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Truancy, the Act of Students Being Absent from School without Legitimate Reasons: A Case of Wesley College Demonstration 'B' Junior High School

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Abstract:

Truancy, the act of students being absent from school without legitimate reasons, has been a persistent concern in the realm of education, posing challenges to students, teachers, and educational institutions alike. This action research study aimed to investigate the effects of students' truancy on academic performance in a secondary school setting. The primary objective was to explore the relationship between students' absenteeism and their academic achievement across various subjects. Over a three-week period, data was collected from a sample of 15 students from different grade levels. Quantitative data was gathered through attendance records and academic performance data, while qualitative data was obtained through questionnaires and tests with teachers, students, and school administrators. The data was analysed to identify patterns and correlations between truancy and academic performance.

The findings revealed a significant negative correlation between students' truancy and their academic achievement. Students with high levels of absenteeism exhibited lower grades and decreased academic performance across subjects. Questionnaire responses from teachers and students provided insights into the impact of truant behaviour on classroom engagement, missed learning opportunities, and reduced motivation to excel academically. The implications of this study underscore the need for proactive interventions to address truancy and its detrimental effects on academic success. Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of using technology for efficient attendance monitoring and early intervention. While this study provides valuable insights, further research is warranted to explore the longitudinal effects of truancy on academic achievement and to assess the effectiveness of various truancy prevention programmes. A holistic approach that involves collaboration among stakeholders is crucial to fostering a positive learning environment that nurtures student attendance and academic success.

Keywords: *Alienate, categorically, consequence, correlate, counterpart, criminality, detrimental, implications, incarceration, notion, prudential*

1. Introduction

This section gives background information to the problem being studied, a statement to the problem being studied, the purpose of the study, research questions and significance of the study.

1.1. Background to the Study

Ghana, as a country, requires all of its children to attend school and achieve the maximum degree of education possible in order to strengthen the country's human resource base. According to Woodland and Mazur (2019), the primary goal of education, whether formal or informal, is to generate individuals who will be productive members of society. Truancy has been identified as one of the most serious issues threatening students' futures. Truancy and poor academic achievement have long been grouped together as part of a larger deviance or problem-behaviour syndrome (Gerth, 2020). Truancy is, in reality, one of Ghana's most serious antisocial discipline issues among JHS students.

Truancy, according to Madaraka (2020), has undermined effective teaching-learning processes so much that some teachers have become helpless and disorganised in their task of imparting knowledge to learners. Truancy is harmful to students' achievement, promotion, graduation, self-esteem, and employment potential, according to Zhenget al. (2020). In a similar vein, high truancy rates have an impact on the overall school accomplishment by decreasing the rate of instruction, which is detrimental to all students since it can also be an early warning sign of educational failure (Hoff, 2019). In fact, students with higher truancy rates have low academic achievement and are more likely to drop out, indicating that there is a link between student attendance and academic achievement (Gottfried, 2019).

1.2. Statement of the Problem

The problem that the researcher has decided to investigate was to assess the effects of truancy on JHS 2 students of Wesley College Demonstration 'B' Junior High School.

During the researchers' supervision of their students for the Embedded Teaching Programme at Wesley College Demonstration 'B' Junior High School, a school within the Kumasi Metropolis in the Ashanti Region of Ghana, it came to light that JHS 2 students in the said school manifested various forms of truant behaviours which have affected their academic performances. In conformity with the problem on board, the researchers made some observations and found out that the majority of B8 students in the same school were not attending school for lessons. This situation, according to Paisley and Paisley (2004), has thwarted a lot of students' performance from the basic level to the tertiary institution.

With enough revelation on board, the researchers believed that this shouldn't have been a problem at the JHS 2 level. Therefore, they have decided to investigate the effect of truancy among JHS 2 students of Wesley College Demonstration 'B' Junior High School.

1.3. Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to assess the effects of truancy among JHS 2 students of Wesley College Demonstration 'B' Junior High School. Specifically, the study aimed to:

- Explore the causes of truancy among JHS 2 students of Wesley College Demonstration 'B' Junior High School.
- Access the effects of truancy on the academic performance of JHS 2 students of Wesley College Demonstration 'B' Junior High School.

1.4. Research Questions

Specifically, the study was directed by the following research questions

- What are the causes of truancy among JHS 2 students of Wesley College Demonstration 'B' Junior High School?
- What are the effects of truancy on the academic performance of JHS 2 students of State Wesley College Demonstration 'B' Junior High School?

1.5. Significance of the Study

The study will help to curb truancy among JHS 2 students of Wesley College Demonstration 'B' Junior High School. The results of this study will also be of great significance to all educational stakeholders, including the GES and MoE, teachers, parents, and students. Specifically, the results of the study will enlighten the GES and the MoE about the effects of students' truant behaviours towards their academic performance. It will also help teachers identify some credible techniques to help lessen truancy among pupils in our various basic schools. It will enlighten parents on the need to cope with school, especially teachers, and help curb truancy among their wards. To students, it will help them to know some of the consequences they will face concerning their academic performance from manifesting truant behaviours.

2. Literature Review

This section reviews literature related to the study. The review of related literature will be directed by the following sub-themes:

- Concept of truancy
- Causes of students' truancy
- Effects of truancy on students' academic performance

2.1. Concept of Students' Truancy

Different people and agencies have defined truancy in various ways. Truancy, according to Bassey (2020), is a student's willful departure from school without his or her parents' knowledge or approval, for which no fair or acceptable cause is presented. This meaning significantly broadens the notion, making it synonymous with unexcused absence. Antrobus et al. (2019) also defined truancy as students who have been registered with a school but have been discovered as failing to attend when the law requires them to. This includes missing classes. Truancy, according to Keppens et al. (2019), is defined as a circumstance in which a pupil is absent from school for no reason.

2.2. Causes of Students' Truancy

Truancy is usually multifaceted in nature, with a variety of probable contributing elements at play (Baskerville & Loveridge, 2020). Several and varied truancy correlates have been identified. Gonzalez-Rodriguez et al. (2019) categorically state that the causes of truancy fall into four categories, which include family issues, school factors, economic factors, and student factors.

2.3. Family Issues

Family characteristics that may influence truant behaviour, according to Gubbels et al. (2019), include but are not limited to parents' education, occupation, supervision, and household income. For instance, Farrall et al. (2020) found a link between family characteristics and truant behaviour in their study. According to the findings of Farrall et al. (2020), the lower the father's degree and wealth, the more likely the child is to commit truancy. If the mother was a high school dropout, the child's chances of truancy were even higher.

2.4. School Factors

Class size, attitudes, ability to satisfy each student's different requirements, and the school's truancy discipline policy are all elements that may contribute to truant behaviour. According to Cross et al. (2018), students who attend large schools may feel lonely or alienated in their school setting. Therefore, they prefer not to attend school to avoid these feelings.

2.5. Student Factors

Physical and mental health issues, substance abuse, drug usage, self-perception, and separation from school are all student factors that can lead to truancy. Physical and mental health difficulties, according to Supraja et al. (2020), play a role in students' truancy. They claim that truancy is associated with student and family mental health issues and that it might be a sign of an existing or developing mental health problem such as post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, depression, and/or substance misuse. In a similar vein, Pengpid and Peltzer (2019) also assert that students who use alcoholic beverages one or more times per month are more likely to miss school than their counterparts who do not consume alcohol. Students who have been truant smoke cigarettes and marijuana at least once a month, according to D'Amico et al. (2020).

2.6. Economic Factors

Students who are eligible for free lunch, which is an indicator of low-income status, are more likely to miss school than students who are not eligible (Garcia & Weiss, 2018). They also perform worse on standardised tests when they miss school, which can widen the achievement gap between poor and non-poor students. Some of the economic challenges that low-income students face include a lack of transportation, school supplies, clothing, food, and health care (Levin, Espinoza & Griffith, 2023). These factors can make it difficult for them to attend school regularly and participate in learning activities. Therefore, economic impacts can have a negative influence on students' absenteeism by creating barriers to access and engagement in education.

2.7. Effects of Truancy on Students' Academic Performance

The consequences of truancy are extensive, resulting in negative implications for multiple levels of society. Henry (2007) conducted a study to assess the characteristics of truant students. One of the objectives of the study was to explore the consequences of students' truant behaviours. The key findings that came out from his study indicate that truancy's consequences are extensive, resulting in negative implications for multiple levels of society. According to him, in the short term, truancy can predict maladjustment, poor academic performance, school dropout, substance abuse, delinquency, and teenage pregnancy. In the long term, evidence reveals that truancy is a predictor of poor adult outcomes, including violence, marital instability, job instability, adult criminality, and incarceration. Moreover, truancy exerts a negative effect on the community because of its correlation with delinquency, crime, and other negative adult outcomes.

3. Methodology

This section presents the methods used in gathering data for the study. It will describe the type of research design employed by the researcher, followed by a description of the population involved. It will then continue with a description of the sample and the sampling technique used. This section will also identify the instruments used to collect data, the data collection procedures, and the various ethical issues observed.

3.1. Research Design

According to Kothari (2004), research designs are the approaches and strategies of investigation devised by the researcher to obtain relevant information that meets the research objectives. The type of research design employed for this study was the case study design. The researcher adopted the case study design because it allowed him to prudently study a particular setting within a specific area.

3.2. Population

The researcher's targeted population for the study consisted of all JHS 2 students of Wesley College Demonstration 'B' Junior High School with a total number of thirty (30) students, of whom seventeen (17) were males, and the remaining thirteen (13) were females.

3.3. Sample and Sampling Procedures

Through the purposive sampling procedure, the researcher purposively handpicked students who were truant after he had glanced through the class attendance register. The purposive sampling method was employed because it allowed the researcher to intentionally select participants who had experience with the main phenomenon being studied. Since the study was time-bound, the whole class was not used. The study was then limited to ten (15) students, comprising 8 males and 7 females.

3.4. Research Instruments

The researcher obtained data for the study using questionnaires and test items as his research instruments. With the help of these instruments, the researcher became well-informed about the problem and was able to carry out the study.

3.5. Data Collection Procedures (Pre-intervention, Interventions and Post-Test Data Collection)

3.5.1. Pre-intervention

In coherence with the problem being studied, the researcher conducted a pre-test to diagnose the extent of the problem. Here, the researcher aimed to assess the effects of truancy on students' academic performance.

3.5.2. Intervention

After marking pupils' scripts, it was drawn to the attention of the researcher that students performed poorly in the pre-test administered. This situation shows that truancy has a negative detrimental effect on students' academic performance. Having this revelation, the researcher took students through several motivational paradigms for a period of four weeks to help curb problems of truancy among pupils and improve their academic performance.

3.6. Weekly Activities in Curbing Truancy among Students

3.6.1. Week 1

The researchers began his interventional procedures with a brief discussion with students on the state of their academic performance. The purpose of this activity was to update learners on their poor academic performance as a result of their truant behaviour, bringing in the consequences they will encounter ahead in their academic lives if not curbed. The initial motivational technique employed by the researcher, in collaboration with the help and support from the school's authority, during the entire days of the first week's activity was that students who attended school for the whole week and engaged themselves positively during the week's section were applauded by their classroom mates as they stood in front of the class.

3.6.2. Week 2

The researchers began the week's interventional procedures by updating learners on how they were progressing in their academic performance. The motivational technique employed by the researcher, in collaboration with the school's authorities, during the entire days of week 2 was to reward students who attended school for the whole week with a new pen, pencil, and eraser.

3.6.3. Week 3

The researchers began the week's interventional procedures by giving students the latest update on how they are progressing in terms of their academic performance. To increase the motivational intensity, the researcher, through the permission he received from the school's authorities, made some credible provisions for students who attended school for the whole week to stand in front of the entire school and was applauded by all JHS students during one assembly section.

3.6.4. Week 4

The researchers began the final week's intervention by updating students on the state of their academic performance. To further increase the motivational intensity, the researcher took a picture of students who attended school for the whole week and published it on the school's WhatsApp platform and on the school's notice board.

3.7. Post-intervention

After the interventions, the researchers conducted a post-test to find out whether students' performance has been improved after they employed several motivational techniques on students.

3.8. Ethical Considerations

Several ethical issues were adhered to by the researcher during the study. Issues such as informed consent, autonomy, and confidentiality were observed by the researcher during the study. With the issue of informed consent, the researcher gained the consent of participants before the commencement of the study. After obtaining the student's consent, the researcher ensured that there was participant autonomy. In this regard, the researcher did not force her choices on the participants. They were given the chance to respond to the questionnaire in the way they wanted, within the framework of the purpose of the study. The researcher ensured that there was confidentiality. Participants were assured of confidentiality, and the researcher made efforts to ensure that the data collected were not shared with any external party without the consent of the respondents or authorities of the schools except in circumstances of threat to life or survival.

4. Results, Findings and Discussion

This chapter presents and discusses the results obtained from the study and how it was analysed in relation to the research questions.

- Research question 1: What are the causes of truancy among JHS 2 students of Wesley College Demonstration 'B' Junior High School?

This research question sought to find out the causes of truancy among JHS2 students of Wesley College Demonstration 'B' Junior High School. To find answers to this research question, the research administered questionnaire

items to students to solicit their views concerning some of the factors that have caused students to manifest truant behaviours. Table 1 presents the results obtained from the questionnaire item administration.

Item Statement	Strongly Disagreed	Disagreed	Agreed	Strongly Agreed
Illness	2 (13%)	4 (27%)	6 (40%)	3 (20%)
Poverty	1 (6%)	3 (20%)	7 (47%)	4 (27%)
Lack of parental supervision	0 (0%)	2 (13%)	4 (27%)	9 (60%)
Peer influence	0 (0%)	2 (13%)	3 (20%)	10 (67%)

Table 1: Causes of Truancy among JHS 2 Students of Wesley College Demonstration 'B' Junior High School
Source: Fieldwork (2023)

Table 1 presents the results obtained from the questionnaire administered by the researcher on the causes of truancy among JHS 2 students of Wesley College Demonstration 'B' Junior High School. Data analysis from table 1 shows that two (2) students, representing 13% of the respondents, strongly disagreed, and four (4) students, representing 27% of the respondents, disagreed that illness is one of the factors that has caused students to manifest truant behaviour. Data analysis could also be made from table 1 that six (6) students, representing 40% of the respondents, agreed, and three (3) students, representing 20% of the respondents, strongly agreed that illness is one of the factors that have caused students to manifest truant behaviour.

After analysing the data shown in table 1, it could further be made that only one (1) student, representing 6% of the respondents, strongly disagreed, and three (3) students, representing 20% of the respondents, disagreed that poverty is one of the factors that has caused them to manifest truant behaviour. Again, from table 2, it could also be realised that seven (7) students representing 47% of the respondents agreed and four (4) students representing 27% of the respondents strongly agreed that poverty has caused students to manifest truant behaviours at school.

In furtherance, it can be deduced from table 1 that none of the respondents strongly disagreed with the fact that issues concerning lack of parental guidance have caused students to manifest truant behaviours at school, while two (2) students, representing 13% of the respondents disagreed that issues concerning lack of parental guidance have caused students to manifest truant behaviours at school. From table 1, it could further be analysed that four (4) students, representing 27% of the respondents, agreed, and nine (9) students, representing 60% of the respondents, strongly agreed that issues concerning lack of parental guidance have caused students to manifest truant behaviours at school.

Lastly, data analysis could be made from table 1 that none of the respondents strongly disagreed with the fact that issues concerning peer influence have caused students to manifest truant behaviour at school, while two (2) students, representing 13%, disagreed, three (3) students representing 20% of the respondents agreed, and ten (10) respondents, representing 67%, strongly agreed to the fact that issues concerning peer influence have altered students to manifest truant behaviour at school.

- Research question 2: What are the effects of truancy on the academic performance of JHS 2 students of Wesley College Demonstration 'B' Junior High School?

This research question sought to determine the effects of truancy on students' academic performance. To find credible answers, the researcher conducted a pre-test at the pre-interventional data collection stage to diagnose the extent of the problem and a post-test at the post-interventional data collection stage to verify whether students' initial condition had improved. Tables 2 and 3 and figures 1 and 2 present the results obtained in both pre-test and post-test item administration.

Scores (x)	Frequency (f)	f x
0	7	0
1	3	3
2	2	4
3	3	9
4	0	0
5	0	0
Total	$\Sigma f = 15$	$\Sigma f x = 16$

Table 2: Frequency Table Showing Students' Scores in a Pre-Test

$$\text{Mean} = \frac{\Sigma f x}{\Sigma f} = \frac{16}{15} = 1.1$$

From the table, the mean score for the pre-test conducted was 1.1.

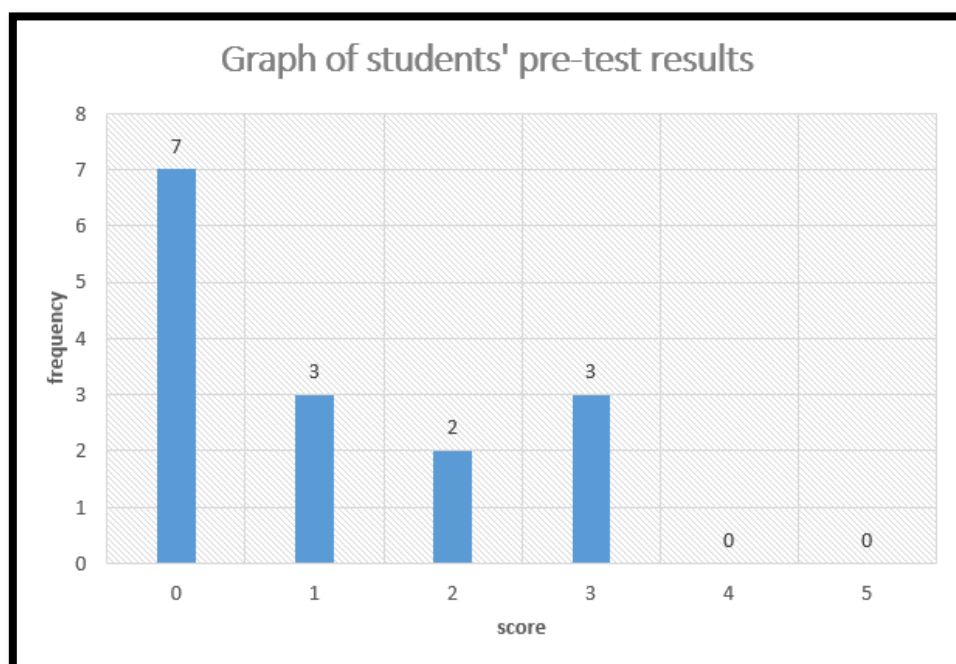


Figure 1: Graph of Students' Pre-Test Results

Table 2 and figure 1 present the results obtained from the pre-test conducted. From table 2, it could be analysed that seven (7) students scored 0 marks, three (3) students scored 1 mark, two (2) students scored 2 marks, and three (3) students scored 3 marks all out of 5 marks in the pre-test conducted. This is represented by the first, second, third, and fourth bars in figure 1, respectively. It could be further analysed from table 2 that neither of the students scored above three marks in the pre-test. The pre-test attained a mean score of 1.1, as presented in table 2.

Scores (x)	Frequency (f)	f x
0	0	0
1	0	0
2	0	0
3	1	3
4	5	20
5	9	45
Total	$\Sigma f=15$	$\Sigma f x =68$

Table 3: Frequency Table Showing Students' Results in a Post-Test

$$\text{Mean} = \frac{\Sigma f x}{\Sigma f} = \frac{68}{15} = 4.5$$

From the table, the mean score for the post-test conducted was 4.5.

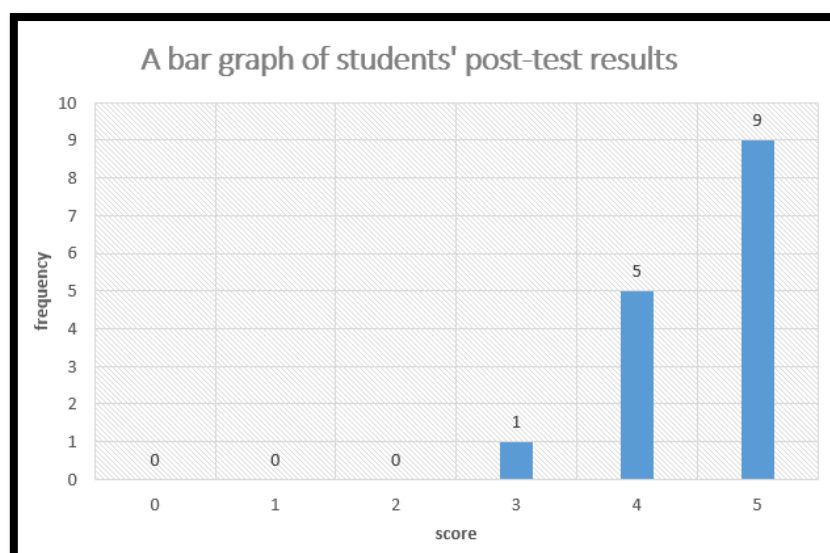


Figure 2: Graph of Students' Post-Test Results

Table 3 and figure 2 present the results obtained from the post-test conducted by the researcher. From table 3, it could be analysed that no one scored below 3 marks in the post-test conducted, while only one (1) student scored 3 marks, with five (5) students scoring 4 marks and nine (9) students scoring 5 marks. The post-test attained a mean score of 4.5, as presented in table 3.

4.1. Comparing Students' Pre-Test and Post-Test Results

By comparing the two results after the two tests, it could be concluded that there was a tremendous improvement in students' academic performance after the interventional procedures.

4.2. Discussion of Key Findings

The main purpose of this study was to assess the effects of truancy among JHS 2 students of Wesley College Demonstration 'B' Junior High School. The study found that students attributed the manifestation of their truant behaviour to illness, poverty, lack of parental supervision and peer influence. By comparing the mean scores obtained from both pre-test and post-test items, the administration found that students' truancy has had very detrimental effects on their academic performance.

5. Summary, Recommendations and Suggestions for Further Research

5.1. Summary of the Study

In this study, the effects of students' truancy on academic performance were investigated. The primary objective was to examine the relationship between students' absenteeism and their academic achievement. The research was conducted over three weeks in a junior high school setting, involving a sample of 15 students from basic seven.

The study employed both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. Quantitative data was obtained through attendance records and academic performance data, while qualitative data was gathered through interviews with teachers, students, and school administrators. The collected data was analysed, and patterns and correlations between truancy and academic performance were identified.

5.2. Recommendations

Based on the findings of the action research study, the following recommendations are suggested to address the effects of students' truancy on academic performance:

Strengthen Truancy Prevention Programmes: The school should develop and implement truancy prevention programmes that identify and support at-risk students. These programmes could involve regular attendance monitoring, early intervention for students showing signs of truant behaviour, and parental involvement to address the underlying causes of absenteeism.

Improve School-Home Communication: Establish effective communication channels between teachers, school administrators, and parents to inform them about students' attendance patterns and academic progress. This can help create a collaborative effort to support students and promote regular attendance.

Implement Incentive Programmes: Consider implementing incentive programmes to reward students with good attendance and academic performance. Positive reinforcement can motivate students to attend school regularly and engage in their studies.

Individualised Support for Truant Students: Provide individualised support and counseling for truant students to understand the reasons behind their absenteeism. Addressing the underlying issues, such as academic difficulties, social challenges, or family issues, can help improve students' commitment to school.

Utilise Technology for Attendance Monitoring: Implement digital attendance tracking systems to streamline the recording and monitoring of student attendance. Technology can provide real-time data on students' attendance patterns, enabling timely interventions.

5.3. Suggestions for Further Research

While this action research study provided valuable insights into the effects of students' truancy on academic performance, there are still areas that warrant further investigation. Future research could consider the following:

Longitudinal Studies: Conduct longitudinal studies to examine the long-term effects of truancy on academic achievement and students' educational trajectories.

- **Comparative Studies:** Conduct comparative studies between different schools or regions to understand how school-specific factors may influence the relationship between truancy and academic performance.
- **Intervention Effectiveness:** Evaluate the effectiveness of various truancy prevention and intervention programs to identify best practices for improving attendance and academic outcomes.
- **Student Perspectives:** Further explore truant students' perspectives on the reasons for their absenteeism and their perceptions of the impact on their academic performance.
- **Teacher Practices:** Investigate the role of teacher practices, such as classroom management and instructional strategies, in mitigating truancy and supporting academic achievement.

By continuing to explore these areas, educators and policymakers can develop evidence-based strategies to address truancy effectively and enhance students' academic performance and overall educational experience.

6. Glossary

Alienate – To cause someone to feel isolated or estranged

Categorically – Without exception or qualification, absolutely

Consequence – A result or effect of an action or decision

Correlate – To have a mutual relationship or connection

Counterpart – A person or thing that corresponds to or has the same function as another

Criminality – The state of being involved in criminal activity or behavior

Detrimental – Causing harm or damage; harmful

Implications – The possible results or effects of an action or decision

Incarceration – The state of being confined in prison; imprisonment

Notion – An idea or belief about something

Prudential – Involving good judgment and practicality, especially in business matters

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