on a healthy relationship between the educator and the learner is more likely to promote regular attendance (see section 2.6.2.6). It is thus imperative to find out how significant the dependency is between having a good relationship with teachers and truancy.

Hypothesis 7

Ho7: There is no significant dependency between learners having a good relationship with teachers and (a) skipping school (b) certain lessons (classes) in the last 12 months.

Ha7: There is significant dependency between learners having a good relationship with teachers and (a) skipping school (b) certain lessons (classes) in the last 12 months.

3.3 The research approach

A quantitative method of research involves a study with a focus on the collection of numerical data and testing of hypotheses (Johnson and Christensen, 2004:30). The design of this study follows a quantitative approach. The researcher's choice is not based on paradigm issues and the assumption about the nature of reality, but rather on how the data are presented. According to Punch (1998:28), "paradigm" is a term that refers to a "set of assumptions about the social world and about what constitutes proper techniques and topics of inquiry". In the preceding section (see section 3.2, paragraph 1), the researcher mentioned the problems encountered in the form of questions used to guide the study. The researcher's choice of method is also not based on which approach is better or superior, but rather on the research questions. As Tailor (2000:63) points out, research questions are important in guiding the research process and problem-solving in both quantitative and qualitative research. The argument that the choice of method is determined by the research question is further supported by the assertion that "different questions require different methods to answer them and that the way questions are asked has implications for what needs to be done to answer them"(Punch, 1998:19).

Since the research problems are quantitative questions and the researcher further seeks to test several hypotheses, the use of a quantitative approach is imperative.

3.4 Research design

Survey research represents a process whereby researchers translate a research problem into questionnaires, which are given to respondents to create data (Neuman, 2000:285) in

order to understand the characteristics of a population (Johnson and Christensen, 2004:197). According to Macmillan and Schumacher (2001:304), characteristics that are measured in a survey are often described in terms of frequency, incidence and distribution. Data collection is in the form of a survey because the researcher wishes to know the frequency of occurrence and incidence of truancy amongst learners, and, as Neuman (2000:250) points out, surveys measure several variables where many respondents report about past behaviours and experiences.

The literature reviewed in the preceding chapter (see section 2.6) shows that many variables are involved in the phenomenon of truancy, hence the researcher decided to test most of those variables. Survey research is chosen because it allows for measurement of many variables and testing of multiple hypotheses, and is therefore effective in terms of time and cost (Neuman, 2000:250).

3.5 The research instrument

3.5.1 Questionnaire

Data were collected by means of a questionnaire (see Appendix 1). Using a questionnaire was appropriate because it is economical and can ensure anonymity, particularly when dealing with a large sample (Nardi, 2003:59; Punch, 1998:97). Upon careful consideration of existing questionnaires from the literature that address variables and hypotheses the research seeks to measure, the researcher decided to compile a new one for the present study. The items that are included in the questionnaire are based on factors that are likely to contribute to truancy and are derived from the literature study. Some of these are also identified and described by informants as reasons for truancy (Bimler and Kirkland, 2001:99). The items are also determined by the research questions and hypotheses.

Closed-ended questionnaires are used because they are easy to score and can be answered quickly, especially when several items are involved or when the sample is large

(Macmillan and Schumacher, 2001:261; Neuman, 2000:261). A Likert scale with four to eight (4-8) categories of responses was used and questions were based on the following:

- Component 1: Biographical data (items: 1-4; 18-19).

These items asked about respondents' personal information, such as age, gender and position in the family.

The determination of the influence of gender is important, because the literature review reveals that the truancy levels of males and female learners do not differ in many instances (see section 2.2.2).

- Component 2(a): Parents' socio-economic status (items 6, 7, 9-13, 21-23).

The decision to include these items is based on the fact that the literature study reveals that there is a link between parents' poor socio-economic status and truancy (see sections 2.6.3.1 to 2.6.3.2).

- Component 2(b): Parents' involvement in their children's school activities, schoolwork and future career (items 25-28, 30-35, 71).

In the previous chapter (see section 2.6.3.3), reference was made to the fact that learners are more likely to play truant when their parents do not show interest in their schoolwork and when they do not encourage learners to do well at school.

- Component 3: Learning problems and school failure (items 65, 85, 115 and 119).

There is evidence from the literature study (see sections 2.6.1.1 and 2.6.1.5) that learners who find schoolwork difficult are more prone to feelings of anxiety associated with learning problems and academic failure.

- Component 4: How educators and learners relate (items 63, 104, 106, 109).

It has been revealed that learners are more likely to play truant if they do not relate well with their educators (see section 2.6.3.6). The former avoids the humiliation associated with meeting the latter by playing truant.

3.5.2 Pilot study

Two procedures were followed during the pre-testing of the questionnaire. According to Cooper and Schindler (2003:86), the researcher may rely on experts when piloting the instrument to identify changes that can be made with confusing items. Experts and colleagues who are experienced in research were requested to examine the questionnaire to check whether there were any items that needed to be changed or rephrased, as well as the appropriateness of the time set for completing it. The next procedure involved completion of the questionnaire by a sample of twelve Grade 10 learners not included in the sample. The items in the questionnaire were therefore considered to be satisfactory in terms of both wording and format.

3.5.3 Validity and reliability

Validity refers to the extent to which the instrument measures what it is supposed to measure. In order to establish its validity, the questionnaire was given to experts and colleagues to determine content and face validity. According to Johnson and Christensen (2004:142), content validity is a judgmental act where experts check whether the items represent the construct which is being studied as well as the wording, formatting and scoring of the instrument. On the other hand, face validity refers to the extent to which

the respondents will perceive the instrument as being valid to test what it is supposed to test (Black, 1999:195).

The extent to which the instrument will provide the same results on subsequent administration, known as reliability, was statistically obtained. The Cronbach Alpha correlation formula was used to calculate reliability. The value obtained is 0.83, which indicates that the reliability of the instrument is satisfactory. This is the "split halves" method.

3.6 Population and sampling

3.6.1 Population

The population consisted of secondary school learners in the Francis Baard District of the Northern Cape Department of Education. The reasons for choosing this population are as follows: The literature study (see sections 2.2 and 2.2.3), revealed that truancy rates increase as learners move to the higher grades. Further, more secondary-school than primary-school learners have been referred to the present researcher for truancy (see section 1.2.1). Since one of the researcher's objectives is to test hypotheses, generalisations about the population can be made. Hence, secondary-school learners that are accessible to the researcher were the focus of this study.

Permission to conduct the study within the district was requested from the officials of the Department of Education, and subsequently granted (see Appendix 2).

3.6.2 The sample

The sample consisted of all Grade 10 learners from three secondary schools. These schools were randomly selected out of 14 secondary schools located in Kimberley. Initially, all Grade 10 and 11 learners were to be selected. The decision to exclude Grade 11 learners was based on cost implications, as the sample would have been too large due

to learners' enrolment at the selected schools. Grade 12 learners were not available because data collection took place when they were preparing for examinations.

Data collection at the three schools took place over three days. All learners who were present during the first period on the day of data collection completed the questionnaire. Educators who were responsible for either class registers or teaching a lesson at the time helped to distribute the questionnaires and to record the number of absentees. Altogether, a sample of 758 Grade 10 learners completed the questionnaire. The above indicates that a combination of convenience and cluster sampling was used.

3.6.3 Limitations

The initial plan to include all Grade 10 learners at all schools did not materialize, since 67 learners were regarded as absent at the time of data collection. Some of these learners may have been culprits of late coming, a common phenomenon among learners, as indicated by Monare (2003).

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter provided an overview of how this study was planned and conducted. The hypotheses the researcher wishes to test were also described. The results of the empirical study are presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS AND INTEPRETATION OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the results of the research problems and hypotheses are presented. The findings will be tabulated, analysed and interpreted against the background of the literature study. The discussion will follow a sequence similar to that used for presenting the problems and hypotheses in Chapter 3.

4.2 Statistical analysis and techniques

The completed questionnaires were submitted to the statistical computer services of the University of South Africa for data capturing. Various statistical tests were used to analyse and interpret the data. Factor analysis was included in the statistical procedures.

The results are presented in numerous tables. Some of these are based on the specific research problems and hypotheses. Furthermore, the discussion of the findings is mainly based on the tables that show the dependency between (a) skipping school or (b) certain lessons (classes) without a real excuse in the last 12 months (items 37 and 38 of the questionnaire) and some of the aspects that are identified as contributing to truancy.

4.3. Results and discussion of results

The results of the analysis of the general research problems are presented in Tables 1 to 5, while those of the specific research problems and hypotheses are presented in Tables 7 to 23.

Learners were asked to give an overall indication of the extent of blanket truancy in the school. Their responses appear in Table 1.

Table 1 Frequencies and percentages of learners who engage in blanket truancy

Item		f	%
On average, learners at my school stay absent without permission from parents and the school	Always or often	550	72.6
	Seldom or never	205	27.0
	No response	3	0.4
	Total	758	100.0

Summary of analysis

Table 1 indicates that the majority of the respondents are aware of the occurrence of truancy at their schools. According to the respondents, 72.6% of the learners are always or often absent from school without permission. Their report confirms that truancy is as much a problem at their schools as it is at many secondary schools mentioned in the literature (see section 2.2.1).

(a) *Blanket truancy* in the present Grade 10

Respondents were asked to select from five alternative answers the number of learners who play truant in their class per week. The results appear in Table 2.

Table 2 Frequencies and percentages of learners who engage in blanket truancy

Item		f	%
How many learners stay absent from school without permission in your class?	Four or more	411	54.2
	Three	131	17.3
	Two	108	14.2
	One	64	8.4
	None	42	5.5
	No response	2	0.3
	Total	758	100.00

According to the above table, it appears that 54.2% of learners are reported to play truant for the whole day on a weekly basis.

(b) *Post-registration truancy* in the present Grade 10

The question about the extent of post-registration truancy refers to truancy that arises when learners miss some classes without permission, or "bunk" (a generally known term) certain lessons. Data relating to this aspect are presented in Table 3.

Table 3 Frequency and percentages of learners who engage in post-registration truancy in Grade 10

Item		f	%
Learners in my present grade bunk certain classes	Always or often	566	74.7
	Seldom or never	191	25.2
	No response	1	0.1
	Total	758	100.00

Table 3 indicates that 74.7% of the learners admit that their classmates often bunk certain classes, thus suggesting that post-registration truancy does occur.

(c) Subject or learning area most likely to be missed due to post-registration truancy

Given that learners do bunk certain classes, it is necessary to know the subject or learning area most learners are likely to miss. The answer to this was derived from learners' response to the last item on the questionnaire (item 124). The results appear in Table 4.

Table 4 Frequency and percentages of post-registration truancy per subject or learning area in Grade 10

Subject or learning area	f	%
MML (Mathematics)	232	30.6
HSS (History, Social Studies)	36	4.7
EMS (Economics, Management)	96	12.7
LO (Life Orientation)	29	3.8
LLC (Language, Literacy)	76	10.0
NS (Natural Science)	43	5.7
TECH (Technology)	8	1.1
BIO (Biology)	147	19.4
No response	91	12.0
TOTAL	758	100.0

According to Table 4, respondents indicate that most of the Grade 10 learners (30.6%) tend to bunk classes in the Mathematics and mathematical literacy (MML) learning area, followed by Biology (19.4%). Furthermore, respondents indicate that Technology lessons appear more popular, because only 1.1% of learners are reported to have bunked some lessons in this subject. The findings regarding the subject mostly missed appear to be consistent with those of some schools elsewhere (see section 2.3.4, par. 3).

As indicated in the preceding paragraph, learners tend to bunk certain lessons. The question is how many of them bunk lessons per week. The response to this question is presented in terms of frequency and percentage in Table 5.

Table 5 Frequencies and percentages of lesson truancy per week

Item		f	%
How many learners stay absent from certain lessons per week?	Four or more	329	43.4
	Three	148	19.5
	Two	117	15.4
	One	82	10.8
	None	81	10.7
	No response	1	0.1
	Total	758	100.00

From Table 5 it is evident that most learners admit that four or more learners bunk certain lessons each week. By looking at Table 2, one realises that the number of learners who engage in blanket truancy might be higher than those that engage in post-registration truancy. That is, 54.2% of the respondents report that four or more learners play truant for the whole day (Table 2), as opposed to 43.4% of the respondents regarding "lesson truancy" indicated in Table 5. This finding is not consistent with the literature (see section 2.4), which indicates that more learners engage in post-registration truancy than blanket truancy.

(d) Where learners go to when they are not at school or in class

As indicated in section 2.5 of the literature study, respondents tend to be dishonest or rather reluctant to disclose their whereabouts while bunking classes. Hence the researcher asked them to disclose the destinations of others instead of reporting about their own behaviour. In other words, the researcher's attempt was to de-personalise the issue in order to encourage objectivity. The responses are tabulated below.

Table 6 Frequencies and percentages of activities which truants engage in when not at school or in class

Question/Item		f	%
Learners who are absent without permission and real excuse do the following when not at school	Go sit in the park	88	11.6
	Go to friend's home	387	51.1
	Loiter in the streets	118	15.6
	Hang around shopping malls	82	10.8
	Do odd jobs	81	10.7
	No response	2	.3
	Total	758	100.00

From Table 6 it is evident that learners who play truant spend most of their time at their friends' homes rather than anywhere else, because 51.1% of the respondents selected that option. This finding has several implications regarding the management of truancy, including the following:

- Whether the friends' parents are at home at that time.
- Whether those parents condone the behaviour or not.
- To what extent parents and the school collaborate with regard to truancy management.

Given that the learners who play truant often engage in various activities that are likely to have negative consequences for parents, the school and the community at large, it is necessary to find better ways of managing truancy.

The discussion that follows focuses mainly on the results of the study in relation to learners who admitted that they did play truant in the last 12 months. The analysis is therefore based on items that involve self-reporting (see Appendix 1, items 37-38) by the typical truants. Further, intervention strategies suggested for truancy reduction are more likely to be relevant if designed on the basis of information derived from the truants themselves. Items 37-38 were selected for analysis, since they are consistent with the aim of the study.

4.4 Specific problem statements and hypotheses

The Chi-square is the statistical technique used to test the hypotheses. In a case where the significance is smaller than 0.01 ($p < 0.01$) or 0.05 ($p < 0.05$), the null hypotheses were rejected at the 1% level and 5% level, respectively. The null-hypotheses were not rejected in cases where the significance is larger than 0.05 ($p > 0.05$).

As indicated in the preceding chapter (see section 3.2, par. 4), several factors that contribute to truancy are identified in the literature. It is not practically possible to analyse all of them. Only hypotheses and individual items that provide clues to problems that could be addressed by working with truants, parents, the school and community will be included. The following are specific research problems and hypotheses that are presented for analysis:

Research problem 1

Is there a significant dependency between *gender* and (a) skipping school or (b) certain lessons (classes) without excuse in the last 12 months?

Ho1: There is no significant dependency between gender and skipping school or (b) certain lessons (classes) without excuse in the last 12 months.

Table 7 Frequencies and percentages of dependency between gender and skipping school in the last 12 months

I have skipped school without excuse in the last 12 months			
	Always or often	Seldom or never	Total
Male: Count	43	286	329
% of total	5.7 %	37.8 %	43.5 %
Female: Count	29	398	427
% of total	3.8 %	52.6 %	56.5 %
Total: Count	72	684	756
%	9.5 %	90.5 %	100 %

Table 8 Chi-square and significance of the dependency between gender and skipping school in the last 12 months

Chi-square value	df	Significance
8.501	1	p < 0.01

Table 8 indicates that there is a significant dependency (on the 1% level) between gender and skipping school in the previous 12 months. Thus, the null-hypothesis may be rejected. In this regard, Table 7 shows a trend that significantly more females (52.6%) than males (37.8%) seldom or never skipped school without excuse in the last 12 months. In other words, more males than females skipped school.

Table 9 Frequencies and percentages of dependency between gender and skipping class in the last 12 months

I have skipped classes without excuse in the last 12 months			
	Always or often	Seldom or never	Total
Male:	Count 61	286	329
	% of total 8 %	35.4 %	43.4 %
Female:	Count 48	381	429
	% of total 6.3 %	50.3 %	56.6 %
Total:	Count 109	649	758 %
	% of total 14.4 %	85.6 %	100 %

Table 10 Chi-square and significance of the dependency between gender and skipping class without excuse in the last 12 months

Chi-square value	df	Significance
8.175	1	p < 0.01

From Table 10, it is observed that there is a significant dependency (on 1% level) between gender and skipping class in the previous 12 months. The null-hypothesis may thus be rejected. Accordingly, the same table shows that significantly more females (50.3%) than males (35.4%) seldom or never skipped class without excuse in the last 12 months. In other words, more males than females skipped class 12 months prior to the study.

In summary: Tables 7 and 9 indicate that more males than females always or often skipped school and class in the 12 months preceding the research.

Further, the results indicate that secondary-school learners engage in both blanket and post-registration truancy (see section 2.4) and that the number of learners involved in the latter might even be higher (see section 2.3 4, par. 6).

Research problem 2

Is there significant dependency between *the learners having learning problems* and (a) skipping school or (b) certain lessons (classes) without excuse in the last 12 months?

Ho2: There is no significant dependency between *the learners having learning problems* and (a) skipping school or (b) certain lessons (classes) without excuse in the last 12 months.

Table 11 Frequencies and percentages of dependency between the learners having learning problems and learners skipping school without excuse in the last 12 months

		I have skipped school without excuse in the last 12 months		
		Always or often	Seldom or never	Total
I have learning problems	Strongly disagree/ disagree	Count	400	429
		% of total	3.8%	52.9%
	Agree/strongly agree	Count	284	327
		% of total	5.7%	37.6%
	Total	Count	684	756
		% of total	90.5%	100.0%

Table 12 Chi-square and significance of the dependency between learners having learning problems and skipping school without excuse in the last 12 months

Chi-square value	df	Significance
8.793	1	p < 0.01

From Table 12 it can be seen that there is a significant dependency (on the 1% level) between learners having learning problems and skipping school without excuse in the last 12 months. Therefore, the null-hypothesis may be rejected. In this regard, Table 11 indicates that more learners who always or often skipped school without excuse agree or strongly agree (5.7%) than strongly disagree or agree (3.8%) that they have learning problems. Regarding the learners who seldom or never skipped school without excuse, more tend to strongly disagree or disagree (52.9%) than agree or strongly agree (37.6%) that they have problems. These results appear consistent with the literature (see section 2.6.1.6) in that learners who play truant were found to have difficulty with schoolwork.

Table 13 Frequencies and percentages of dependency between the learners having learning problems and skipping certain lessons (classes) without excuse in the last 12 months.

		I have skipped class without excuse in the last 12 months		
		Always or often	Seldom or never	Total
I have learning problems	Strongly disagree/ disagree	Count 48 6.3%	381 50.3%	429 56.6%
	Agree/strongly agree	Count 61 8.0%	268 35.4%	329 43.4%
	Total	Count 109 14.4%	649 85.6%	758 100.0%

Table 14 Chi-square and significance of the dependency between learners having learning problems and skipping certain lessons (classes) without excuse in the last 12 months

Chi-square value	df	Significance
8.175	1	p < 0.01

Table 14 indicates that there is a significant dependency (on the 1% level) between learners having learning problems and skipping certain lessons (classes) in the last 12 months. This suggests that the null-hypothesis may be rejected. With regard to Table 13, it appears that an existing trend is that, amongst learners who have always or often skipped certain lessons (classes) during the last 12 months, significantly more learners strongly agree or agree (8%) than disagree or strongly disagree (6.3%) that they have learning problems. Furthermore, of the learners who reported that they seldom or never skipped certain lessons or classes, more tend to strongly disagree or disagree (50.3%) than agree or strongly agree (35.4%) that they have learning problems. Therefore, the analyses show that more learners tend to skip school when they have learning problems. These results are consistent with the literature (see section 2.6.1.6).

In summary: The findings show that more learners with learning problems tend to skip the whole school day and certain lessons or classes. That is consistent with the research, which revealed that learners with learning problems who play truant tend to skip school and certain lessons in order to avoid the anxiety associated with difficult schoolwork.

Research problem 3

Is there a significant dependency between the *family structure in which the learner lives* and (a) skipping school or (b) certain lessons (classes) without excuse in the last 12 months?

Ho3: There is no significant dependency between the family structure in which the learner lives and (a) skipping school or (b) certain lessons (classes) in the last 12 months.

Table 14 Frequencies and percentages of dependency between the family structure in which the learner lives and (a) skipping school in the last 12 months

I have skipped school without excuse in the last 12 months				
		Always or often	Seldom or never	Total
With whom do you live?	Both parents	Count	36	343
		% of total	4.8%	45.5%
	One parent	Count	21	224
		% of total	2.8%	29.7
	Grandparents	Count	10	78
		% of total	1.3%	10.3%
	Other	Count	5	37
		% of total	.7%	4.9%
	TOTAL	Count	72	682
		% of total	9.5	90.5%
				100.0%

Table 15 Chi-square and significance of the dependency between the family structure in which the learner lives and (a) skipping school

Chi-square value	df	Significance
0.878	3	p > 0,05

Table 15 reveals that there is no significant dependency ($p > 0,05$) between the family structure in which the learner lives and skipping school without excuse in the last 12 months. Thus, the null hypothesis is not rejected. In Table 14, a trend indicates a slight difference between the type of family structure (both parents = 4.8%; one parent = 2.8%; grandparents = 1.3%; other = 0.7 %) and skipping school without excuse. This research indicates that children who live with single parents are not necessarily more likely to

engage in truant behaviour (see section 2.6.32 par. 1 and 3). Learners living with any type of parent skip school to the same degree.

A trend similar to the above regarding the family structure in which learner lives and skipping class without real excuse in the last 12 months emerged. The results of the analysis are the Chi-square value of 6.096 (5% level) and the significance ($p > 0, 05$), which shows that dependency between the family structure in which the learner lives and skipping class is not significant. That is, learners living in any family structure (both parents = 6%; one parent = 5%; grandparents = 2, 5%; other = 0.9 %) always or often skipped classes almost to the same extent in the twelve months preceding the study.

In summary: The findings presented in Table15 indicate that there is no significant dependency between the family structure in which the learner lives and (a) skipping school in the last 12 months. Another analysis discussed above (although not tabulated), also shows that the dependency between the family structures in which the learner lives and skipping class in the last 12 months is not significant. Therefore, learners living in families of all types of parenting structure engage in both types of truancy to the same degree. Any learner may always, often, seldom or never play truant irrespective of whom he or she lives with. It is thus not always true that more learners living in single-parent families than those living in other family types tend to play truant

Research problem 4

Is there a significant dependency between *parents expecting the learner to do well at school* and (a) skipping school or (b) certain lessons (classes) in the last 12 months?

Ho4: There is no significant dependency between parents expecting the learner to do well at school and (a) skipping school or (b) certain lessons (classes) in the last 12 months.

Table 16 Frequencies and percentages of dependency between parents expecting the learner to do well at school and skipping school without excuse in the last 12 months

		I have skipped class without excuse in the last 12 months		
		Always or often	Seldom or never	Total
Do parents expect you to do well at school?	Always/often	Count % of total	68 9.0%	675 89.3% 98.3%
	Seldom /never	Count % of total	4 0.5%	9 1.2% 1.7 %
	Total	Count % of total	72 9.5%	684 90.5% 100 %

Table 17 Chi-square and significance of the dependency between parents expecting the learner to do well at school and skipping school without an excuse in the last 12 months

Chi-square value	df	Significance
6.929	1	p < 0,01

From Table 17 it is clear that there is a significant dependency (on the 1% level) between parents expecting the learner to do well at school and skipping school without a real excuse. Therefore, the null-hypothesis may be rejected. In this regard, Table 16 indicates that more learners (89.3%) whose parents always or often expect them to do well at school seldom or never skipped school without excuse in the last 12 months.

On the other hand, a Chi-square value of value of 2.886 indicates that there is no significant dependency ($p > 0.05$) between parents expecting the learners to do well at school and skipping class without excuse in the previous 12 months.

In summary: The dependency between parents expecting the learner to do well at school is significant with regard to skipping school while it is not significant regarding skipping classes in the last 12 months. Therefore, the parents' expectations of learners' ability to do well at school tend to have an effect on skipping the whole school day.

Research problem 5

Is there a significant dependency between *the degree of parental involvement at school* and (a) skipping school or (b) certain lessons (classes) in the last 12 months?

Ho5: There is no significant dependency between the degrees of parental involvement at school and (a) skipping school or (b) certain lessons (classes) in the last 12 months

Table 18 Frequencies and percentages of dependency between the degrees of parental involvement at school and skipping classes in the last 12 months

			I have skipped class without excuse in the last 12 months		
			Always or often	Seldom or never	Total
What is the degree of your parents involvement at your school?	Always/often	Count	74	371	445
		% of total	9.8%	49.1%	58.9%
	Seldom/never	Count	35	275	310
		% of total	4.6%	36.4%	41.1%
	Total	Count	109	646	755
		% of total	14.4%	85.6%	100.0%

Table 19 Chi-square and significant dependency between the degree of parental involvement at school and skipping classes in the last 12 months

Chi-square value	df	Significance
4.216	1	p < 0.05

Table 19 indicates a significant dependency (on the 5% level) between the degree of parental involvement at school and skipping classes in the previous 12 months. The null-hypothesis may thus be rejected. It is evident from Table 18 that when parents are always or often involved at school, more learners will report that they seldom or never skipped (49.1%) classes in the previous 12 months than when their parents are seldom or never involved (36.4%). Furthermore, the percentage of learners who seldom or never skipped classes is larger (49.1%) than that of learners who always or often skipped classes (9.8%) when parents are always or often involved at school.

With regard to missing the whole school day, the Chi-square value of 0.841 indicates that there is no significant dependency ($p > 0.05$ on the 5% level) between the degree of parental involvement and skipping school in the last 12 months. Therefore, the null-hypothesis may not be rejected.

In summary: The analysis of results shows that there is a significant dependency between parental involvement at school and skipping classes. Further, there is no significant dependency between parental involvement and skipping the whole school day 12 months prior to data collection. Therefore, learners are likely to be skipping classes for other reasons, such as peer pressure (see section 2.6.3.4). Skipping classes (lessons) is also probably considered less serious than skipping school.

Research problem 6

Is there significant dependency between *how interested parents are in the learner's schoolwork* and (a) skipping school or (b) certain lessons (classes) in the last 12 months?

Ho6: There is no significant dependency between how interested parents are in the learner's schoolwork and (a) skipping school or (b) certain lessons (classes) in the last 12 months.

Table 20 Frequencies and percentages of dependency between how interested parents are in the learner's schoolwork and skipping school in the last 12 months

		I have skipped school without excuse in the last 12 months		
		Always or often	Seldom or never	Total
My parents interested in my school work	Strongly disagree/ disagree	Count % of total	20 2.6%	108 14.3%
	Agree/strongly agree	Count % of total	52 6.9%	576 76.2%
	Total	Count % of total	72 9.5%	684 90.5%
				756 100.0%

Table 21 Chi-square and significance of the dependency between the degree of parents' interest in the learners' school work and skipping school in the last 12 months

Chi-square value	df	Significance
6.657	1	p < 0.05

From Table 21, it appears that there is a significant dependency (on the 5% level) between parents' interest in the learners' schoolwork and skipping school. This indicates

that the null-hypothesis may be rejected. According to Table 20, of the learners who seldom or never missed school, more learners agree or strongly agree (76.2%), than strongly disagree or disagree (14.3%) that parents are interested in their schoolwork. Therefore, parent's interest in schoolwork has an effect on regular attendance.

On the other hand, the Chi-square value of 3.319 shows that there is no significant dependency ($p > 0.05$ on the 5% level) between the degree of parents' interest in schoolwork and skipping classes. The significance is mainly in terms of skipping school. The analysis thus suggests that parent's interest in schoolwork has more effect on skipping school than on skipping classes.

In summary:

- In many respects, most learners seldom or never skipped school when –
 - (i) their parents always or often expect them to do well at school (see Table 17); and
 - (ii) their parents are interested in their schoolwork (see Table 21).
- Learners tend to play truant irrespective of the family structure or the people with whom they live (see Table 15).

Research problem 7

Is there significant dependency between *learners having a good relationship with teachers (educators)* and (a) skipping school or (b) certain lessons (classes) in the last 12 months?

Ho7: There is no significant dependency between *learners having a good relationship with teachers (educators)* and (a) skipping school or (b) certain lessons (classes) in the last 12 months.

Table 22 Frequencies and percentages of dependency between learners having a good relationship with teachers and (a) skipping school in the last 12 months

		I have skipped school without excuse in the last 12 months		
		Always or often	Seldom or never	Total
I have a good relationship with my teachers	Strongly disagree/disagree	Count % of total	25 3.3%	160 21.2%
	Agree/strongly agree	Count % of total	47 6.2%	524 69.3%
	Total	Count % of total	72 9.5%	684 90.5%
				756 100.0%

Table 23 Chi-square and significance of the dependency between learners having good relationships with teachers and skipping school in the last 12 months

Chi-square value	df	Significance
4.525	1	p < 0.05

Table 23 indicates that there is a significance dependency (on the 5% level) between learners having a good relationship with teachers and skipping school in the previous 12 months. Thus, the null-hypothesis may be rejected. In this regard, Table 22 indicates that more learners who agree or strongly agree (69.3%) that they have good relationships with teachers seldom or never skipped school without excuse in the previous 12 months compared to (21.2%) learners who strongly disagree or disagree. Therefore, the results indicate that although there are some learners who will always or often skip school without excuse, as shown in the literature review (see section 2.6.2.6), a good relationship between learners and educators is an important factor for ensuring good attendance.

The majority of learners who took part in the study echo the negative effect of poor teacher-learner relationships on truancy. More respondents state that learners always or

often (69.8%) play truant because of poor relationships with teachers, compared to 29.9% of those stating that this is seldom or never the case (see item 109, Appendix 1).

With regard to post-registration truancy, the Chi-square value of 3.178 indicates that there is no significant dependency ($p > 0.05$ on the 5% level) between learners having a good relationship with teachers and skipping classes in the last 12 months.

In summary: The effect of a good learner-educator relationship is significant mainly in terms of skipping the whole school day rather than skipping certain lessons or classes. However, such a relationship may not determine whether learners will always or often skip school, but will help to create a situation where most learners seldom or never skip school.

The trend that emerged is that the quality of the relationship between learners and teachers has more of an effect on regular attendance (seldom or never skipped school or classes) than on the level of truancy (always or often skipped school or classes). Most learners agree that having a good relationship with educators is a recipe for regular attendance.

4.5 Conclusion

A summary of the research findings is presented in this chapter. The next chapter will deal with the following:

- Conclusions of the research drawn from both the literature study and empirical findings.
- Recommendations for the management of truancy in schools.
- Limitations of the current research and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary of literature findings

5.1.1 Introduction

The study was undertaken out of concern about truancy in secondary schools, the apparent lack of proper understanding of the phenomenon of truancy, and the resultant poor management. The researcher explored the phenomenon of truancy, contributing or causal factors and the approaches that can be used to reduce it. The research results will be used to make recommendations for truancy reduction and future research. This study will therefore guide and inform school administrators and everyone who works with learners of the different types of truancy behaviour and of the approaches that can be used to address truancy in secondary schools.

5.1.2 Nature and extent of truancy

The literature review indicated the following:

- Truancy refers to the phenomena that result when a learner fails to attend school or certain lessons without the knowledge or permission of the school authorities and his parents. The literature differentiates between two major types of truancy, namely blanket truancy and post-registration truancy.
- Blanket truancy results when the learner skips (misses) the whole school day without authorisation. On the other hand, the learner is said to have engaged in post-registration truancy when he or she comes to school, but leaves or skips classes that follow after being marked present on the class register. Learners who engage in post-registration truancy therefore do not skip the whole school day but select certain lessons or classes that they "bunk".

- The literature study indicates that various countries experience problems with both blanket truancy and post-registration truancy. It is further indicated that there is no gender difference in terms of the rate of truancy. Male and female learners engage in both blanket and post-registration truancy to the same degree (see section 2.2.2)
- As far as the rate of truancy in terms of schools' location is concerned, the literature review shows that truancy is a problem in all secondary schools, irrespective of whether they are in urban, suburban or rural areas. (See section 2.2.3) However, the rate or levels of truancy can vary from school to school within the same area.
- More learners engage in post-registration truancy than in blanket truancy. Most learners tend to bunk lessons after the register has been marked. It has been found that some learners skip one class about once every two weeks and then select a different class to bunk the next time. Furthermore, post-registration truancy can easily lead to blanket truancy.
- With regard to the lessons that learners skip, some studies indicate that most learners tend to skip lessons in Mathematics, Science and English.
- Learners engage in various activities while truanting, and the most popular destination is their friends' homes. The majority of learners do not easily disclose the activities they engage in while not at school (see section 2.5).

5.1.3 Factors contributing to truancy

In Chapter 2, the perspectives or factors that contribute to truancy are categorised as follows:

- (i) Personality aspects
- (ii) School factors

(iii) Family and other social factors

5.1.3.1 Personality aspects

Every individual has certain characteristics that determine his or her behaviour in different contexts. These characteristics are regarded as personality aspects because they are intrinsic to the learner. Personality aspects that were found to predispose learners towards truancy are anxiety and fear, poor social skills, low self-esteem, conduct disorders, learning difficulties and cognitive learning style.

5.1.3.2 School factors

The school environment and climate contribute towards determining whether or not learners become truants. Environment and climate include aspects of the physical environment, teaching and learning situations, educator-learner relationships and peer relations.

Aspects of the school's physical environment that contribute to truancy are dilapidated school buildings, poor facilities, school size and movement between classes during lesson changes. Teaching and learning situations include classroom management, educator-learner relationships, and teachers' instructional approach, while bullying is an aspect that has to do with peer relations.

5.1.3.3 Family and other social factors

Family factors that contribute to truancy are the socio-economic status of parents, marital status of parents, poor parental involvement and supervision.

Social factors that were found to cause truancy are peer influence, violence and drug abuse.

5.2 Approaches that are used to manage truancy in secondary schools

5.2.1 Personality aspects

According to the literature, counselling and therapy, either in groups or on an individual basis, proved to be effective in reducing truancy.

Interventions in the form of tutoring and mentoring systems for learners who have learning difficulties also helped to address the problem of truancy in schools.

5.2.2 Interventions at schools

Approaches that some secondary schools use to reduce truancy include –

- the use of reward systems to reinforce regular attendance;
- effective monitoring, registration and recording of attendance;
- welcoming learners back to school after a period of absence and helping them to catch up with schoolwork;
- the districts' student welfare service established school-based support services, which are run effectively; and
- schools formed homework clubs to help learners deal with homework

5.2.3 Interdepartmental cooperation and government initiatives

- The departments of Education and Justice in the United States of America prepared a manual with guidelines that schools can use to manage truancy. The British government not only provided the funding that was reserved for combating poor attendance, but also launched a strategy document for tackling truancy.
- Various community agencies, such as shopkeepers, the radio and the bus Companies, work with Education Welfare Officers and schools in reducing

truancy (see section 2.7.3, par. 4).

5.2.4 Acting fast on learner absence

This involves instituting follow-up actions against learners with three unauthorised absences and providing short-term counselling and parenting skills training where needed.

5.2.5 Introducing loitering ordinance

Loitering ordinances helped to reduce high-school dropout rates in addition to improving attendance rates in the USA (see section 2.7.5).

5.2.6 Attendance or truancy officers

Attendance rates at schools increased when truancy specialists were appointed and assigned to work with cases of truants and their families.

5.2.7 Prosecution

In some cases, prosecuting parents of truants is regarded as a measure of reducing unexcused absence.

5.2.8 Awareness campaigns

Members of the public are informed about the need for regular school attendance through various forms of the media.

5.2.9 Whole-school development

All the above strategies could be combined to form an all-encompassing strategy known as the whole-school development approach (see section 2.7.9). The

success stories where this approach was used prove that all role-players have to work jointly in order to reduce the rate of truancy in schools. In this way, we will ensure that dropout rates are decreased and learners are prepared to take their rightful places in the country's economy as either employees or employers

5.3 Summary of the finding of the empirical investigation

The following conclusions are based on the research results presented in Chapter 4:

- a. The majority of the respondents (72.6%) state that learners always or often stay absent from school without permission from parents and the school authorities. This leads to the conclusion that blanket truancy occurs at the schools studied (see Table 1). Furthermore, 74.7% of the respondents state that Grade 10 learners always or often engage in post-registration truancy (see Table 3).
- b. It is also evident that more learners engage in blanket truancy than in post-registration truancy (see Table 2 and Table 5). These results differ from the literature review, which suggests that the rate of post-registration truancy is higher than that of blanket truancy.
- c. Regarding the subject or learning area that learners bunk, results indicate that most learners tend to skip Mathematics and Biology lessons (see Table 4).
- d. Most truants spend their time at their friends' homes when not at school (see Table 6).
- e. Significantly more males than females engaged in blanket and post-registration truancy 12 months prior to the study (see Tables 7 and 9).
- f. Results show that there is a significant dependency between the learners having learning problems and skipping school (see Table 15) and skipping certain lessons

(classes) in the last 12 months (see Table16), since learners who have learning problems always or often get involved in both types of truancy.

- g. The rate of both types of truancy is not significantly dependent on the type of family structure in which the learner lives. Learners get involved in truancy irrespective of whether they live with one parent, both parents or extended family members. Therefore, truants may come from any type of family.
- h. According to results of the current study, there is a significant dependency between parents' expectation of learners' ability to do well at school and blanket truancy. That is, significantly more learners seldom or never skipped school when their parents expect them to do well at school. Similarly, the blanket truancy rate tends to increase when parents do not expect their children to do well at school. On the other hand, the rate of post-registration truancy does not depend on parental expectation of the learners' performance at school. Therefore, learners engage in post-registration truancy irrespective of the academic expectations their parents have of them.
- i. The results of this study suggest that there is a significant dependency between the degree of parental involvement at school and post-registration truancy. In other words, learners whose parents are always or often involved at school would seldom or never engage in post-registration truancy, while those whose parents are seldom or never involved have always skipped certain lessons. However, the results indicate that blanket truancy is not significantly dependent upon the degree of parental involvement at school. Therefore, parental involvement at school appears to have a more marked effect on post-registration truancy than on blanket truancy.
- j. The study indicates that blanket truancy is significantly dependent upon parents' interest in their children's schoolwork. Learners whose parents are always interested in their schoolwork never engaged in blanket truancy. Conversely, the

rate of post-registration truancy is not significantly dependent upon parents' interest in learners' schoolwork.

- k. According to the results, significantly more learners who have a good relationship with educators seldom or never skipped school 12 months prior to the study. On the other hand, learners engage in post-registration truancy irrespective of the kind of relationship they have with their educators. Thus, the results suggest that a good relationship between the learners and educators is more important for reducing blanket truancy than post-registration truancy.

5.4 Recommendations

1. Addressing learning difficulties should be included in all interventions that are aimed at reducing truancy. Educators can be equipped to identify and assist learners who have learning difficulties through in-service and pre-service training. Through training, educators can become capable of using various instructional approaches that accommodate different learning styles and thereby proactively reduce the level of truancy. In addition, educators can embark on a programme where some learners are trained to become learning mentors who will assist peers to understand schoolwork better. Educators in secondary schools must be able to identify and assist academically at-risk learners as well as those that have behavioural problems. In this way, schools would be able to intervene before post-registration truancy turns into blanket truancy or even school dropout.
2. The district's Education Support Services (ESS) must ensure that school-based support teams are established and efficiently run. The ESS specialists should then provide in-service training that is aimed at preparing educators to deal with the challenges mentioned in 1 and 2. Training in life-skills education should also be offered. Such training should not only focus on HIV/AIDS issues. Topics pertaining to basic skills, personal and career counselling, parental guidance, bullying, discipline and truancy need to be included in the training modules.

Educators who received training can provide basic counselling to individuals and parents or refer serious cases to the district's ESS.

3. Schools need to arrange and conduct training workshops for parents in order to inform them about their roles with regard to schoolwork, to enlighten them on how to assist children with schoolwork or to monitor their performance and attendance. The school-based support teams can coordinate the training and involve the district's ESS and other officers that are responsible for dealing with truancy.
4. The Department of Education should not only appoint attendance officers, but also train them properly, so that they can, with other officials, jointly deal effectively with truancy matters.
5. Secondary schools should forge a link between parents and the community, and involve other government departments as well as the private sector in creating an awareness about truancy and its negative consequences. For instance, it might be helpful to work with non-governmental organisations like the National Institute for Crime Rehabilitation of Offenders (NICRO), since truancy is associated with substance abuse and other criminal behaviours. The NICRO can be requested to offer counselling services to truants and their parents
6. Secondary schools need to use reactive and proactive approaches when dealing with truancy. For instance, parents should participate in the drawing up of conduct policies. These policies must include a specific section on procedures, besides those prescribed by the Department of Education, that will be used to monitor attendance, as well as incentives that will be offered as rewards for regular attendance. Such rewards can be presented at schools' prize-giving days or be publicised in any way

7. With regard to the state's intervention, lessons learnt from other countries must be taken into account when addressing matters related to school attendance and truancy, in particular. Class registers should be revised to enable better recording of lesson attendance.

5.5 Contributions of the study

- Clarification of concepts: The study revealed that truancy is unauthorised absence, which can be differentiated into blanket truancy and post-registration truancy. Blanket truancy is absence from the whole school day without excuse or permission, while post-registration truancy involves absence from lessons for a certain period of the school day.
- Summary of the literature: The literature study provides the necessary background to various perspectives of truancy by different researchers and the approaches for reducing the rate of truancy.
- Development of measuring instrument: The instrument can be used in other areas as a tool for further research or be adapted for use in the evaluation of truancy intervention programmes.
- Empirical research results: The results indicate areas that should be attended to when addressing the issue of truancy, for instance, children's learning problems, parental involvement and educator-learner relationships.
- Compilation of ideas for improving attendance rates: Educators, school administrators and psychologists can use the results and recommendations when compiling programmes for improving attendance.

5.6 Limitations of the study

Regarding the research group, only Grade 10 learners at three schools were included in the sample. Furthermore, some learners were absent at the time of data collection. Therefore, the sample does not allow us to make a generalisation to a larger population of

all secondary schools. More schools, learners and grades could be included in the research in the future.

The measuring instrument could also be expanded to include the measuring of more variables and hypotheses.

5.7 Conclusion

This study indicates the following about the nature of truancy and life worlds of truants at secondary school:

Truancy appears to be a universal problem. Generally, two concepts are used to differentiate between the main ways in which learners stay absent from school without excuse, namely blanket truancy and post-registration truancy. Research indicates that secondary-school truants do not come from any particular socio-economic background. Learners play truant due to predisposing intrinsic and extrinsic factors. The negative consequences of truancy include poor scholastic performance, criminal behaviour and school dropout.

All role-players in education will need to work together, make a concerted effort in reducing truancy and continue to learn from the experience of others when embarking on truancy intervention projects.

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APPENDIX 1

Dear Learner

I am doing a study to find out about things you do that might affect your education. There are some questions that have to do with your parents, home, school and community. The only way to learn more about these aspects is if each learner gives honest answers to this questionnaire.

Will you please spend few minutes of your time to complete the attached questionnaire? I would greatly appreciate your cooperation.

Remember:

1. This is not a test, but a questionnaire, so there are no right or wrong answers.
2. It is a **confidential** questionnaire and nobody besides you will know what your answers are.
3. Respond to each statement or question by indicating the extent of your agreement or disagreement. Mark an X on or next to your choice of answers on the sheet.
4. Answer the questions frankly and truthfully. Never give an untrue answer because you think it is the cool thing to say.
5. Please answer the questions as quickly as you can. Do not spend time puzzling about them. Give the first, natural answer, as it comes to you.
6. Do not skip any questions.

Thank you for your time and cooperation.

The researcher

Write down your school EMIS number:

A. BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

1. What gender are you?

1 Male	2 Female
-----------	-------------

2. What is your age?

1 15 yrs	2 16 yrs	3 17 yrs	4 18 yrs	5 19 yrs and above
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3. In what school grade are you?

1 Grade 10	2 Grade 11
---------------	---------------

4. What grade did you repeat at this or any other school?

1 Primary school	2 Grade 8	3 Grade 9	4 Grade 10	5 Grade 11	6 None
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5. Where do you stay?

1 Home	2 Hostel	3 Private boarding	4 Other
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6. With whom do you live?

1 Both parents	2 One parent	3 Grandparents	4 Other
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7. What is your parents' marital status?

1 Never married, living with friend	2 Never married, single	3 Divorced and remarried	4 Divorced but not married	5 Married	6 Widow	7 Widower	8 Widow, remarried	9 Widower, remarried
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8. What is your position in your family?

1 Only child	2 Eldest child	3 More or less middle	4 Youngest child
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9. What is your guardian/father's occupation?

1 Clerical	2 Professional (e.g. teacher, lawyer, etc.)	3 Technical (e.g. carpenter, painter, etc.)	4 General labourer (casual)	5 Self-employed	6 Unemployed	7 Pensioner
---------------	--	--	--------------------------------	--------------------	-----------------	----------------

10. What is your guardian/mother's occupation?

1 Clerical	2 Professional (e.g. teacher, lawyer, etc.)	3 Technical (e.g. carpenter, painter, etc.)	4 General labourer (casual)	5 Self-employed	6 Unemployed	7 Pensioner
---------------	--	--	--------------------------------	--------------------	-----------------	----------------

11. What type of working hours does your guardian/father's occupation entail?

1 Full day	2 Half day	3 Shifts	4 Other
---------------	---------------	-------------	------------

12. What type of working hours does your guardian/mother's occupation entail?

1 Full day	2 Half day	3 Shifts	4 Other
---------------	---------------	-------------	------------

13. What is the educational level of your guardian/parent that lives with you?

1 Tertiary education	2 Grade 12	3 Grade 10	4 Grade 7 or lower	5 No formal education	6 Other
----------------------------	---------------	---------------	--------------------------	-----------------------------	------------

14. How many children are there in your family/household (you included)?

1 More than six	2 Six	3 Five	4 Four	5 Three	6 Less than three
--------------------	----------	-----------	-----------	------------	-------------------------

15. How many people are staying with you in your home altogether (guests excluded)?

1 More than six (you included)	2 Six (you included)	3 Five (you included)	4 Four (you included)	5 Three (you included)	6 Less than three (you included)
--------------------------------------	----------------------------	-----------------------------	-----------------------------	------------------------------	--

16. What type of housing do you live in?

1 Permanent brick structure	2 Permanent corrugated structure	3 Temporary corrugated structure	4 Other type of housing
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17. How many rooms does your family house have?

1 One	2 Two	3 Three or more
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18. Is the sitting room in your home also used as a bedroom?

1 Yes	2 No
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19. Which language do you usually speak at home?

1 English	2 Afrikaans	3 English and Afrikaans	4 English & one African language	5 Afrikaans & one African language	6 One African language
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20. How often do you as a family have meals together?

1 More than 4 times a week	2 3 x per week	3 2 x per week	4 1 x per week	5 At least once a day	6 Never
----------------------------------	-------------------	-------------------	-------------------	-----------------------------	------------

21. How often does your parent/guardian drink liquor?

1 More than 4 times a week	2 3 x per week	3 2 x per week	4 1 x per week	5 At least once a day	6 Never
----------------------------------	-------------------	-------------------	-------------------	-----------------------------	------------

22. How often do your parents/guardians fight with each other?

1 More than 4 times a week	2 More than 2 x per week	3 1 x per week	4 Daily	5 Never	6 Do not know
----------------------------------	--------------------------------	-------------------	------------	------------	------------------

23. How often (from Monday to Friday) is your parent not at home after six o'clock in the evening?

1 Never absent from home during week days	2 One evening absent	3 Two evenings absent	4 Three evenings absent	5 Four evenings absent	6 Five evenings absent
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24. How often do you as a family communicate meaningfully about daily news, TV programmes or other topics of mutual concern?

1 Always	2 Often	3 Seldom	4 Never
-------------	------------	-------------	------------

25. How often do your parents/guardians discuss your future career with you?

1 Always	2 Often	3 Seldom	4 Never
-------------	------------	-------------	------------

26. What is the degree of your parents' involvement at your school (e.g. attendance of meetings, sport or extramural activities?)

1 Always	2 Often	3 Seldom	4 Never
-------------	------------	-------------	------------

27. How often do your parents/guardians assist you with your schoolwork?

1 Always	2 Often	3 Seldom	4 Never
-------------	------------	-------------	------------

28. Do your parents/guardians ask you about what you did at school?

1 Always	2 Often	3 Seldom	4 Never
-------------	------------	-------------	------------

29. Do your parents / guardian make sure that you attend school regularly?

1 Always	2 Often	3 Seldom	4 Never
-------------	------------	-------------	------------

30. Do you have available resources to consult when doing homework or preparing for assignments, e.g. a dictionary or reference books?

1 Always	2 Often	3 Seldom	4 Never
-------------	------------	-------------	------------

31. Do your parents discuss your schoolwork and test results with you?

1 Always	2 Often	3 Seldom	4 Never
-------------	------------	-------------	------------

32. Do your parents / guardian help you with school work when needed?

1 Always	2 Often	3 Seldom	4 Never
-------------	------------	-------------	------------

33. Do your parents expect you to do well at school?

1 Always	2 Often	3 Seldom	4 Never
-------------	------------	-------------	------------

34. Do your parents initiate a visit to your school to discuss your progress with educators?

1 Always	2 Often	3 Seldom	4 Never
-------------	------------	-------------	------------

35. Do your parents go to school to meet your teachers when invited to do so?

1 Always	2 Often	3 Seldom	4 Never
-------------	------------	-------------	------------

36. On average learners at my school stay absent without permission from parents and the school

1 Always	2 Often	3 Seldom	4 Never
-------------	------------	-------------	------------

37. I have skipped the whole school day without a real excuse in the last 12 months

1 Always	2 Often	3 Seldom	4 Never
-------------	------------	-------------	------------

38. I have skipped certain lessons without a real excuse in the last 12 months

1 Always	2 Often	3 Seldom	4 Never
-------------	------------	-------------	------------

39. Learners in my present grade bunk certain classes

1 Always	2 Often	3 Seldom	4 Never
-------------	------------	-------------	------------

40. How many learners stay absent from school without permission in your class per week?

1 Four or more	2 Three	3 Two	4 One	5 None
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41. How many learners stay absent from certain lessons per week?

1 Four or more	2 Three	3 Two	4 One	5 None
-------------------	------------	----------	----------	-----------

42. The police stops you and ask you reasons for not being at school when you should be (during school hours) ...

1 Always	2 Often	3 Seldom	4 Never
-------------	------------	-------------	------------

43. Parents are aware of their children who bunk school

1 Always	2 Often	3 Seldom	4 Never
-------------	------------	-------------	------------

44. Learners avoid missing school without a real excuse because they do not want to get into trouble with parents.

1 Always	2 Often	3 Seldom	4 Never
-------------	------------	-------------	------------

45. Parents are aware of their children who bunk classes.

1 Always	2 Often	3 Seldom	4 Never
-------------	------------	-------------	------------

46. Learners do not attend school regularly in order to avoid the difficult schoolwork.

1 Always	2 Often	3 Seldom	4 Never
-------------	------------	-------------	------------

47. Learners who bunk classes go missing after the class register has been marked.

1 Always	2 Often	3 Seldom	4 Never
-------------	------------	-------------	------------

48. How many learners bunk the classes after the register has been marked?

1 Four or more	2 Three	3 Two	4 One	5 None
-------------------	------------	----------	----------	-----------

49. Learners bunk school because they are afraid of bullies.

1 Always	2 Often	3 Seldom	4 Never
-------------	------------	-------------	------------

50. Learners in my school do not attend school regularly because school is boring.

1 Always	2 Often	3 Seldom	4 Never
-------------	------------	-------------	------------

51. Learners do not attend school regularly because they do not like school.

1 Always	2 Often	3 Seldom	4 Never
-------------	------------	-------------	------------

52. Those who do not come to school regularly do so because friends ask them to stay away.

1 Always	2 Often	3 Seldom	4 Never
-------------	------------	-------------	------------

53. Those who miss school in my class do so when they are late.

1 Always	2 Often	3 Seldom	4 Never
-------------	------------	-------------	------------

54. Learners bunk school and classes because it is easy to do so without being caught.

1 Always	2 Often	3 Seldom	4 Never
-------------	------------	-------------	------------

55. Learners miss school to avoid certain teachers.

1 Always	2 Often	3 Seldom	4 Never
-------------	------------	-------------	------------

56. I attend school regularly because I enjoy school.

1 Always	2 Often	3 Seldom	4 Never
-------------	------------	-------------	------------

57. I attend all lessons when active participation and interaction are allowed.

1 Always	2 Often	3 Seldom	4 Never
-------------	------------	-------------	------------

58. Learners attend all lessons when they find the work interesting.

1 Always	2 Often	3 Seldom	4 Never
-------------	------------	-------------	------------

59. Learners attend classes which they find relevant and useful for future careers.

1 Always	2 Often	3 Seldom	4 Never
-------------	------------	-------------	------------

60. My teacher contacts my parents/guardian immediately when they do not know my whereabouts.

1 Always	2 Often	3 Seldom	4 Never
-------------	------------	-------------	------------

61. My school demands of me to provide a real excuse for missing school.

1 Always	2 Often	3 Seldom	4 Never
-------------	------------	-------------	------------

62. Adults stop and ask learners reasons for not being at school during school hours.

1 Always	2 Often	3 Seldom	4 Never
-------------	------------	-------------	------------

63. Learners attend lessons when they feel made welcome by teachers.

1 Always	2 Often	3 Seldom	4 Never
-------------	------------	-------------	------------

64. Much of what is taught at school today is irrelevant and unimportant.

1 Strongly disagree	2 Disagree	3 Agree	4 Strongly agree
---------------------------	---------------	------------	---------------------

65. Even if one tries hard, one will never understand much of what is taught at school.

1 Strongly disagree	2 Disagree	3 Agree	4 Strongly agree
---------------------------	---------------	------------	---------------------

66. The atmosphere in the classroom plays an important role in determining how one performs academically.

1 Strongly disagree	2 Disagree	3 Agree	4 Strongly agree
---------------------------	---------------	------------	---------------------

67. One achieves better results in a small school than a larger one.

1 Strongly disagree	2 Disagree	3 Agree	4 Strongly agree
---------------------------	---------------	------------	---------------------

68. I attend school in order to satisfy my parents.

1 Strongly disagree	2 Disagree	3 Agree	4 Strongly agree
---------------------------	---------------	------------	---------------------

69. Homework will only be done if parents check whether it is done.

1 Strongly disagree	2 Disagree	3 Agree	4 Strongly agree
---------------------------	---------------	------------	---------------------

70. Teachers like to draw attention to one's failures.

1 Strongly disagree	2 Disagree	3 Agree	4 Strongly agree
---------------------------	---------------	------------	---------------------

71. My family is supportive regarding my academic career.

1 Strongly disagree	2 Disagree	3 Agree	4 Strongly agree
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72. I am wasting my time at school.

1 Strongly disagree	2 Disagree	3 Agree	4 Strongly agree
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73. I take up a parental role at home.

1 Strongly disagree	2 Disagree	3 Agree	4 Strongly agree
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74. The social attitudes and values in my home differ from the attitudes and values set by my school.

1 Strongly disagree	2 Disagree	3 Agree	4 Strongly agree
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75. My school is well equipped to meet my educational needs.

1 Strongly disagree	2 Disagree	3 Agree	4 Strongly agree
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76. I am satisfied with the academic standard of my school.

1 Strongly disagree	2 Disagree	3 Agree	4 Strongly agree
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77. My father is a good role model to me.

1 Strongly disagree	2 Disagree	3 Agree	4 Strongly agree
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78. My mother is a good role model to me.

1 Strongly disagree	2 Disagree	3 Agree	4 Strongly agree
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79. My friends persuade me to do things that I don't want to do.

1 Strongly disagree	2 Disagree	3 Agree	4 Strongly agree
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80. Achievements are under-emphasised by my parents/guardian.

1 Strongly disagree	2 Disagree	3 Agree	4 Strongly agree
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81. I am exposed to violence at home.

1 Strongly disagree	2 Disagree	3 Agree	4 Strongly agree
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82. I am exposed to violence in my community.

1 Strongly disagree	2 Disagree	3 Agree	4 Strongly agree
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83. I concentrate well on my schoolwork.

1 Strongly disagree	2 Disagree	3 Agree	4 Strongly agree
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84. I am detrimentally affected by the pressure exerted on me by my friends.

1 Strongly disagree	2 Disagree	3 Agree	4 Strongly agree
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85. I have learning problems.

1 Strongly disagree	2 Disagree	3 Agree	4 Strongly agree
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86. My parents have time for me and my problems.

1 Strongly disagree	2 Disagree	3 Agree	4 Strongly agree
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87. My parents are interested in my schoolwork.

1 Strongly disagree	2 Disagree	3 Agree	4 Strongly agree
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88. My relationship with my family members is good.

1 Strongly disagree	2 Disagree	3 Agree	4 Strongly agree
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89. I feel humiliated by other learners at school.

1 Strongly disagree	2 Disagree	3 Agree	4 Strongly agree
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90. I have a good relationship with teachers at school.

1 Strongly disagree	2 Disagree	3 Agree	4 Strongly agree
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91. I am concerned about my parents' relationship with each other.

1 Strongly disagree	2 Disagree	3 Agree	4 Strongly agree
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92. I play truant (stay away at school for no reason).

1 Strongly disagree	2 Disagree	3 Agree	4 Strongly agree
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93. I arrived late at school without a real excuse.

1 Strongly disagree	2 Disagree	3 Agree	4 Strongly agree
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94. I was marked absent when I was late for school.

1 Strongly disagree	2 Disagree	3 Agree	4 Strongly agree
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95. I skipped a day of school without a real excuse.

1 Always	2 Often	3 Seldom	4 Never
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96. I skipped a lesson without a real excuse.

1 Always	2 Often	3 Seldom	4 Never
-------------	------------	-------------	------------

97. How many learners in your school stay away from school without a real excuse?

1 None	2 Few	3 some	4 most
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98. How many of your friends smoke dagga?

1 None	2 Few	3 Some	4 Most
-----------	----------	-----------	-----------

99. How many of your friends drink liquor?

1 None	2 Few	3 Some	4 Most
-----------	----------	-----------	-----------

100. How many of your classmates smoke dagga?

1 None	2 Few	3 Some	4 Most
-----------	----------	-----------	-----------

101. How many of your classmates drink liquor?

1 None	2 Few	3 Some	4 Most
-----------	----------	-----------	-----------

102. How many of your classmates smoke cigarettes?

1 None	2 Few	3 Some	4 Most
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103. My school reward learners for good/regular attendance.

1 Always	2 Often	3 Seldom	4 Never
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104. Teachers help learners with poor reading skills at this school.

1 Always	2 Often	3 Seldom	4 Never
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105. My school has ways of encouraging learners to attend school regularly.

1 Always	2 Often	3 Seldom	4 Never
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106. Teachers help learners with general academic skills.

1 Always	2 Often	3 Seldom	4 Never
-------------	------------	-------------	------------

107. My parents are aware that I skip school without a real reason.

1 Always	2 Often	3 Seldom	4 Never
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108. Learners who bunk classes have friends who bunk classes.

1 Always	2 Often	3 Seldom	4 Never
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109. Learners play truant because of poor relationships with teachers.

1 Always	2 Often	3 Seldom	4 Never
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110. It is easy to play truant because of the inconsistent marking of registers.

1 Always	2 Often	3 Seldom	4 Never
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111. It is easy to bunk classes because there is no follow-up on those who bunk.

1 Strongly disagree	2 Disagree	3 Agree	4 Strongly agree
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112. A learner bunks school if he or she cannot cope with adjusting to a new school.

1 Strongly disagree	2 Disagree	3 Agree	4 Strongly agree
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113. A learner bunks school because a particular teacher always picks on him or her.

1 Strongly disagree	2 Disagree	3 Agree	4 Strongly agree
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114. Learners who bunk school get involved in criminal activities outside school.

1 Strongly disagree	2 Disagree	3 Agree	4 Strongly agree
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115. Learners bunk classes because of fear of failure and/or its consequences.

1 Strongly disagree	2 Disagree	3 Agree	4 Strongly agree
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116. A learner who misses school without a real excuse lacks confidence in himself or herself.

1 Strongly disagree	2 Disagree	3 Agree	4 Strongly agree
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117. Learners who bunk classes find it exciting to break rules.

1 Strongly disagree	2 Disagree	3 Agree	4 Strongly agree
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118. Those who bunk classes or school have pre-arranged places to go to.

1 Strongly disagree	2 Disagree	3 Agree	4 Strongly agree
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119. Learners play truant because of an ongoing history of school failure that is not being addressed by the school.

1 Strongly disagree	2 Disagree	3 Agree	4 Strongly agree
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120. I am afraid to bunk school because my parents and the school will find out.

1 Strongly disagree	2 Disagree	3 Agree	4 Strongly agree
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121. I cannot get away with lying to my parents and teachers about bunking school.

1 Strongly disagree	2 Disagree	3 Agree	4 Strongly agree
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122. I attend school regularly and never miss a class.

1 Because lessons are interesting	2 Since teachers make me feel special	3 To avoid trouble with parents	4 Otherwise teachers will find out	5 To be educated and employable
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123. Learners who are absent without permission and a real excuse do the following when not at school:

1 Go sit in the park	2 Go to friends' homes	3 Loiter in the streets	4 Hang around shopping malls	5 Do odd jobs
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124. Most learners in my class like to bunk some lessons in this subject or learning area.

1 MML	2 HSS	3 EMS	4 LO	5 LLC	6 NS	7 TECH	8 BIOLOGY	9 Other
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Thank you for completing this questionnaire

APPENDIX 2

Mr du Plessis:

Personal interview, 9 September 2003, Kimberley

Northern Cape High School

Hayston Road

Kimberley

Tel. (053) 832-3314

Ms B J du Toit:

Personal interview, 10 September 2003, Kimberley

William Pescod Secondary School

Church Street

Tel. (053) 832-3362

Mr N Nodoba:

Personal interview, 10 September 2003, Kimberley

Attendance Officer

Francis Baard District Office

Department of Education

Tel. (053) 8745142