

DECREASING STUDENT TARDINESS THROUGH STRATEGIC REWARD SYSTEM: AN ACTION RESEARCH REPORT

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ABSTRACT

This study examined continual student tardiness within an urban middle school in Karachi. The primary aim of the study was to improve the punctuality of identified middle school students by providing them with rewards and incentive on the observation of each decrease in their tardiness. In addition to it, it focused on facilitating and transforming the behavior of the parents and teachers towards student tardiness in the school. Action research design was applied and eight students were chosen for the intervention of determined strategies. Later, six weeks intervention was planned for the identified students and incentives were attached for them for coming on time. After the weeks of intervention the post test was carried out using the similar measures. The data included observations in two phases; pre-intervention observation and a post intervention observation by reviewing the attendance register. The results revealed a significant change in the students' tardiness in the school post intervention. These findings highlight the importance of a relationship between institutional practices of reward and behavoiour modification in students.

Keywords: School Tardiness, School Based Action Research, Reward Based Behavior Modification

INTRODUCTION

The school is considered as a hub for transformational learning and life skills. Students are enrolled not only to acquire knowledge and understanding of the world phenomenon but also to become better citizens and human beings. In this regard, schools through their curriculum inculcate the significance of social skills in the learners in order to aid with the required skills to be become responsible beings. On the other hand, the students and families are equally held responsible for the learning they acquire from the school and attitude and beahviour that exhibit towards school and learning. Hence, the students in the school are not only assessed for the demonstration of their intellectual capabilities but also their behavior.

Walking through the halls every morning the researchers observed students demonstrating two types of attitudes towards punctuality in the school. One set of students make it a point to reach school on time whereas, the others present relaxed attendance habits. They arrive late almost every day and appear to have varying attitudes for their repeated lateness. Therefore researcher viewed student tardiness as one of the most crucial problems in today's classrooms. This was further analyzed from the teachers perspective where almost all teachers who take first period in the school find first five to ten minutes of the class a sheer waste because of the students who do not come on time. Teachers find it very inconvenient as the momentum of the class does not remain smooth and coherent if any of the students enter late. Furthermore it also distracts teachers' normal pace and hinders in the time management plan of the teachers. Teachers' response in this situation varies from one situation to the other. A few teachers are found ignoring them, a few are sighted to send them back to home, and a few are observed to penalize them either corporal or incorporeal.

Hence the researchers found this problem to be significant in the urban school context and it is observed that not much research work has been carried out in Pakistan to address this problem. Therefore, In order to fully understand student tardiness the researchers evaluated the external causes. Additionally, the researchers looked at students, teachers and administrators perceptions and behaviors regarding student tardiness. Tardiness is often discussed as an important topic in magazines and newspapers but seldom in research. Hence the researchers picked up this problem to address this problem creatively and effectively. The whole school is affected by this problem.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The phenomenon of school tardiness in the literature has been viewed as students coming late, not reaching school on time, missing out initial time from the first period and primarily not being present in the time set by the school. Educational psychologists took a great interest to find the causes of and solutions to, tardiness and subsequently worked a lot to get the most accurate findings. They were more focused about discovering the root causes behind tardiness so that this problem is addressed appropriately. There are many reasons for the students to show tardiness in the school, few reasons are directly related to the student that is students are not taking their breakfast on time, students are de-motivated to come to the school and the young ones who find it extremely difficult to get up early in the morning. Whereas a few are not related to the students, but fall on others like family members, van drivers and others who do not support students to be on time. Researchers view tardiness as a form of absence because this is how students miss a part of their class regardless of being excused or not. Tardiness is defined as "coming, occurring or remaining after the correct, usual or expected time; delayed" (The Free Dictionary, 2003)

Therefore tardiness can broadly be defined as missing time over a course of a school day. For that reason researchers reckon it as a chronic problem as two of the classes which the researchers have taken into consideration, have around six students who turn up late every other day and show signs of lethargy and disengagement from school. The familiar faces are lined up every morning outside the attendance office with no concern or emotion on their faces whenever the researchers pass by. This attitude can even become more adverse when the students re-promoted from their middle school to high school. Unpunctuality in the middle school can develop into high school lateness where the early slow disentanglement

evolves into later truant attitudes, dropping out of school and even in the workplace when students become uninvited adult working employees (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006; Koslowsky, 2000; Sagie, Birati, & Tziner, 2002).

Kirkpatrick, Crosnoe and Elder (2001) educational psychologists, stated that school tardiness and absenteeism accelerate if the students are not committed to their school. In an earlier study, Osterman (2000) reached at the same conclusion, vigorously stating that if students do not at home in their school environments, they prefer to be absent or tardy at school. Beards George, 1881 asserts it as “A delay in few minutes might delay the hope of lifelong”. Students who are tardy miss the starting of their morning classes, and this also is a reason of distraction when they reach late to class. Furthermore it is also observed that students whose ratio of tardiness is high score low grades, constitute less GPA during assessments and finals. They remain distracted that whole day which leads to the behavioral problem and on the other hand most of the students are suspended, rusticated or dropped out from the school.

The above thought is been proven by pragmatic studies. In 2000, Crosnoe surveyed approximately 500 students in 10 elementary and middle schools, half of them has extra ordinarily good attendance with punctuality while the other half has extremely poor. When they were questioned about what attracted or repelled them towards or form school, their answers were extremely straightforward. Those with high attendance stated that they had many friends at school and felt a sense of social belonging there and those with low attendance exclaimed the opposite, stating that they had hardly any friends at school and therefore felt socially isolated. Johnson, Farkas and Bers, 1997; (Furman, 1998; Crosnoe, 2000; Crosnoe, 2001).

Statistics specify that the greater majority of school children either come from single parent or two working parents’ home, where one is not available to take care of the child in order to maintain his punctuality and regularity. Sometimes the child has to perform chores around the home, including, in the case of the older siblings, the responsibility of the younger children. In such cases, the children are too tired to wake up in the morning and attend school on time (Pope, 2003). As it is apparent from the above stated, that psychological variables are a key determinant of tardiness and absenteeism. Within the context of this finding, one of the solutions to absenteeism appears to lie in the fortification of students’ sense of belonging both through the enhancement of teachers’ levels of professional commitment and parents sense of responsibility towards their kids.

Apart from the above mentioned causes, the literature on tardiness indicated, nutrition is an important cause of both tardiness and absenteeism. Studies on the relationship between diet and the defined research problem have directly identified nutrition as the source behind tardiness. In the first place, and as Taras (2005) reports that malnutrition has an adverse effect on both cognitive functioning and energy levels. Students who suffer either form of malnutrition generally tend towards high tardiness and absenteeism rates. The reason is very simple that they don’t have the energy to come to school on time. That means, that apart from the fact that they do not have the physical energy required to do their school work, they lose whatever motivation they have. (Taras, 2005).

OBJECTIVES

The above study was planned based on the following objectives:

1. To improve the identified students punctuality on the school timings.
2. To incorporate reward based behavior modification in the school tardiness policy.
3. To pilot the intervention and its impact on the students tardiness.

METHODOLOGY

Design

The action research design was determined for this research study. This was deliberated to improve the students' punctuality and reduce tardiness by inculcating reward based behavior modification plan. Six weeks intervention cycle was planned for the identified students. Triangulation in data collection was applied by opting for qualitative and quantitative modes of data collection and tools.

Participants

There were eight students identified for the research intervention. The students were chosen from the eighth grades that have shown a significant tardiness in the last two months.

Measures

A pre-test and post-test observation checklist was designed to record the data of students tardiness before and after the intervention. The first tool devised by the researchers was to attain quantitative data from the teachers and administration about the lateness of students in times. The second tool was designed in order to gather qualitative data where the students and teachers were given the questionnaires to record their perceptions and outputs regarding student tardiness.

Procedure

The researchers identified the participants of the study and their consent to participate in the study. Later, the pre-test was carried out and interventions were planned in accordance. The intervention was made through giving the rewards either tangible or intangible to the students every time they come to school on time. Furthermore Parents-teachers conference was also arranged with those very parents whose wards were observed to be tardy, for that consent of school administration was taken prior. Finally, a post-test was carried out to see the post intervention impact.

Data Analysis

T-Test was applied to explore if there was any significant difference between the times student is late for school per week, if the trend of student tardiness is being reduced or increased after the intervention.

RESULTS

The weekly data was recorded for six weeks. The data analysis revealed that the overall tardiness has decreased as the initial frequency was 25 in the first week and started reducing just after the intervention and became 11 in the 2nd week. It remained decreasing in the 3rd week with 6, 3 in the 4th week and 6 in the last week.

Table 1

Participants	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6
1	5	3	2	2	1	2
2	3	1	0	0	1	0
3	4	0	2	0	0	1
4	4	3	4	2	0	0
5	4	1	0	0	0	1
6	5	3	2	2	1	2

In addition to it, the following results demonstrate an overall significant difference between the pre-test and post-test $t(6.6) = 10, p < .001$.

Table 2

The Mean Difference between Pre-Test and Post-Test on the Variable of Interventions

	Status	N	Mean	Std. Dev	t	df	Sig
Difference	Pre-Test	8	4.17	.75	6.6	10	.000
	Post-Test	8	1	.89			

Note: According to the results job satisfaction is not statistically significant ($t=13.5, df=5, p < .001$).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

It can be stated that the intervention has positively brought a change in routine. Whilst there is a need to understand the hidden factor behind this positive change whereby in the current context it can be related to the interventions that were planned by the researchers. The strategies that were planned for this behavior modification consisted of student reward system and removal of policy of physical punishment. This can be referred with a two-fold perspective that is theoretical perspective and cultural perspective. As for the theoretical perspective many authors have suggested that students given a reward and incentive tend to show improvement in their school behavior and practices. This can be linked from Skinner's theory of behavior where a positive stimulus leads to a positive response and the increase in reward leads to a permanent response of the positive desired behavior

As from the cultural perspective, in Pakistani context corporal punishments are commonly used practice in the schools to alter the unwanted behavior of the students. Students being constant participants of such penalties adapt to a negative framework and ultimately channelize their behavior responses in negative regard. However, in this study this practice was completely removed and on a contrary method of praise and appreciation was implied. This allowed students to feel valued and eventually brought a positive change in their attitudes. This pilot study gives an insight to the researchers and practitioners that if the school transform their policies into more student-friendly and oriented then they will receive positive outcomes of the problems faced by them.

Therefore, it is suggested that operant conditioning should be devised to give rewards to those who are early comers and reinforce consistency all through-out the school. The implementation of a school-wide tardy policy should strictly be enforced where the teachers

and administrators should go hand in hand to create a system that is easy to enforce yet effective against tardiness. Since it is observed through the study that providing students with rewards and incentives for not being tardy to the school worked, therefore this strategy can be applied as school-wide policy.. However, it can also expand to more tangible rewards such as homework passes. The benefit of this is that students who are following the rewarded, hopefully reinforcing their positive behaviors. This research is one of the initiatives that will facilitate school policy makers, teachers and parents to explore the ways of creatively decreasing the student tardiness. Furthermore, it will help to bridge a gap in Pakistani literature for this phenomenon.

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