Absenteeism: Its Effects on the Academic Performance of Selected SHS Students

A Literature Review by JOSE ALBERT EVALLE 11- FORECASTLE

John B. Lacson Foundation Maritime University – Arevalo Inc. 2017

A major problem faced by schools across the country is student absenteeism. Although the problem is pervasive in American schools, the attention focused on this issue has been inadequate. Poor student attendance has far reaching effects on the individual, the school, and society in general. The intent of this paper is to document the problem, summarize existing research on mediating factors, provide a summary of interventions for improving student attendance rates in schools, and to offer specific suggestions for school psychologists. In addition, specific attention is given to suggestions for future research to help expand the current understanding of the causes and remediation of poor student attendance.

Being always present in class and getting to school on time are two of the crucial determining factors of a student’s success, not just as a student but as a person who will be managing his/her own life in the future. Given the importance of being punctual, this study aims to explore and find out the factors that affect the punctuality of SHS students. It includes facts about tardiness, the different factors that causes it and its effect to the students as students and as bearer of their own lives in the future. From reliable research materials like online journals and research papers, we will provide some facts and theories from authors, teachers and notable people in order to have a concrete justification of our study.

First, we will give a definition of tardiness or absenteeism and present some theories and facts about it. Next, we will discuss he various factors that causes the students to come to school late, the psychological theories, the observation of the teachers and the personal reasons of the students. Lastly, the effects of tardiness and absenteeism to students academic performance, not just to himself/herself but also to his/her future and to other people, will be discussed.

**Tardiness**

            As SHS students of JBLFMU-Arevalo, we are expected to perform well with excellence in everything that we do, most especially in the academic aspect. One factor that dictates the quality of performance of a student is his/her punctuality that is, getting to school on time or being tardy. As cited by Nakpodia and Dafiaghor (2011), “lateness” can be defined as the “situation where an individual arrives after the proper, scheduled or usual time (Oxford Advance Learners’ Dictionary, 5th ed., 1995), Lauby (2009) puts it as a term used to describe “people not showing up on time” and Breeze et al. (2010) contributed by saying that, lateness is synonymous with “tardiness”, which implies being slow to act or slow to respond, thus not meeting up with proper or usual timing. Lastly, Weade (2004) defined tardiness as “being late for any measurable length of time past the stated or scheduled start time for work or school.” In most schools, a student is considered tardy when he/she is not present when the school bells rings or when the first teacher starts to give instructional materials for the first subject in the morning class.

One of the most recurring and the most “frustrating problem” that the schools are having with their students nowadays is tardiness (Sprick and Daniels, 2007). It creates problems, not just to the students but also to the teachers (Cowan Avenue Elementary School Community, 2007, para 1). Cowan Crier, the official School Publication of CAESC, also states that while having “occasional tardy” isn’t a big deal, unfailing tardiness is and it gives students problems including being ill-prepared for the job market. According to the results of the study of the U.S. Department of Education on “truancy”, which is related to tardiness, being present and on time in going to school are big factors on the “success and behavior” of  the students (Zeiger, 2010, para 1). Thus, it is a lot important to value time and practice being on time while being a student.

            According to CAESC (2007) and Zeiger (2010), the most essential learning time of the day for the students lies in the morning, specifically between 8:00 to 9:30 AM. It is because the students are most mindful and observant at this time of the day. It is also the reason why the most important lessons and subject matters are discussed during this time. So when students are late or are not present during this time of the day, they, in effect, miss out most of the important lessons to be noted and learned.

**Absenteeism**

Truancy has been labeled one of the top 10 major problems in American schools, and rates of absenteeism have reached as high as 30% in some cities. In New York City, an estimated 150,000 out of 1,000,000 students are absent daily (DeKalb, 1999). Similarly, the Los Angeles Unified School District reports that 10% of its students are absent daily, and only half return to school with written excuses (DeKalb). Although school officials are unsure as to the proportion of legitimate verses illegitimate absences, nationwide estimates have ranged from 1-22% for illegitimate absences (Guevermont, 1986; Neilsen & Gerber, 1979). These studies may actually underestimate non-illness related absences due to the large margin of error likely to be found in self-report data of this nature. It is quite possible that the proportion of illegitimate absences has changed since these data were reported; however, no recent estimates are available. Additionally, the proportion of illegitimate absences may vary substantially among school districts in different parts of the country. In the major metropolitan area of New York, for example, attendance rates for the boroughs of Brooklyn and Queens ranged between 86% and 96% for the 1998-1999 school year. The mean rate of attendance in Brooklyn’s elementary schools was 90.63% (SD = 2.15), and for elementary schools in Queens the mean rate of attendance was 92.36% (SD = 1.96). By way of comparison, New York State’s Nassau and Suffolk Counties on Long Island had elementary school attendance rates ranging between 88% and 99% for the 1997-98 school year. The mean attendance rate for elementary schools in Nassau County was 95.81 (SD = 1.30), and Suffolk County’s mean rate of attendance was 95.33 (SD = 1.32) for elementary schools. Within the state of New York, attendance rates for different regions appear to vary substantially (New York State Department of Education, personal communication, May 18, 2000). It is possible that the proportion of illegitimate absences varies, as well. DeLeonibus (1978) estimated an attendance rate of 96% as adequate, given 7 days of absence per student per year as based on norms for adults in the workplace. Although attendance rates from other parts of the country may differ, it is possible that DeLeonibus’s criterion is too stringent an expectation for school children. For example, only one of a combined 386 elementary schools in Brooklyn and Queens surveyed by the authors met DeLeonibus’s criterion. The means for suburban districts on Long Island were quite close to the 96% criterion; however, the majority of schools on Long Island (60.8%) also fell below this benchmark. The magnitude of the attendance problem may be further illustrated with an example: If we consider a school with an attendance rate of 90%, this means that one of every 10 children may be absent on any given school day. Given class sizes of 25-30 students per class, this translates to two or three children missing per school day. The consequences of poor attendance can be far reaching. Neill (1979) conducted a survey of 1414 members of the American Association of School Administrators to explore their opinions concerning the importance of attendance and perceived consequences of poor attendance. Administrators were concerned that chronic lack of school attendance could lead to permanent intellectual damage to students, as gaps in students’ knowledge bases would be likely to arise. When students do not achieve their intellectual potential they limit career choices. Additionally, children who have high rates of absenteeism are more likely to drop out of school before completing high school (DeRosier, Kupersmidt, & Patterson, 1994; Gerics & Westheimer, 1988; Hersov, 1960; Neilson & Gerber, 1979). Given the positive correlation between academic achievement and monetary income (Greene, 1963; Reid, 1984), chronic absentees may be less able to sustain themselves or a family as they enter young adulthood. Absenteeism has also been found to be a predictor of future criminality, alcoholism, and occupational difficulty (Hersov & Berg, 1980). Administrators that were surveyed in Neill’s (1979) study were also concerned about potential effects on their schools from high degrees of truancy. Schools are, to some degree, economically dependent on attendance rates. Some districts even develop specific formulas using attendance as an indicator of overall school functioning (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). Absenteeism was seen as contributing to the overall lowering of academic standards of a school. Administrators were concerned about increases in paperwork, and about the extra time teachers needed to spend working with students who were absent. Time spent reviewing material was viewed as taking away from the learning time of the students who were present. Administrators felt high degrees of absenteeism lead teachers to become frustrated, and morale problems are more likely to be experienced when this occurs. Another concern was that high rates of absenteeism could have a negative effect on the school’s relationship with the community as a whole, as the school institution may ultimately be viewed as burdensome rather than as a resource to assist children in becoming educated and responsible adults. Administrators were also concerned about the reduction in monetary state aid for the school resulting from absenteeism. Overall, administrators agreed (95%) that truancy was a major difficulty in their respective school districts. Researchers have consistently found grades, achievement tests, and standardized tests to be positively correlated with individual attendance records. For example, Levanto (1975) found class ranks and IQ scores significantly correlated with rates of attendance. Lamdin (1996) compared attendance rates with California Achievement Test scores, reading grade level scores, and math grade level scores. Even while holding teacher/pupil ratio and socioeconomic status constant, attendance rates were positively correlated with all three scores. Additionally, Moos and Moos (1978) examined student absenteeism rate and average class grade, as well as social classroom climate. They found a -.45 correlation between rate of absenteeism and classroom grades. School absenteeism has been a persistent problem for educators and researchers alike. The longterm consequences can be substantial, and decades of research have been dedicated to understanding the etiology of, and exploring intervention possibilities for absenteeism. The data presented in this section are by no means comprehensive. Recent data are sparse and an analysis of individual attendance patterns, and subsequent effects, is needed. For example, an attendance rate of 90% for a population probably represents some students who are absent a lot and some students who are infrequently absent, rather than each student being absent 10%. It would be more informative to provide information on the percentage of students who exceed a specific level than school district averages. Future research along these lines is highly recommended.

**Academic Performance**

In his widely cited paper, Romer (1993) is one of the first few authors to explore the relationship between student attendance and exam performance. A number of factors have contributed to declining class attendances around the world in the last 15 years. The major reasons given by students for non-attendance include assessment pressures, poor delivery of lectures, timing of lectures, and work commitments (Newman-Ford, Lloyd & Thomas, 2009). In recent times, students have found a need to seek employment while studying on a part-time basis due to financial constraints. The numbers of part-time and mature students has also risen sharply. The use of information technology also means that information that used to be obtained from sitting through lectures can be obtained at the click of a mouse. Indeed, web-based learning approaches have become the order of the day. Given all these developments that either makes it impossible or unnecessary for students to attend classes, the question that needs to be asked is whether absenteeism affects students’ academic performance. Research on this subject seems to provide a consensus that students who miss classes perform poorly compared to those who attend classes (Devadoss& Foltz, 1996; Durden& Ellis, 1995; Romer, 1993; Park & Kerr, 1990; Schmidt, 1983). Based on these findings a number of stakeholders have called for mandatory class attendance. Although the existing evidence points to a strong correlation between attendance and academic performance, none of the studies cited above demonstrate a causal effect. The inability of these cross-sectional studies to isolate attendance from a myriad of confounding student characteristics (e.g. levels of motivation, intelligence, prior learning, and time-management skills) is a major limiting factor to the utility of these findings (Rodgers & Rodgers, 2003). Durden and Ellis, (1995) controlled for student differences in background, ability and motivation, and reported a nonlinear effect of attendance on learning, that is, a few absences do not lead to poor grades but excessive absenteeism does.

Educational services are often not tangible and are difficult to measure because they result in the form of transformation of knowledge, life skills and behavior modifications of learners (Tsinidou, Gerogiannis, & Fitsilis, 2010). So there is no commonly agreed upon definition of quality that is applied to education field. The definition of quality of education varies from culture to culture (Michael, 1998). The environment and the personal characteristics of learners play an important role in their academic success. The school personnel, members of the families and communities provide help and support to students for the quality of their academic performance. This social assistance has a crucial role for the accomplishment of performance goals of students at school (Goddard, 2003). Besides the social structure, parents’ involvement in their child’s education increases the rate of academic success of their child (Furstenberg & Hughes, 1995).

**Factors affecting Punctuality**

            Reasons for being late in class and other factors affecting the punctuality if a student vary. There had been some theories that pointed out that tardiness is caused by the personality of a person. Santillano (2010) stated that psychological theorists considered some “personality traits, including low self-esteem and anxiety” as triggering factors of tardiness (para 2). She also mentioned that while some theorists considered tardiness as an “inborn quality” since our being early or late is “partially biologically determined”, which she also agreed, other experts also believed that some people are “chronically tardy” for the reason that they consciously and unconsciously get good things from it (para 3).

        In the book cited by Santillano, “Never be late again: 7 cures for the punctually challenged”, the author Diana DeLonzor suggested that some personality traits could most likely lead to a person being often late. Some of the traits included were “struggling with self control”, “feeling nervous or uncomfortable with social situations” and “getting distracted easily” (para 4). Santillano also discussed about the study conducted by DeLonzor at San Francisco State University in 1997 in which she surveyed 225 respondents about their habits that makes them late from their appointments. It was also a test on the personalities of the respondents that affect their habits. According to the results of DeLonzor’s study, those respondents that were often tardy apt to be anxious and gets distracted easily.

            Nakpodia and Dafiaghor attribute lateness or tardiness to a lot of factors or causes. Going late to bed and waking up late next morning are the most common. The authors added film-watching late at night as a cause for tardiness. The student may forget that he/she needs to be in school the next day. The distance between the student’s home and school or solely the school’s location is also considered by Nakpodia and Dafiaghor as a possible cause for tardiness. Not just because it takes more time to get to school, but according to the authors, the student is susceptible to more distractions and hindrances along the way. Parent’s untimely tasks and commands are also reasons that students come late to school. Habitual tardiness can also be learned from other members of the family, especially from the older ones. Lack of a firm and consistent policy on punctuality also encourages students to come late at school since there are no consequences attached to lateness or tardiness. These causes of tardiness will lead to serious effects.

            Another research partly studied about tardiness but tackled a specific reason or factor. A study by Pimentel and Quijada (2011) focused on the frequency of use by the UP Cebu freshmen students of Facebook and a part of the study tackled about the effect of the famous social networking site to UP Cebu students’ punctuality and academic performance.

            For their study, Pimentel and Quijada collected 60 respondents and provided them with questionnaires. The questionnaires contained questions that ask the respondents about their use of Facebook and its effects. A certain question asked the respondents if late-night use of Facebook has an effect on their punctuality. According to the results of the study, three out of 60 respondents are always late, eight said they are sometimes late, 12 said they are seldom late and 37 said that they never get late due to late-night use of Facebook. Generally, the results showed that the respondents are seldom late in class because of late-night use of the social networking site. Ledoux, as cited by Pimentel and Quijada, said that lack of sleep causes neural malfunctions and further affects a person’s behavior. In the study’s case, it is a student’s punctuality that is affected.

Sometimes, it is not solely the students’ fault why they keep on being late in coming to class. Another factor that could affect the punctuality of a student is the response of the teachers to tardy students. Sprick and Daniels (2007) stated that the range of the teachers’ response was “from ignoring them to sending them to office” (p. 21). This variation could lead the students to confusion as to how important it is to be on time in going to class. Another reason is the lack of motivation. Students who come to school on time are not given incentives or rewards. Also, responses to tardiness are lenient, that is nothing is done until the tenth strike or more. Another reason is “giving the student the impression that they won’t be missing anything if they are late” since in some classes, no important activities or instructions and no lessons are being done for first few minutes. Lastly, crowded hallways could create traffic, thus blocking the way of other students and making it hard for them to pass through.

**Effects of Tardiness and Absenteeism**

            Tardiness among students has its own negative repercussions. Nakpodia and Dafiaghor (2011) emphasized that lateness or tardiness is not just the problem of the late student but it affects the surrounding people. A student coming late in class distracts the rest of the students and disrupts the flow of the teacher’s discussion. It is even a burden to the student/s whom the late students ask for what to catch up with. The rest of the effects given by Nakpodia and Dafiaghor are about the welfare of the whole school, its productivity and revenue. Knowing the possible effects of lateness or tardiness, it is necessary for solutions to be executed.

            Studies have revealed that those students with “perfect or near-perfect attendance” have good grades compared to those students who misses classes often and late-comers (Cowan Avenue Elementary School Community, 2007, para 3). Moreover, as mentioned by Zeiger (2010), the results from the survey report conducted by teachers show that students with high tardiness rates have “higher rates of suspension and other disciplinary measures” (National Center for Education Statistics Indicators of School Crime and Safety [NCESISCS] (2007)). It also causes the students to have behavioral problems and to drop out. Lastly, Zeiger (2010) stated that “Students who are frequently tardy to school are also more apt to be fired from a job for showing up late” (para 5).

            A study conducted by Barbara Lee Weade on 2004 tried to "determine if school tardiness is a predictor of work tardiness" (Weade, 2004). It provided a lot of literature that observes correlations and factors affecting a student's tardiness. As cited by Weade, the 3rd most common cause for the failure of a student is "excessive tardiness and unexcused absences" (Ligon and Jackson, 1988). "Inconsistency of school rules" (Britt, 1988) and situations such as “crowded halls, limited opportunities for social interaction, irrelevant course content, and teacher indifference” (Damico et al., 1990) are also factors that affect a student's attendance and punctuality. As mentioned by Weade, personal values, financial security and lack of parental guidance (Payne, 2001) as well as family background (Featherstone et al., 1992) influence tardiness and absences of students.

             Weade gathered data from the schools of participating students. First and foremost, she asked consent from the students and their parents in order to gain permission to collect their school records. She collected and studied the attendance and punctuality records of these students based on the number of unexcused absences and minutes of tardiness. Her study showed that among high school students, the grade point average is correlated with absences and tardiness. This means that students with better attendance and punctuality have higher grade point averages and vis-à-vis. Her study was also able to show that attendance and punctuality of students are not consistent throughout the year. There were more absences and tardiness at the latter part of the year. Gender has also shown to be a non-factor in the attendance and punctuality of high school students.

            The study was very comprehensive in its subject matter. It tackles not just school tardiness but its implications on work tardiness. It shows that "students who are on-time for school classes are also likely to be on-time at work while students who are tardy frequently at school will probably also be tardy at work" (Weade, 2004). The study requires a lot of data but Weade was able to gather a sufficient amount. Though some possible correlations were not established, it is outside the scope of this research.

            Due to the fact that tardiness has been giving negative effects on the students nowadays, the most important thing to do is to develop a firm, consistent and functional policy that addresses late students. There must be defined sanctions and penalties for late students.  Nakpodia and Dafiaghor (2011) stated that school administrators must lead by example. They should be punctual in their own meetings and classes to avoid students to think that being late is just alright since even the authoritative persons are doing it. They should as well teach it and integrate it in every lesson. The effort on the remedy on lateness or tardiness does not start and end with the school. It must begin with the parents of the students and the government must take part as well. Transportation must be improved in order to avoid students getting stuck in traffic or encountering other obstacles down the streets.

            Some schools have already started finding solutions that would effectively minimize and/or eliminate tardiness among students. One of the solutions made by some schools is implementing tardiness policies, wherein they take steps in approaching the students and parents for them to solve the problem. CAESC has their policy worked this way. Other schools initiated interdisciplinary curriculum that integrates discipline and conduct in academics. Cordogan (as cited by Weade, 2004), said that a school in Chicago, Illinois adapted a similar curriculum and yielded positive results. Students under the interdisciplinary program exhibited more positive behaviors from students not from the curriculum. Interdisciplinary students showed less absences and tardiness, as well as higher grades. Other schools made smaller academic changes such as developing personality works and cooperative learning activities, such as creation of portfolios and tutorial to younger students. These taught the students better goal-setting, decision making skills and time management. In return, students under these behavior modification programs yielded less tardiness and higher grades.

To summarize, many studies have shown the reasons and factors that may contribute to the tardiness of a student and its effects to students academic performance. One of the mentioned reasons of tardy students was waking up late in the morning causing them to miss their lessons, which can also be attributed to late-night activities, such as social networking, watching movies and television shows, as well as untimely academic and domestic errands. As proven by several studies, sometimes, it’s not also the act of the student that leads to his/her tardiness. The heavy traffic, the teachers, the school surroundings and policies may also serve as influences to the tardiness of students.

            Many studies have also shown the effects of tardiness on the students, the teachers, the school and the society. According to these studies, the tardiness of a student consumes his/her learning time as well as disturbs other students and teachers. The tardy student also poses as a threat to the school as an educational and professional institution and the student may be one of the less productive members of the society.

            A lot of studies as well gave testimonies to effective remedies on tardiness. These studies promoted integration of personality development and interdisciplinary programs into school curriculum to aid students enhance positive behavior and personality leading to the decrease of tardiness.

            Our study intends to find out the tardiness and absenteeism of SHS students of JBLFMU-Arevalo and the reasons and factors that may influence this tardiness.

.