

SOCIETAL AND ECONOMIC FACTORS AFFECTING PUPILS' ABSENTEEISM AS A GAUGE OF ACADEMIC EFFICIENCY

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to investigate the reasons of frequent absences of pupils in school as well as the factors affecting their school attendance. The study utilized qualitative in-depth interviews among grade three pupils' parents. The factors such as poverty, social services, parent's perception towards education, and bullying affect school attendance. Poverty induced absenteeism. Parent's perception towards education motivated and had driven parents up to strive hard in sending their children to school. Bullying did not affect school attendance of pupils. Social services assisted economically disadvantaged families through giving financial aid that somehow helped in reducing the number of school absences of pupils.

KEYWORDS: Societal Factors, Economic Factors. Academic Efficiency

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

School performance relies on pupils' performance. The output of the pupil body will determine the kind of performance school will acquire. Therefore, the pupils are main contributors to the performance and rank of school. Low-ranking school conveys poor performance of pupils. High pupil performance will spring from attending school regularly.

Moreover, attendance is a key for school success (Gupta.et.al, 2014). School attendance may precipitates falling or rising of the school performance. Good attendance contributes to the success of school. On the other hand, absenteeism plays a great role for achieving low performance not only the pupil but also the school.

Absenteeism is the root of low grades and achievements of pupils. It may also result into dropping out and academic failure of pupil. These results will not just reflect in the performance of school but will also affect the budget of government and education system of the country. Gupta et.al (2014) asserted that classroom absence is a primary determinant accountable for sinking standard in school education system today. The adverse effect does not stop in the school. The effect of absenteeism extends in the pocket of the finance department of country. Like for instance, it has been discovered that in Okland, Unified School District suffered a loss of \$4 million dollars from student absences (Gupta et.al, 2014).

Absenteeism is now a major concern due to its prevalence both in peripheral and developed countries.

For instance, a study conducted by Virginia Department of Education in 2005 showed that public schools in urban schools has high absentee rate. In England, the Chief Inspector's Annual Report for 2003 discovered that 36 percent of all cases of frequent absenteeism start in primary schools.

In the Philippines, particularly in Habitat Elementary School of Kidapawan City there are about 48% or 16 out of 34 Grade IV pupils are chronic absentees during the months of October, November and December 2011 (Tejada, 2011).

Furthermore, absenteeism leads to less chances of learning and loss of interest in education especially if it starts in early stage of education. It lessens their opportunity to discover their talents and skills which school can provide. Frequent absences makes gap in pupil's education. Pupils with too many absences may feel academic insecurity and being left behind. It deters the pupil to aim high grades (Gupta.et.al, 2014).

However, absenteeism is not pupils' fault. Absenteeism is a product of circumstances. It is a combination of varied factors where learning is compromised. There are many diverse and multifaceted reasons why pupils opt not to be present in school (Pitre, 2010). Oftentimes, the pupils are just the recipient of some negative factors that forcing them to skip school. Even though the pupils are eager to go to school there are factors hindering them from attending classes.

Factors Affecting Pupils' Absenteeism

The following factors are deemed to be the primary causes of the students' poor scholastic performance:

Poverty

Absenteeism has many underlying factors. Poverty is one of those factors. It plays an important role in pupil's education. The government is having difficulty in dealing with poverty that concerns education. Socio-economic status of the family affects child's education. Poverty has a link to absenteeism. Hocking (2008) found a correlation between frequent absences of pupils to financial constraint. Pupils who live in poverty are more likely to be absent often.

According to Hussein (2007), absenteeism has a strong connection to child poverty. Economic deprivation contributes to excessive absences of the pupil. Poor school attendance is concomitant to financial difficulty. Those who are in financial difficulty are more likely to skip school often. The pupils opted to be absent when they could not submit the projects they needed in school (Tejada, nd).

Moreover, poverty is really an issue that can delineate chronic absenteeism of pupils. A study done in

Pakistan also revealed that poverty is one of the causes of absenteeism. Pupils helped their parents to earn money that contributes to their excessive number of absences (Shahzada.et.al, 2011). In relation to the above study, a research done by Utah Education Policy Center (2012) in Utah, USA demonstrated a vivid connection of poverty to school attendance. The research showed that absenteeism is higher in pupils that come from low income family. Based on research, absenteeism from low income family is about 90 percent higher than pupils not from low income homes. In the Philippines, children from poor families exhibited high propensity of absenteeism (Perez et.al, nd). Some pupils help their parents to earn money (Shahzada et.al, 2011).

The link between poverty and absenteeism has been clearly illustrated in many countries. It is not only in peripheral nations that poverty links to absenteeism even in developed countries as well. A study done in five states in America such as Oregon, Rhode Island, Maryland, Florida and Nebraska showed that those economically disadvantaged pupils were missing school frequently. This study revealed that 70 percent of chronically absent pupils are from families who live in poverty. Those who live in poverty are missing school frequently (Balfanz et.al, 2012). They also estimated that from 5 to 7.5 million pupils each year are missing school regularly. Poverty is really a barrier in attending school regularly (Kearney, 2008).

Parent's Perception towards Education

Education starts at home. Parents are the first teachers of children. Low and high academic achievement of the pupil relies on how much effort the parents will exert. Parents' involvement and perception toward education have impact on pupil's attendance. Hussein (2007) found that parent's negative attitude toward learning plays a major role in absenteeism. Interestingly, this negative attitude is from the lack of trust of parents in the school education system; and parents with negative attitudes and perception about their own education may likely to exhibit less interest and low involvement in their child's education (Powell, 2012).

In some families attendance is not the top priority. Reid (2008) argued that attendance dilemma if not due to poverty is parentally condoned. Majority of absence is overlooked by their parents. It is acceptable to have poor attendance in school. Parents place less value to education and do not see learning as priority (Hocking, 2008). In relation to this study, Powell (2012) strongly argued that lack of parent involvement has impact to pupil attendance. Parent's perception about education can influence pupil's attendance as well as the overall perception of the pupil towards learning. Pupils are not engrossed in learning because their parents are not focused either. The learners do not know the reasons why they are at school (Komakech et.al, 2014). Those parents with negative attitude about education because of negative education experience are more likely find it hard to engage themselves in their child's education. Commitment to their child's education is low.

Parents of absentees were more inclined to keep their children off school due to being less positive about school. Lack of encouragement from the parents with regards to their child's education would elicit negative implication to the child that may result to poor attendance in school. Pupils with excessive absences in school have no eagerness in being at school because their parents do support missing classes (Komakech et.al, 2014). Pupils are not motivated to attend school regularly.

Bullying at School

Bullying is a contributing factor that promotes absenteeism. Anyone can be a victim of bullying regardless of age, sex, race or even religion (Ngesu et.al, 2013). It is another detrimental determinant that should be given attention. When a pupil could not concentrate at school, having academic difficulty and showing low interest in attending classes these maybe the pupil is being bullied in school. The victims of bullying are frequently absent (Dake et.al, 2003). These victims tend to avoid school. Not going to school serves as an escape route from bullying.

It is not only Dake who attempted to explicate the relationship of bullying to absenteeism. Balfanz et.al, (2012), also hold the same contention that the pupils opted not to attend school just to evade bullying. The fear of being ridiculed, attacked and harmed by other classmates or schoolmates, and harassed obstructed them to attend school regularly. Bullying averts children from doing their duties as pupils (Ngesu et.al, 2013). As bullying affects pupil's well-being it progresses into absenteeism.

Conceptual Framework of the Study

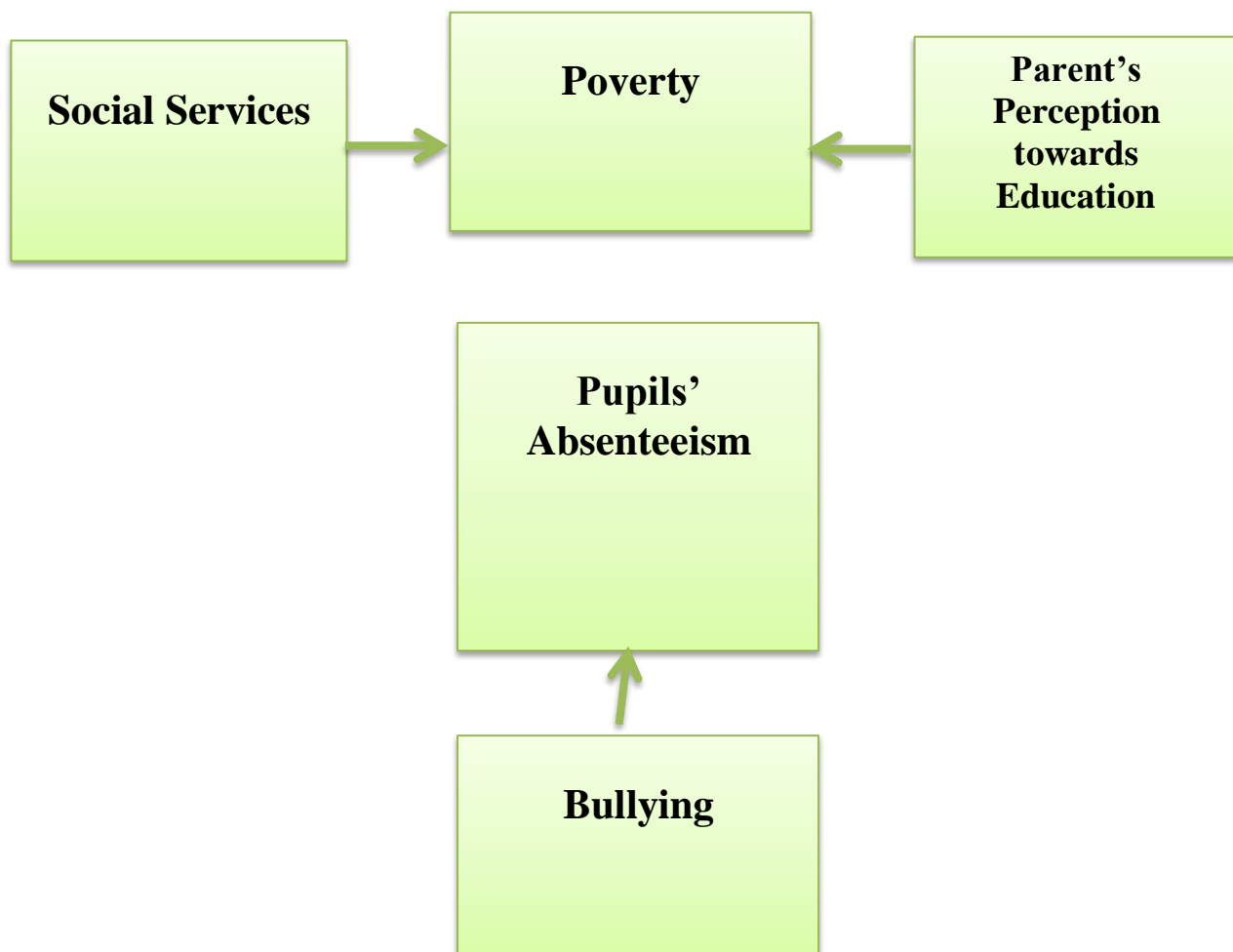
This section presents the conceptual framework of the study. Figure 1 shows the relationship of the variables.

School attendance is very vital for achieving good academic performance. It is also factor for learning to transpire. Attending school is a chance for the teachers and school to cultivate pupils' talents and skills. It is an opportunity to develop their social skills and other learning areas. Hence, chronic absenteeism deters the pupils to experience and seize all these opportunities before them.

The first component of the framework is poverty. As the literature suggested, poverty is the most contributing factor to chronic absenteeism. In most cases, the pupils are not attending schools because of financial constraint. Their parents could not afford to send them to school regularly.

The second component is social services. The government even local or national devised services that could alleviate poverty if not eradicate totally. These services are designed to aid these families to somehow avail necessary medical care and education. However, the body of literature revealed that chronic absenteeism is still prevalent among pupils who received some social services.

FIGURE 1. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY



The third component of the study is parent's perception towards education. Chronic absenteeism is also highly dependent on pupil's parents. As young as they are, they have no power over their education. Attending school regularly is relied upon their parent's discretion. Good or poor attendance links to the level of involvement of parents to their children's education. This level of involvement encompasses parent's perception towards education. In some cases, absenteeism is a result low involvement of parents to their children's education due to their negative perception about education.

The fourth component of the framework is bullying. Victims of bullying in school tend not to attend school due to their fear of violence. They avoid coming school that results into chronic absenteeism. The body of literature revealed that victims of bullying in school are frequently absent. They avoid being in school to avert from being attacked, ridiculed, and harmed by bullies.

Statement of the Problem

This study aims to describe the reasons of absenteeism and the factors affecting pupils' absenteeism among Grade III pupils at Aurora A. Quezon Elementary School.

Specifically, this study would like to answer the following inquiries:

1. The socio-economic profile of pupil's parents
2. The reasons of frequent absences of pupils
3. How do the following determinants affect pupils' attendance in school?
 - a. poverty
 - b. social services
 - c. parent's perception towards education
 - d. bullying

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This part discusses the research design, population and sampling, and data gathering procedure.

Research Design

This study is descriptive type of research that looked into factors affecting absenteeism. This study used qualitative technique of in-depth interview as a method to give better understanding about the reasons behind chronic absenteeism.

Population and Sampling

The data came from the in-depth interviews of four key informants. This study employed a non-probability sampling, specifically the purposive sampling. The researcher checked that respondents' children are still enrolled in the school.

Data Gathering Procedure

The set of key informants was completed by asking the class advisers to list their pupils with the most number of absences. The researcher asked the contacts of those chosen pupil's parents.

SIGNIFICANT FINDINGS

Indeed, poverty is a hindrance for pupils. Their education at this stage is highly relies to their parents capability. In this study, family's income ranges from P700 – 1,500 per week. The income some male parents get from driving pedicab supports family needs although not sufficient. Their very meagre income is supposed to cover all their basic necessities like foods and water. Sending their child to school is the least in their list when income is not even good enough to buy foods. Moreover, the lack of money to buy something during recess drives the pupil to be absent. Nonetheless, there is also some instances that the pupil herself/himself will do something just to attend school.

More So, bullying is one of the factors that deter a pupil in coming to school. The fear of violence and humiliation serve as barrier to good attendance of pupil.

Empirical studies showed that poverty has a strong connection to chronic absenteeism of pupils. Poverty is a significant determinant affecting pupil's attendance (Hussein, 2007). A study conducted in Jamaica exhibited that poverty is the main factor affecting school attendance of pupils (Cook et.al, 2010). Financial constraint hinders parents to send their children in school.

In this study, three respondents reported that financial problem deters their children from attending school regularly. Most of the time, the children had no provision they opted to be absent in school than to suffer from hunger during recess time. Sometimes, pupils were ashamed of having no provision during recess time.

Furthermore, the parents themselves would tell their children to be absent when they cannot even provide food to them at home. They were afraid their children might get dizzy during class hours due to hunger. Poverty made these children chronic absentees.

Evidently, poverty really affects children's education. This variable stands as the most important factor affecting regular attendance of pupils. The money in their parent's pocket will determine should they be in school or stay home and be absent. Income is not even adequate for their food on table that leave their children nothing to spend in school. In most cases, lack of provision holds children back from school. Some parents recounted that the child is ashamed of having no provision at all that lead them to be absent.

Apparently, the respondents are aware of the consequences and loss of opportunity for their children to learn more, but financial difficulty left them no choice. Apprehension for their children's health draws them not to allow their children go to school. The respondents admitted that most of the time they cannot even provide them complete meals in a day. Hence, they were forced to oblige their

children to stay home rather than attend school.

Social services help to send children school. Some parents revealed that they count on financial aid they receive from different social services they are in. This financial aid that intended to expend in education and medical care is also used in their other expenses like paying house rent and some bills. Some part of financial aid is spent to their children's education. The respondents allocated the money to different family needs not just to education alone.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the results of this study, the researcher suggests the following:

1. Schools administrators could collaborate within the community and other relevant government agencies with the aim of increasing income-earning power of poor pupils' parents. A training program that helps enhance parents' working skills could be devised.
2. Alternative programs should be developed for parents having trouble in sending their children to school due to financial constraint. The program ought to increase financial aid for these economically disadvantaged families.
3. Attendance must become social and political obligation. Parents should be given legal penalty for having chronic absentee child.
4. Schools seeking to alleviate absenteeism should promote feeding program to poor pupils exhibiting chronic absenteeism.
5. School administrators, teachers, and classroom advisers can implement incentive program that will draw pupils in coming to school regularly.

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