

A Study on Prevention of Truancy in a Government School of Delhi

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Abstract

Regular class attendance is a prerequisite to maximise the school's contribution towards students' achievements. Truancy is a widespread phenomenon that needs attention of researchers and school education planners. A study was conducted on 6th and 7th grade students of a Government Senior Secondary school in Delhi to explore reasons for truancy and to develop remedial strategies. Out of 110 students, 12 students were found to be frequently truant. Qualitative research techniques like observation and semi-structured interview of students, teachers and parents were used. The information obtained was analysed for finding out the possible reasons and factors behind truancy. Different strategies were evolved and implemented for preventing truancy and motivating these students to attend classes regularly. Various motivational, environmental and disciplinary strategies deployed by the researcher were found to be useful in reduction of truancy among students. The experience of this action research can be utilised in other similar situations and comprehensive strategies for prevention of truancy can be developed for wider implementation in school education system.

INTRODUCTION

School life has a perennial impact on children's life. Its positive impact on children manifests in learning better and responsible behaviour which finally makes them accomplished human beings. Punctuality and regular attendance in school is a prerequisite for children's achievement

as a student. The child wants to go to school regularly when he finds school climate joyful and exciting. Truancy is a habit that develops among school children who find it difficult to sustain their interest in classroom activities. As a result they run away from the class and engage in unwanted and at times harmful activities outside the

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classroom and school. Considering the problem of truancy, an action research was planned with the following objectives:

1. To identify the truant students in the class.
2. To find out the reasons of truancy among students.
3. To evolve effective strategies and interventions for reducing truancy and to implement them in classroom situation.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

Two sections of grade VI and grade VII in a Government Senior Secondary School of Delhi were assigned pupil-teacher for School Experience Programme (SEP) for a period of three months. Through the direct and indirect observation by the pupil-teachers 12 out of 110 students were identified who did not attend classes regularly and were in the habit of leaving the class after first or second period. These truant students constituted sample for the action research.

Tools

Semi-Structured Interview Schedules for students, teachers and parents were developed for collecting necessary information about the possible factors contributing to the development of truancy among students and its possible remedies. The information obtained through these semi-structured interviews and direct

observation was analysed qualitatively. The inferences were drawn about the reasons and factors leading to truancy. The investigator developed certain strategies based on her experience as a teacher educator, and the views of students, teachers and parents were recorded. Appropriate interventions were implemented for reducing the habit of truancy among these students.

FINDINGS

All three groups of respondents provided rich information about various factors that might be responsible for truant behaviour among students.

(I) Students' Responses

Responses of 12 truant students about their habit were as follows-

(a) Irregularity of teacher in taking

class: Most of the students opined that they bunk the class because the teachers do not take the classes regularly as a result of which they get ample time for playing and recreation. This gradually develops into a habit of missing the classes.

(b) Monotony in teaching methods:

Most learners felt bored in the class due to lack of variety in teaching approaches to accommodate different learning styles and preferences, and to cater to the individual differences of learners. As a result many of them started running away from the classes and engaged in other activities of their choice.

- (c) **No time for recreational facilities:** Every child has a desire for recreation that is helpful in better learning. But when the school timetable does not provide any scope for recreational activities, the students tend to escape from the classes for enjoying recreational activities outside the school.
- (d) **Negligence of authorities:** Negligent attitude of authorities specially that of teachers resulting from poor supervision and inadequate disciplinary measures prompts the students to miss the classes.
- (e) **Non-completion of home assignment:** Pupils are very much frightened of those teachers who give corporal punishment because of non-completion of home assignments and due to this fear some students remain absent from classes if they had not completed home assignments.
- (f) **Lack of appropriate teaching pace:** The teachers often fail to use appropriate pace and learning resources to enhance pupils' interest during the classroom teaching and students failing to adjust with the pace of class get disinterested and miss the classes.
- (g) **Disinterest in a particular subject:** Some students develop disinterest in one or more particular subjects due to poor knowledge, lack of appropriate teaching-learning material and faulty

feedback system which leads the students to remain away from the classes.

(II) Teachers' Responses

Following inferences were drawn from teacher's responses-

- (a) **Importance of class attendance:** Most of the teachers agreed that a system of class attendance in every period may deter students from bunking classes. However, they opined, this will not be feasible due to insufficient time.
- (b) **Vigilance and monitoring by teachers:** Majority of the teachers agreed that better vigilance by teachers to monitor students' activities inside and outside the classroom may reduce truancy. However, they reported that it is very difficult due to their multiple responsibilities.
- (c) **Background of the students:** According to some teachers the students are not willing to study as they come from slums and low socio economic strata of the society which influence their personality in such a manner that they develop the tendency to skip the classes and indulge in other activities. Most of the students are the first generation learners and do not have any family member to help them in the studies at home. According to some teachers, these students fail to visualise the importance of education in their life.

- (d) **Absence of effective teaching-learning material:** Due to lack of effective teaching-learning materials the teachers could not make teaching learning process interesting. They also opined that neither they have time nor the resources to make teaching aids on each and every topic they teach.
- (e) **Negligence of parents:** Teachers felt that a better vigilance by parents may stop their wards from missing the classes. Parents should supervise their wards' home work and cocurricular activities, so that the students feel that their activities are being monitored by the parents.
- b) **Poor educational status of parents:** As they are uneducated, parents cannot help their children in study matters like helping them in completing home assignments or preparing for the exams. This indirectly affects their children's interest and motivation in studies resulting into truancy.
- c) **Engaging children in household activities:** Some of the students assist their parents in doing household activities such as looking after their younger siblings or in small business activities like assisting in shop. This is used as an excuse by students for remaining absent from classes.

(III) Parents' Responses

Parents were able to reflect upon some of the family factors contributing to truancy in their children. Major factors reported were as follows-

- a) **Inadequate time to monitor children:** Parents opined that due to their low socio-economic strata they were busy in earning their livelihood. So they do not have enough time to keep a track of different activities of their wards during and after school hours.

STRATEGIES DEPLOYED BY THE INVESTIGATOR

After analysing the responses of the students, teachers and parents, the investigator developed a strategy consisting of a combination of motivational, environmental and disciplinary measures for implementation in the class. These measures were implemented and their short term impact was evaluated.

Table 1. Measures for reducing truancy among school children

Motivational Measures	Environmental Measures	Disciplinary Measures
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Displaying a caring and empathetic attitude 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Giving new look to the classroom 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • System of class

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Setting realistic but challenging targets • Reinforcing responsible behaviour • Praising the Pupil's achievement • Strengthening 'Can do' factor • Grading system for the best disciplined student • Providing proper and specific feedback • Gaining student's trust and keep trusting them • Activity based home work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of visuals • Buddy System 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • attendance • Token system • Vigilance in school premises
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(I) Motivational Measures

Motivation, self-esteem and self-efficacy linked together help us understand the different ways to which the learners may respond to the demands and opportunities of the classroom. A strong sense of self-efficacy is a great motivating factor. Absence of self-confidence in the pupils reduces their initiative to work hard.

The investigator deployed certain techniques for raising pupil's self esteem and motivation to attend classes regularly. These techniques are as follows:

a) Displaying a caring and empathetic attitude: The investigator raises the self-esteem of pupils by showing that she really cares for them through talking to them informally,

addressing them by their names, showing concern, taking their feelings and emotions seriously and giving time to individual pupils.

- b) Setting realistic but challenging targets/goals:** The investigator sets realistic and challenging targets and goals for different pupils depending on their capabilities and potentialities for ensuring individual progress. That means arranging opportunities for success with the philosophy that all pupils are good at something or other.
- c) Reinforcing responsible behaviour:** The desirable behaviours like punctuality and regularity in the class, completing homework in time etc. were reinforced through a monitoring system in which the performance of

pupils was displayed in the class corner resulting in peer appreciation and individual recognition.

(d) Praising pupil's achievement:

The investigator used the verbal praise by using words like good, very good, excellent etc. as well as non verbal praise like smile, eye contact, different facial expressions for building up the students' self-esteem. This played an important role in fostering a supportive and non-threatening classroom climate.

(e) Strengthening the 'Can do' factor:

The investigator strengthened the 'can do factor' by breaking down the task into smaller steps and focused on one task at a time and encouraged the pupil for fulfillment of that segment successfully.

f) Grading system for the best disciplined student:

The investigator followed a grading system for identifying the best disciplined students of the week who can work as pace setter for other students to follow. This worked as a miracle for motivating the students to be in the class and winning the award of the best disciplined student.

g) Providing proper and specific feedback:

The investigator provided specific, clear and descriptive feedback to each student in the identified area in which the students needed to concentrate more.

h) Gaining students' trust and keep trusting them:

The investigator gained the student's trust by creating an emotionally supportive classroom and also helped the students to feel that classroom is a safe place where pupils are not at risk from emotional and physical bullying or other adverse factors.

i) Activity based Homework:

By giving homework assignment that requires creativity rather than mechanistic repetitive task helped students in taking more interest in homework and attending classes.

(II) Environmental Measures

a) Giving a new look to the classroom:

Classroom should be converted into a comfortable, well organised, clean and physically attractive place through the use of attractive teaching aids like charts, models, posters and interesting quotations. This made the classroom an interesting and exciting place which stimulated the pupil to learn and hence reduce truancy.

b) Use of visuals:

Using visual images of key topics of different subjects on classroom walls acted as a reminder of what has been learnt by the pupil in the class. This helped in creating interest among students for studies. This indirectly increased the pupil's attendance in the class.

c) Buddy System:

Use of buddy system allows pupils to support each other in their curricular and cocurricular activities. The pupils

are less likely to be afraid of making mistakes if they are in pairs.

(III) Disciplinary Measures

- a) System of class attendance:** By using the system of class attendance at the beginning of each period it became easy for the teacher in identifying the truant students and keeping a constant check on these students. This also helped in identifying specific periods in which students escape from classes regularly.
- b) Token system:** Under token system a particular token was used in which one student at a time was allowed to go out of the class by taking this token. This ensured that not more than one student remains out of the class at any time.
- c) Vigilance on the play ground and other areas in the school:** The teachers and other staff members of the school were asked to keep a check on students who wander here and there in the school and send such students back into their classes.

CONCLUSION

This action research demonstrates that it is possible to analyse the factors

behind truancy and evolve effective strategies to reduce truancy among students. The factors causing truancy are related to the teachers' attitude towards students, teaching approaches, classroom environment, supervisory and disciplinary practices, parental involvement in their children's school activities, children's self-esteem and motivation. The strategies to reduce truancy include motivational, disciplinary and school environment related measures. Motivational measures increase the inherent willingness to be in the school that gets reinforced by the congenial environment and disciplinary checks and controls. The strategies discussed in this paper were found to be successful in bringing down the truancy habit in 8 out of 12 truant students on short term basis. The author recommends more action research of similar nature in different kinds of schools to evolve a comprehensive set of strategies that can be implemented at wider level and become institutionalised in the school education system.

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