

LATECOMERS AMONG STUDENTS IN A MALAYSIAN COLLEGE: A CASE STUDY

Gunasegaran Karuppanan (PhD), Muhantha Paramalingam (EdD) & Datu Masjidin Datu Moksan (EdD)

Faculty of Education and Social Sciences, Universiti Selangor, Malaysia

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.37500/IJESSR.2021.4422>

ABSTRACT

In schools and colleges in Malaysia, the concept of time keeping is very important as every activity is scheduled for a particular time. This qualitative case study investigated the frequency of latecomers among students aged 18 in a public college with a 159-student population. The study also focused on the associated reasons for coming late; and the dealing strategies employed by the college administrators in curbing this problem of tardiness among the students. The rationale for the study stems from the need to gain perspective of the zero-defect policy in the keeping up with punctuality among students and subsequently alleviate the problem of latecomers. The instruments employed in the collection of data include interviews with the College Senior Assistant for Students' Affairs and the College Discipline Teacher; a document review of students' attendance records. Results reflect the analysis of data recorded of the latecomers over the first three months of 2017 and the details recorded in the interviews with the college administrators. Emerging from the data are reasons associated with students late-coming behavior and the frequency of latecomers; the effective strategies employed in reducing the problem of tardiness among students in the college.

KEYWORDS: zero defect policy, dealing strategies, frequency, associated reasons, tardiness

INTRODUCTION

In schools and colleges, the concept of time keeping is very important as every activity is scheduled for a particular time. However, some students are late to college on a regular basis. Latecomers often relate reasons such as traffic jam, vehicle breakdown, waking up late, job responsibilities, distance of residence from college that causes them to be late. When students come late to class, the flow of the lesson is interrupted and the other students are distracted. Valuable learning time is lost when students are late. Educators agree that punctuality is an important key to a student's success (Ruti & Gunasegaran, 2020).

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Students being late to college is not just the problem of the latecomers but it affects the whole learning process. Punctuality has so many attributes such as setting a standard for people to emulate. Students in a college are on a transit to get onto a career path or entry into a tertiary level of education where punctuality will be the foundation to success. Unfailing tardiness is a problem as students will become ill-prepared for the job market. Being present and on time are big factors on the success and behavior of students. Thus, it is important to value time and practice to be on time while being a student.

In a O Level College in Petaling Jaya, Malaysia, some students are found indulging in tardiness. There is a need to identify the factors that cause students to come late and thus to reduce to a zero defect where the problem of latecomers is concerned. One of the goals of the Students' Affairs Unit is to make students arrive at the college by 7.30 am. Although coming to college is better than not coming at all, tardiness is still a major problem for the students and the college.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- 1) How often do students come late and are the same students involved?
- 2) Which of the reasons given by the latecomers record the highest frequency?
- 3) What effects do latecomers have on the teaching and learning process?
- 4) How effective are the strategies employed by the College in dealing with the latecomers?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Literally, the term "lateness" denotes a situation in which usual time in which an individual arrives after the proper, scheduled or usual time (Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary, 5th ED. 1995). It is a form of behavior which can cause disruptiveness. In a classroom situation, latecomers disrupt the smooth flow of a lesson and interrupts the momentum. Lauby (2009) states 'lateness' as "people not showing up on time". A synonym of 'lateness' is 'tardiness', which implies being slow or slow to respond thus not meeting up with proper or usual timing (Breeze et al,2010).

In the Guidelines, on the Management of the college, by the Ministry of Education, Malaysia,2016, is stated that students are to be responsible in being punctual in the attendance for tutorials, practical sessions, course work and co-curriculum.

According to Sprick and Daniels (2007), one of the most frustrating problem in today's classroom is tardiness. He explains that the first four to eight minutes of class is almost a waste of time as students straggle in, disrupting instruction.

Some of factors related to students being late going to bed late and waking up late, the distance between the students' home and college, vehicle breakdown and public transport arriving not as scheduled, traffic jam and congestion, family background and bad weather.

METHODOLOGY

The profile of the college students was collected from the College Senior Assistant for Students Affairs and followed by an interview. While from the College Discipline Teacher; a document review of the Log Book for latecomers were gathered.

The college involved in this case study has a population of one hundred and fifty-nine students. The gender composition of the students are: forty -five male students and one hundred and fourteen female students. The ethnic compositions are eighty-five Malay students, twenty–six Chinese students, thirty –five Indian and thirteen students come under the categories of others.

Data was collected through interviews with the College Senior Assistant for Students Affairs and the College Discipline Teacher. The interview protocol was constructed to three questions. The questions were designed to learn about their roles and the common problems that they encounter in dealing with the latecomers. Open-ended questions were used to allow them to elaborate openly on the issue of latecomers in the college.

Permission was also granted by the College Senior Assistant for Students Affairs to view the details of latecomers in the Log Book for Latecomers.

The interview questions used for the Senior Assistant of Students Affairs are:

- i) What are the main concerns of the Students Affairs Unit in relation to latecomers among the students in the college?
- ii) What are the actions that have to be taken by your Unit in curbing the problem of latecomers?
- iii) What effects do latecomers have on the teaching and learning process in the college?

The interview questions used for the College Discipline Teacher are:

- i) How often do students come late to college?
- ii) What are the reasons given by the latecomers and which is the most common one?
- ii) What are the strategies used to overcome the problem of tardiness and which is the most effective strategy employed?

FINDINGS

The Interview with The College Senior Assistant for Students Affairs

The information that was given by the College Senior Assistant for Students Affairs was used to gain insight into the policies related to discipline and in particular tardiness, the impact of the strategies in dealing with the problem of latecomers; the effects of tardiness on the teaching and learning process. The college expects its students to be in college by 7.30 in the morning. However, the college classifies a student as late if he arrives after 7.40 in the morning. Students who are on time, swipe their matric card at the office for record of attendance. In addition, attendance of the students is marked in the class registers along with online record to the Ministry of Education. Students who are absent are marked '0'. Should the students appear in college after 7.40 in the morning they are marked present with the letter 'L' which means 'Late'. Students who are late are to fill in a log book at the foyer where the Discipline teacher awaits latecomers and deals with them.

Three questions were specifically used to elicit information from the College Senior Assistant for Students Affairs, according to her, the main concerns of the Students Affairs Unit in relation to latecomers in the college is to educate students on punctuality. The College believes that 'it is better to be late than never come but never late is always better'. The college further aims to instill the fundamentals of discipline that is to respect rules and regulations of the organization. Responsibility on the part of the student plays a major role in changing the negative effects of tardiness. Students should adhere to punctuality in coming to college by 7.30 in the morning and respect the grace period of extra time of ten minutes given so that they don't come under the categories of latecomers. The effects that the latecomers have on teaching and learning process are many. Students depend on the structure of the day. Students are aware that routines are in place mainly to be ready and focus on learning. Repeated lateness can cause these routines to be disrupted and they have trouble settling in. Latecomers deprive the other students in the class of attention and concentration as the teacher diverts the attention on the latecomer walking in. Latecomers are left out from the gist of the lesson and generally the latecomers' readiness for the day is lost due to the bad start. Latecomers often face consequences such as missing exams or cause other students to fail in group activities that require the presence of every member. Students with better attendance and punctuality generally have a better result with a higher cumulative grade point average (CGPA). Latecomers need to change their attitude to a more positive one to be successful in their lives.

The Interview with the College Discipline Teacher

The interview with the College Discipline Teacher proved to give an additional information on the latecomers. According to the discipline teacher, the students on the whole are reminded in a subtle manner on the importance of being punctual through a motto displayed at the office where students swipe the matric card to record attendance, "It is better to be late than never but never late is always better". However, there is an average of about two students who are late daily. There is one student who is regularly late with a maximum of nine days in a total of fifty-four days.

Students on the whole are reminded during the weekly assemblies on Monday and Wednesday on the issue of punctuality. According to the discipline teacher, a few procedures need to be followed by the latecomers. The latecomers who come after 7.40 a.m. are required to register their names at the college guard-house before they are allowed into the college compound. Following that, the latecomers will be met by the discipline teacher at the foyer where they fill in details such as name, class, time of arrival and reason for being late in the Latecomers Log Book. Students who are consecutively late for three days or more than three times a week, will need to undergo a follow-up session with the Senior Assistant for Students Affairs. Parents of the concerned latecomers are contacted to inform of the problem and requested to look into. This has proven to be effective in reducing the latecomers walking in late. Parents need to know that the college administration is monitoring closely on the latecomers and they care about them. This strategy has proven to be effective as parents who are not aware can advise and monitor their children to leave for college earlier so that they can arrive on time. The college is working towards a zero-defect strategy where tardiness will be subsequently reduced.

The discipline teacher stated that the reasons given by the latecomers are: waking up late in the morning, getting caught in a traffic jam as many students drive or ride to college, vehicle breakdown, public transport did not arrive on scheduled time, and parents are late in dropping them off at college. According to the discipline teacher, the most common reason is waking up late in the morning and secondly getting caught in a traffic jam. Getting caught in a traffic jam appears to be a valid reason as the college is situated amidst a heavily populated housing area. However, the reason waking up late in the morning is more of an attitude problem because most of the regular latecomers are living in the vicinity of only about one kilometer away from the college. Students who are travelling a distance much further do not normally seem to arrive later than 7.40 am.

DOCUMENT REVIEW

Based on the Latecomers Log Book that students fill in, the data obtained shows the distribution of latecomers and the reasons given for being late have also been recorded.

In the month of January there is a record of eight latecomers which is 5.03% of the overall population of 159 students. Following that, in February the number of latecomers was 93 with the highest record in the second week, that is 42 students. The percentage of latecomers for the month of April was 58.5. For the month of March, the record shows a drastic decrease to 46 students with a percentage of 28.9.

The most common reason given by the latecomers is waking up late in the morning. Latecomers have also given reasons such as traffic jam, motorcycle breakdown, public bus late, parents reached college late because they had to drop off siblings at another school.

CONCLUSION

As a conclusion, the attitude of the latecomers plays a major role in the resolution of the problem of tardiness. The effort taken by the Students Affairs Unit of the college in Petaling Jaya, Malaysia has proven effective in reducing the number of latecomers. The constant checking on the latecomers and following up with parents is one positive move. Parents when contacted to inform of their child's problem of tardiness, tend to help by monitoring and instilling in their children the value of time and punctuality. It may turn them to be role models for their children. Parents can look into the problem of transportation and avoid their children in getting caught in the traffic jam. The common reason for being late to college is waking up late. However, a majority of the latecomers who have given the reason as waking up late are living within vicinity of the college. This is truly a reflection of a negative attitude of the latecomers. Counselling and slots on time management would be beneficial for the students too.

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