Perceptions of Freelancing among Secondary School Students in Lagos: A Qualitative Research Approach[1]

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Abstract

Education comes in various forms with its unique features and importance. However, no matter how education is well packaged, if students do not attend classes regularly; either physically or on-line, the purpose of the curriculum might prove abortive. Freelancing is a purposive staying away from school by a student during school hours with the school uniform on in order to satisfy specific gratification or interest which normal school activities do not meet has become a noticeable phenomenon among students in Lagos State. The intent of this research is to elicit information from students on the reasons why their colleagues freelance and why they go to school with another clothes in their school bags, preparatory to freelancing. The qualitative methodology involved focus group interviews conducted on students. It consisted of a small number of respondents (15) from the target population. Permissions were obtained from school authorities and the purpose of the focus group interview was well explained to students in the group before commencement of the interviews in order to ensure ethical consideration. Population of the study consisted of all senior secondary school students in public secondary schools in Lagos state. Answers from the groups are presented unedited. Responses showed that students perceived the following as concomitants to the colleagues' freelancing: Responses show that students perceived the following as concomitants to their colleagues' freelancing: unfinished assignments, bad influence from peers, fear of being sent back home because of unpaid fees. Nonchalant attitude to school – school is a scam, freelancing is pure pleasure and lateness to school, among other reasons.

Introduction

There is no denying the fact that education has been a hub of various significant activities pertaining to developments and innovations in many countries and that regular school attendance is a sine- qua- non to academic success. Education plays a pivotal role in developing a country in every aspect, be it social, cultural or moral development. Accordingly, the role of education in national development of a country cannot be denied. Education is the platform that manipulates the needed manpower for national development. A developed and

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educated society is the one that has enough manpower and each person occupies his or her rightful position to revolutionize the way people live. According to Obasanjo (2010), education is the route that takes a nation through the culture of productivity by enabling each and every individual to discover the creative potentials in them that they have been gifted naturally and apply the same improvement of the existing skill and technique of performing specific tasks. Education also leads the people to the ultimate satisfaction of being useful to the society they live in. Additionally, a good and sufficient funded education system develops in individuals those values which make for good citizenship, such as honesty, selflessness, tolerance, dedication, hard work and personal integrity, identifying that education despite other good impacts gives moral training as well.

The system of education varies across the globe; in Nigeria, the system of education differs from that of America, Japan, Brazil, Australia, and other nations of the world. Etymologically, the word education is derived from two Latin words "Educare" and "educere" (Doho, 2015). Accordingly, "Educare," means to train, to form, or to mould. In other words, it means the society trains, forms, or to moulds the individual to achieve the social needs and aspirations. "Educere," on the other hand, means to build, to lead, or to develop. This is mostly favored by the humanists who argue that the function of education is to develop the natural potentialities in the child to enable him to function in the society according to his abilities, interests, and needs (Kingdom, Orji and Job 2013).

However, no matter how education is well packaged, if students do not attend classes regularly; either physically or on-line, the purpose of the curriculum might prove abortive. The fact that the Federal and State Governments are making frantic efforts at educating the citizens is not litotes. It is disheartening that a lot of students still freelance despite efforts being made at getting them educated. Freelancing has become a growing phenomenon among secondary school students in Lagos State. Freelancing is a purposive staying away from school by a student during school hours with the school uniform on in order to satisfy specific gratification or interest which normal school activities do not meet. William (2004) expressed that many children and adolescents will express reluctance to go to school at some point. However, there are a number of children and adolescents who find going to school so difficult that they refuse to go. The term "school refusal" is often used when the poor attendance is related to some anxiety or worry that the child or adolescent has about going to school. Parents or caregivers are usually aware that their child is not going, and have been making efforts to alleviate the anxiety and to encourage the young person to attend school (Kearney & Albano, 2004). The student's themselves are often upset about what they are missing. Missing out on education is det-

rimental to lifelong learning and development in many ways. A week is a long time in the playground, so frequent absences might jeopardize children's social relationships. School refusal can also create conflict and strained relationships within families as a result of disruptions to routines, and might even affect income as parents or caregivers forgo work to stay home with the child. Some research has shown that school refusal has been associated with a higher chance of having problems later in life with mental health and social relationships, in addition to affecting the ability to get employment. Truancy is a type of school refusal. Another type of school refusal is freelancing.

Dosunmu, Ahove, Raji-Lawal and Olufowobi (2022) explained that, etymologically, the term "freelance" dates back to the 1800s when a "freelance" referred to a medieval mercenary who would fight for whichever nation or person paid them the most. The term "lance" referred to the long weapon that knights on horseback used to knock opponents off of their horses (think jousting).Freelancing means to work as an independent company worker rather than be employed by someone else. Freelancers are self-employed and often referred to as independent contractors. Freelancers are hired by other companies on a part time or short-term basis, but they do not receive the same compensation as full-time employees or have the same level of commitment to any particular company. They further clarified that, Freelancing is a type of truancy which a student engages in for gratification of their passion, ambition, aspiration or desire outside the school during school hours. It could be described as purposive absence from school by students during school hours and with the school uniform or any school identity on in order to engage in a particular activity so as to satisfy specific gratification or interest which school curricular activities do not meet. Reasons for Freelancing are multitudinous. Some of which are: home or parental factor, school factor and peer factor. The peer group factor will be explained briefly.

The Peer Group Factor

According to Osarenren (1996), the period of adolescence is when the youngster undergoes a concurrent series of "agonizing reappraisals" of himself, his immediate interpersonal world and his view of the world at large. Each of these reappraisals creates a period of instability at the end of which a more integrated plateau is attained. They seek the company of one another. They draw social comfort from members of their age group and they give themselves support because they have discovered that some of them have similar problems. It is this acceptance and social support that they do not get most times from their families and schools.

Peer acceptance is particularly crucial and the influence of the group is very

powerful and all encompassing. Whatever is right to their friends automatically becomes the right thing to do and whatever they condemn stands condemned. Even when they are aware that what they are doing is wrong, they will not want to go against the rules and beliefs of their group so as not to be rejected. They therefore, as a group abandon school and engage in all sorts of activities like engaging in the use of drugs and alcohol, going to the cinema, hotels and clubs. They sometimes hang around in some recreational centers, engaging in some extra - curriculum activities.

Impact of Generalized Others and Significant others on Students' Freelancing

People continue to participate in new experiences that will further affect their personalities. Although members of a society share common values and behaviour, they also experience different episodes in life. Each individual will encounter different people, places and situations. Within the same society, people will belong to different religions, will live in different regions, will be subject to different controls, and will be granted or denied different opportunities.

Mead (Hobbs and Blank, 1982) believes that self develops as the child accepts the values of the society. All those around us who participate in the customs of our society can be thought of as the Generalised Other He further explained that the Generalised Others also consists of people we have never met and probably never will meet. It even consists of people who have been dead for a long time but who once contributed to and participated in the beliefs and customs of our society.

Within the Generalised Others are people who are especially important to us. These includes parents, siblings and close friends (peer groups) who make vital contributions to the development of our personalities. Such people are our significant others. Usually, a significant other is someone with whom we share intimate relationship. Such relationships include expectations for permanency. However, a significant other could also be a person who touches our life for a short time but whose relationship leaves a lasting influence on one's behaviour and outlook on life. It is usually the significant others who have the most influence on us during the formative years. The moral bankruptcy and general indiscipline exhibited by adults in our society give the adolescent the impression that there is some measure of good and acceptance of such behavioural patterns because they feel that if there is no virtue in such behaviour, the adults who should be models for emulation would not engage in such acts. Therefore, their truant behaviour is viewed as an accepted way of life. For example, if an adult can leave his office before closing time to engage in his per-

sonal business, a student will see nothing absolutely wrong in his leaving school before closing time to go and have fun with his friends. However, existentialism takes different route.

Explaining Freelancing from Existentialism Perspective

Akinkuotu and Olufowobi (2011) summarize the underlying concepts of Existentialism thus:

- Human free will
- Human nature is chosen through life choices
- A person is best when struggling against their individual nature, fighting for life
- Decisions are not without stress and consequences
- There are things that are not rational
- Personal responsibility and discipline is crucial
- Society is unnatural and its traditional religious and secular rules are arbitrary
- Worldly desire is futile

Akinkuotu and Olufowobi (2011) aver that even though they do agree that life is not optimally satisfying, it nonetheless has meaning. Existentialism is the search and journey for true self and true personal meaning in life. Most importantly, it is the arbitrary act that existentialism finds most objectionable-that is, when someone or society tries to impose or demand that their beliefs, values, or rules be faithfully accepted and obeyed. Existentialists believe this destroys individualism and makes a person become whatever the people in power desire thus they are dehumanized and reduced to being an object. Existentialism then stresses that a person's judgment is the determining factor for what is to be believed rather than by arbitrary religious or secular world values.

Research Questions

What are students' perceptions of:

i. Why their colleagues freelance?

ii. Why some of them come to school with extra clothes in their bags (apart from school uniforms)?

Methodology

Research design for the study is qualitative. The qualitative methodology involved focus group interviews conducted on students. A focus group is a pop-

ular qualitative research approach for data collecting. It typically consists of a small number of respondents (6-10) from the target population. Permissions were obtained from school authorities and the purpose of the focus group interview was well explained to students in the group before commencement of the interviews in order to ensure ethical consideration. The primary goal of the focus group is to obtain answers to the questions, why students freelance and why did some of them go about in other clothes apart from their school uniforms? Population of the study consisted of all senior secondary school students in public secondary schools in Lagos state. The answers of the groups are presented unedited. The practice was that one of the students in the group would volunteer to write, summarizing the group's perception to the question asked.

Presentation of Results

Why students freelance

Group 1—Truancy: Most times the students may inhabit the habit of truancy. It may occur as a result of an unfinished assignment or the feeling of not just going to school that day. Sometimes it also occurs as a result of bad influence from peers. Fear of being sent back home because of fees or other stuffs: Some students whose parents are not capable of paying the particular amount the school is requesting for at a particular time will not even bother to inform their parents about the school persistent request for the money. So they will decide not to go to school to bring the fees for the fear of being sent back home.

Group 2—The reason why students leave home and do not go to school is due to in discipline. Nowadays, most students do not really care about school. There is this slang that students say "School na scam" a students, who is not disciplined, will support this ideology, which is very absurd. Another reason is peer pressure. Peer Pressure has changed. A lot of students through bad friends, They get negatively influenced. Most students do not want to feel isolated, so they keep or follow bad company (friends). Which can influence them badly. But normally, a serious student who knows what he or she is doing will not give into negative influence.

Group 3—Some students leave their houses and not get to school because of peer influence. They go to friends' houses to chill instead of going to school because they feel that school is a big scam. Lack of interest for school: when a person have no interest for school. He or she finds way or excuse, to not go to school. But if the person is forced to go to school. He or she finds a place to stay, and when school is over, he or she goes back home. Influence from peer pleas-

ure: the people of Friends a person follows or move with is another reason if a person moves with bad friends (friends that engage in illegal activities, those) They will have the mindset that school is a waste of time when these type of mindset is in the head, it can make them skip school.

Group 4—Students leave home and not go to school just to feel among or should I say it is pure pleasure.[What my friends are doing is want to do. Not to Miss fun of that moment and prefer to forfeit school for fun. Peer pressure is said to have a very high reason, while student leaves home without getting to school. It could be friends and advice to have fun so they say. but vital key here is that it always has to be bad friends who the individual follows. Lack of interest for school: Lack of interest for school towards academics and also forceful decision when forced into a school you dislike.

Group 5—Bullying: when an individual is being bullied at school premises. low self esteem or when you seem like you aren't getting anything from It (being dull). People tend to leave house without getting to school because of the kind of friends they do follow. Peer pressure from bad friends. People skip school because of peer pressure. Friends can influence children to skip school and do all sorts of bad things like taking drugs or becoming nuisance in the community.

Group 6—Unseriousness; Some students think that going to school is a waste, they leave home and wander around the streets who stop. They do not have a reason for being or sent to school and they cause nuisance in the neighbourhood. Being late for school; a student who is late for school, think that he or she is late, they can get punished. Some students don't like being punished for lateness, so they wander around instead of going to school to save them from being punished. Friends; the friends one keep can influence a person's thinking, Instead of being in school, they go in groups, (friends cling).Wandering in the neighborhood, some even go to the extent of visiting their boyfriends or visiting the opposite sex.

Group 7—Need for money; a student would leave home with the intention of going to work or do menial jobs to secure and money for themselves, instead of going to school. Their parents won't even know about their doings.

Group 8—Students who inculcate bad behavior are the ones who stay out of school. So the people in the society believes. Preceding are the cogent reason students go somewhere else in place of school. Firstly, peer pressure affect students a lot. Some of them want to fill among and thereby do the wrong things. Who stop students are mostly teenagers who are in their prime ages, they tend to dry out a lot of things. They want to copy what other people around them do. Sometimes the combination of pure pleasure and the type of society they live affecting student a lot who stop this makes them stay out of school. Second-

ly, Some students prefer learning handwork other than going to school. Sometimes they feel bad when their parents try to force them to go to school. Interest in school is very low and this makes them leave home and head somewhere else in place or school. Lastly, Most students believe they are failures, they tend to limit themselves in academics and believe other people are better than them. Moreso, Some students think school is a waste of time, as they say school now scam. They believe that going to school will not make them achieve the things they want in life.[material things]this vision influenced them and makes them stay out of school.

Group 9—Some students feel unfortunate and/or unlucky that they have to go to school due to what they are out of school. Friends tell them they do while he or she is at school high. When they get back from school, their friends who are out of school tells them amazing things that they did just to make them look like the ones suffering.

Group 10—Maltreatment or harassment at school: students who get bullied in school on a daily basis tend to develop a fear of getting beaten daily. And with the fear already installed in them they fail to report the case, so their only resolution or way to the problem is to skip school. Inferiority complex: in some secondary schools, there are always some groups who are the most popular, So when a student have an encounter with some of them and they get embarrassed or humiliated, in order not to face the whole again, and to protect their social life, which has been ruined, they skip school.

Reasons why students leave home with extra clothes

Group 1—To show off. Because some are not going home directly after school, they are either going to work, to their boyfriend house or to their girlfriends' houses, et cetera. In case of anything, they changed their house clothes to escape and not to be recognized. For some female is to wear their new clothes so that boys will see their shapes, that is, to seduce boys or teachers. Because some of them have an appointment after school. So they change their clothes, their clothes so as not to be recognized either by teachers or by school mate.

Group 2—Some students are learning hand work. Some do tell their parents that they are going to school, but they are going somewhere else. Some students are learning trade and they might want to wash their uniform at their place of work, so they would have to put extra clothes. While some might want to go to party or to their boyfriends house.

Group 3—Some are going for hookup. Some feel too big that they do not want their streets or community members to know the school or class they are in. So leaving school they will put in another clothes in their bag so they can

change it so. Some of their parents sends them on errands so they don't want to go out with their school uniform.

Group 4—The reason is because some leave the school and branch at their learning place. Like me. Once I leave the school, I go to my nearby sister's house to change my clothes to change my school uniform to my learning clothes. But some have other reasons like help their mother in a nearby shop because it is not good to put on uniform and work around the community. It does not make sense at all. They may want to go to their mom's shop after school and they will not branch their home, so they will prefer clothes in their bag. But mostly some students leave their home with clothes in their bag because they want to visit their boyfriends. They do not want people to know there are still a student and also to form big girl so they will see potential suitors.

Group 5—Some students usually go to shop after school and they will not want to wander around with school uniform. Some students go to market to sell for their mother, so they put clothes inside their bag. Some people, they must feel like doing or going to their boyfriend house and it is not right. And whenever they do so, if their parents ask why they got home late. They will say they are doing lesson. They will lie to implicate teachers.

Group 6—Some students may want to go to relative house which is nearby. While some other ones to go and do very bad habits and they think they can't put on school uniform. Some of them don't want people to know there are still schooling. Some are told from whom that after school they should go and Hawk. some leave with their uncles or aunties that didn't sponsor them in any education if they later find someone that will sponsor them, they will not let their uncles and aunties to be aware of it.

Group 7—There are many reasons why students leave their home with extra dresses, with or without their parent approval. Initially, students with negative behaviours or questionable characters are mostly caught in the act. They do so in order to have a free time after school hours or to go to parties or socialized event. Furthermore, those with prostitute behaviour and their approval of their parents do so to go and various trade or leaving for a particular place with their approval of their parents. In conclusion, students do so as a result of peer groups, influence, curiosity and their feeding on top of the world.

Group 8—One of the reasons why students leave home with extra clothes or dresses is the fact that some of them have handwork, like hairdressing and tailoring, which they branch out after school. And when they get to the workshop after school they then change into the extra house clothes that they have carried along with them another reason is that some parents are not usually around after they must have, they must come back from school, so they require extra cloths and change. Then they will stay with their neighbors and

their parents come back from work. Another reason is that some students use their dresses to show off to their fellow mates about new dresses. Why some carry clothes in their bag in case they want to pass by their parent shop after school. Some people carry clothes in case they want to visit someone after school hours. Many students, most especially the girls, leave their home with extra clothes because of the bad influence they have gotten by changing after school to head to another plate. They also did that to persuade some events Involving their settles. Some woke up late. Some students leave home with extra clothes in their bag because some of them will go to their parents shop after school because they will not go home straight. Most of them will want to go out with their friends and some will not want anyone to know that they are going to school. Most of them put their clothes in their bag to go to their boyfriends' houses after school, and most of them always go to their workplace.

Group 9—Some people put extra quote in their bag because some of them always go to lesson after school. Some students go to their friends' houses after school. Some people go to party after school especially birthday parties.

Group 10—Some students put extra clothes in their bag, maybe after closing from school, they will go to their workshop or their learning trade. While some students do not, under did not want to show their true identity's that they're too big to go to school. They want to put on their house clothes when coming to school. Some of them might not go home the same time they close from school command. Most of them go to their place of work, a place of trade so they can put extra clothes in their bag in order to change when they go to their place of work, while some putting extra clothes to change in case their uniform gets dirty. Some of this is due to the change in weather e.g rain. Students also put clothes in their bag to show their friends how beautiful they are.

Summary of Findings

Responses showed that students perceived the following as concomitants to their colleagues' freelancing: unfinished assignments, bad influence from peers, fear of being sent back home because of unpaid fees. Nonchalant attitude to school – school is a scam, freelancing is pure pleasure, lateness to school.

The following reasons were adduced to why some students take additional clothes to school apart from days they had to Physical and Health exercises: To show off to their mates after school hours, some would like to take flight work for pay, to their boyfriends' or girlfriends' houses. Some feel too big that they do not want people on their streets or communities to know the school or class they belong. Some students go to trade in their parents' shops after school.

Conclusion

The research findings affirmed that students have an understanding that their mates freelance and the adduced reasons to why they do so. Whether the reasons are genuine or otherwise is another thing entirely. However, some of the reasons fall short of expectations of who a student should be. It should be noted that no group of students mentioned teachers as directly responsible. However, it could be reasoned when students decide not to show up in school due to unfinished assignments, the fear of what teachers might do cannot be ruled out. Various reasons have been adduces to students leaving their homes with extra clothes to school when they are not doing school organized physical and health exercises. The import of this is that parents should be more observant in this regard. It starts gradually. A little cough in the morning might signal the beginning of a terminal disease.

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