

Do school absences and tardiness have a correlation to students' behaviors?

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1. Table 1.

Measures of Central Tendency

	Mean	N
Sum of Absent and Tardy	3.17	12
# of behaviors	5.83	12

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2. Table 2.

Correlation Analysis

		Sum of Absent and Tardy
Sum of Absent and Tardy	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	1
	N	12
# of behaviors	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	.817**
	N	12

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** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Abstract

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine whether student absences and tardiness have a correlation to the occurrence of student behaviors within the pre-kindergarten classroom setting. This correlational study examined the relationship between students' misbehavior and students' absences and tardiness. Previous research indicates that students who are absent from school are also more likely to exhibit misbehavior while in school. However, there has not been a substantial amount of research conducted with students who are tardy to school. The current study used a random convenience sample and examined the correlation between students who are both absent and tardy and students who exhibit misbehavior during the school day. This study found a significant correlation between students who were absent and/or tardy to school and students who exhibit misbehavior during the school day. However, there were multiple threats to validity with the testing sample of students used in this study. While results of the study showed a substantial correlation between students' school absences and/or tardiness and student's misbehavior, this study should be conducted again using a larger sample size and a broader population of students to provide more credibility to the research.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Overview

In this study, the researcher will attempt to analyze the impact that school absences and tardiness have in relation to students' behaviors, provided by documenting the student absences, tardiness, and the overall behaviors of the students. Tracking this information is important for various purposes. Some students demonstrate a pattern of missing days from school, and such a pattern may be connected to the behaviors of these identified students. Furthermore, studies show that student absenteeism and student achievement are linked.

School attendance is critical for all students to achieve. Over the years school attendance has become a problem across the America. On any given day, at least 10% of public-school students are absent, and in more urban areas, absenteeism can be as high as 30% (McConnell & Kubina, 2014). The Harford County Public School District has been concerned about student absenteeism for many years. The Harford County Public School District has come up with initiatives on a countywide level and on schoolwide levels to try to improve student absenteeism numbers. The researcher in this study, a teacher, is concerned about the correlation between student absenteeism and the possible relationship to students' problematic behaviors in the classroom. Students who demonstrate problematic behaviors may also be lower achieving students due to the impact it can have over time through loss of instruction.

Statement of Problem

Student achievement is something that has been evaluated and analyzed in relation to a student's attendance record. Students who regularly attend school have a better chance at achieving success. Another thing that should be analyzed is a student's behavior record in

relation to their attendance record. Students' behaviors can also interfere with a child achieving success in school. The purpose of this study is to compare a student's attendance record in conjunction with a child's behavior record. The researcher will want to analyze and compare both data records to determine if there is a relationship between the two pieces of data collected. The research that follows proposes the answer to the following question: Do school absences and tardiness have a correlation to students' behaviors?

Operational Definitions

A *behavior checklist* was utilized to determine which specific behaviors were identified, and tracked, during the duration of the study. The *school attendance record* will be utilized to track student absences and tardiness. A random sample of students will be chosen to ensure a variety of students are studied and analyzed. The researcher will identify specific time periods to track behaviors. Based on the results of the behavior data collected, and the students' attendance record, the researcher will determine if student absences and tardiness have a correlation to the students' behaviors during the school day.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Overview

This literature review examines the relationship between student absenteeism and disruptive behaviors by elementary school students in the prekindergarten classroom. The first section of this literature review defines what absenteeism is and how student absences should be tracked and monitored for prekindergarten students. The first section also explains the importance of student attendance and the effect it can have on a student's behavior and how it impacts the classroom overall. In the second section, behavior expectations in the prekindergarten classroom are described. The second section also defines disruptive behaviors and how they can be examined. The third section provides an explanation of a positive school climate and how that can impact both absenteeism and student behaviors. This section of this literature review also describes prevention and intervention measures for decreasing student absenteeism and for decreasing the instances of disruptive behaviors in the classroom. It also examines relationships related to absenteeism and goal setting strategies for improving absenteeism and decreasing the number of disruptive behaviors.

Definition of Absenteeism

According to Oxford Online Dictionary (2019), the definition of absenteeism is the practice of regularly staying away from work or school without good reason. Absenteeism has both, short and long-term consequences on student achievement. School attendance for all students is critical to maintain continuity and to build and maintain positive relationships. When students are regularly absent from school, it can affect more than academics; it has also been linked to other serious problems, such as internalizing and externalizing behavioral disorders,

lowered reading and mathematics test scores, lower academic performance and achievement, fewer literacy skills, grade retention, juvenile justice system involvement, and risk of dropout (Hendron & Kearney, 2016). School absenteeism can lead to bigger problems down the road. Some of the issues can include academic challenges, grade retention, disengagement from school, and problems with behaviors. According to Raftu (2017), “Compared to their peers, students who don’t attend school regularly have lower academic performance, limited future employment opportunities and will experience social and emotional problems in adulthood” (p. 182). School absences have become a national problem. Sheldon and Epstein (2018) report that according to the U.S. Department of Education (1998), 15% of public-school teachers report student absenteeism as a “serious problem” at their school. Absenteeism is a major problem, not only in schools, but it’s also a problem for communities, cities, districts, states, and the nation (Mahoney, 2015). School districts, as well as educators, are required to monitor and record students’ attendance each day. Most school systems and educators will intervene when they see a pattern of student absences in order to lessen the potential of negative effects in the future.

Definition of Behaviors

The definition of behavior is “the way in which one acts or conducts oneself, especially toward others” (“Behavior,” 2019). There are behavior expectations as a student enters school for the first time. The start of school can be a crucial event for children as they transition from home day care centers, childcare or kindergarten, into a more formal school environment (Sayers, West, Lorains, Laidlaw, Moore & Robinson, 2012). During these transitions, children begin to face new demands and academic challenges. Students begin to learn new rules and routines and are expected to meet teacher expectations and gain acceptance into new peer groups. Students may face heightened expectations for behavioral compliance, sustained

attention, and social integration (Ladd & Price, 1987). The early transition into the classroom is particularly important because it can affect the attitudes and reputations of the students that develop during the beginning of the student's school career. These attitudes and reputations may follow them through their years as a student. Developing a positive attitude about school early on is crucial. When students like school and feel secure in their learning environment, they are likely to profit from their educational experience. Students who do not develop a positive attitude towards their school environment and learning may develop reactions such as anxiety, avoidance, or negative attitudes towards school. These may early signs of adjustment difficulties that, in turn, may disrupt a child's future progress.

When students are absent, they are more likely to have behavior issues, which can negatively impact the classroom environment by modeling those negative behaviors and demanding more time and attention from the classroom teacher (Van Eck, Johnson, Bettencourt & Johnson, 2017). These kinds of disruptions can have a negative effect on how students feel about school, their teachers and the overall school climate. Students who miss school may then have the potential to start engaging in risky behaviors (McConnell & Kubina, 2014).

Building relationships with peers and teachers plays a crucial role in the school climate and how the child feels about coming to school each day. A student's behavior may require a teacher to direct their focus on the negative behaviors. This may take away from them being able to focus their attention on the students who are behaving and in need of positive attention. Other students may feel as if the classroom is boring or chaotic and often feel invisible to the teacher. This can contribute to their lack of interest in learning and an increase in absenteeism (Sullivan, 2018). Students with negative feelings about their school and relationships with school personnel have shown greater attendance difficulties as well as antisocial behavior in the

classroom (Hendron & Kearney, 2016). Efforts to build relationships with students who are chronically absent have proven to be successful. Educators need to listen to their students and let them share their reasons for being absent. By doing this, they can build connections and demonstrate their willingness to provide supports to the student if they need it (Sullivan, 2018)

Prevention and Intervention

School climate may play a factor in a students' absenteeism. Focusing more attention on the school climate presents an opportunity to reach the students who may be at risk for being absent (Van Eck, et al., 2017). Teachers need to build positive caring relationships with their students. When students are in a safe environment, where they feel they are cared for, they will be more inclined to want to be present at school. School climate involves "the quality and character of school life. School climate consists of components such quality of student and teacher interpersonal relationships" (Hendron & Kearney, 206 p109). Some other important elements of the school climate are student autonomy, clear and consistent rules and goals, including parents and families, safe and organized classrooms, and engaging and effective lessons. School climate involves building connections with students so that students feel accepted by teachers and peers. Students need to feel valued and that they are part of the class. School climate and connectedness can also overlap with student engagement, bonding and attachment. Changing student absenteeism issues takes school improvements and having structures in place. It's important for teachers to provide quality instruction, but teachers also need to build relationships with parents and families to ensure that all students feel secure, welcome and an important part of the classroom (Mahoney, 2015)

There are many steps a teacher can take to prevent students from missing school and to help with reducing instances of disruptive behaviors. Using modeling, positive praise, and a

class wide attendance monitoring system can help get students to attend school each day (Sheldon & Epstein, 2018) Teachers need to work with parents, families and school counselors to help get students to school on a regular basis. Teachers may want to meet with individual families to address their individual needs. Community collaborations between teachers and families may help get more students in school. This can help to keep students safe and more likely to learn the academics they need in order to succeed.

According to Mahoney (2015), “Parents are equally to blame when students are chronically truant from school” (p.127). There are many ways parents can contribute to frequent absenteeism both directly and indirectly. Issues at home, including parental anxiety, mental health issues, separation or divorce, family dynamics, family conflict, single parent status, and child-parent relationships, may all be contributing factors toward absenteeism (Sullivan, 2018). Parents should be educated on the effects absenteeism can have on their child. It is crucial to get parents on board and to “buy in” on the importance of school attendance. Educators have a responsibility to help families and communities become involved in reducing student absenteeism. Teachers and families need to communicate regularly to support one another in their efforts to reduce the occurrence of absenteeism. It is critical the teachers communicate with families about attendance. Teachers should celebrate good attendance with their students and their families and connect chronically absent students with school and community mentors. Involving families with support can help to reduce students’ chronic absenteeism from one year to the next (Sheldon & Epstein, 2018).

Developing meaningful interventions can help reduce chronic absenteeism by involving the students, parents, peers, the school and the community. Attendance may be improved with some simple and direct interventions such as phone calls home from teachers, principals and

other staff members (McConnell & Kubina, 2014). “Direct parent contact on a daily basis appears to have the most promising results” (p.254). Interventions that provide a collaborative approach may be more successful when schools are able to work with parents to provide effective solutions to the problem. Schools may provide interventions within the school such as the Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports Program (PBIS). These supports provide interventions focused on teaching positive student behaviors and behavior management. According to Mallett (2016), PBIS programs often involve student-centered teaching strategies, improved tolerance, mentoring programs, group discussions and family involvements. PBIS programs have been found to improve attendance rates, lower suspension rates, and improve family and student involvement. Interventions that involve a more collaborative approach may be more successful over time.

Summary

School attendance is critical for students to learn and achieve. Student attendance rates have been a severe problem in public classrooms across America each year (McConnell & Kubina, 2014) Students who are frequently absent or late to school have been shown to be at risk for academic underachievement, delinquent behaviors and a higher risk for dropping out of school (Van Eck, et al., 2017). Intervention strategies and school collaborations can be used to help support student attendance in an effort to reduce these behaviors and allow students the opportunity to achieve success. Teachers, students and families can work together to help set goals for their students’ attendance. Teachers need to celebrate their students’ attendance and make them feel wanted and successful in the school environment.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

The purpose of this study is to determine whether student absences and tardiness have a correlation to the occurrence of student behaviors within the pre-kindergarten classroom setting.

Design

This study used was a correlational study. Students were randomly selected and monitored for their behaviors using a behavior checklist (instrument #1). Data was collected using the behavior checklist each day during specific times during the school day. The researcher was looking for specific problematic behaviors to occur during the school day. The identified students' attendance record (instrument #2) was also analyzed for the number of absences and tardiness they had acquired during the duration of the study. At the conclusion of the study period, the data was then examined to determine whether there was a correlation between the students with the higher number of absences and tardiness to the students who exhibited a higher number of problematic behaviors.

Participants

Participants in this study included six elementary students in the prekindergarten morning session, and six elementary students in the prekindergarten afternoon session. (ages 4 and 5). These participants are currently enrolled in the public-school system, in a title I elementary school. Two of the students in the study have Individualized Education Plans, with the special education coding of Developmental Delay. The students were all randomly selected through a number system with their names listed in alphabetical order. Of the 12 selected students, 8 students were reported as African American and 4 were reported as white. Seven of the students are female and 5 are male.

Instrument #1

The behavior data collection instrument in this study was a behavior tallying chart which was developed by this researcher. Teachers tallied the frequencies of six identified behaviors for each student during identified periods of time every school day during the duration of the study. Teachers tallied each incident when a student called out, including calling out answers without raising their hand. A tally was given when a student left their seated area without permission. This would include roaming around or simply getting up to use the bathroom without getting a teacher's permission. A tally was given for refusal of a task. Teachers also tallied when a student actively defied or refused to comply with a teacher direction based on verbal or nonverbal cues. This excluded students who would simply appear distracted or did not hear the given directions. A tally was given for a student talking to peers during a lesson or during a non-talking time. A tally was given for students who were argumentative or talked back to a teacher, A tally was given for students who showed aggression towards peers or adults. This included using their body or words in an aggressive manner towards any person in the classroom. A tally was recorded for each incidence during the identified period of time.

If a student was observed having the behavior multiple times, the behavior was tallied for each time it was observed. At the end of the data collection, the frequencies were added together for a behavior score for each student included in this study. There is no reliability or validity data for this instrument.

Instrument #2

The Harford County Public School's attendance record will serve as the second instrument that was used in this study. Each student had their attendance, including absences and tardiness, recorded during the duration of the study. The researcher used this record to tally

the number of school days each student missed during the period of time the study was conducted. Tardiness was also included as a part of this study. At the end of the study, student absences and tardiness were added together, and that data was recorded for each student in the study. This data gathered from this instrument was a reliable and valid source of information.

Procedure

At the conclusion of this study, the researcher compiled the data using charts to compare the data collected. The researcher created a chart with the students included in the study, listing the participants as “student 1” to “student 12.” Each student was given a score for the occurrence of behaviors, based on the behavior checklist used for this study (instrument #1), and a score based on the students’ attendance record (instrument #2). Each student’s individual data was then analyzed to determine whether there was a correlation between the number of absences and tardiness, and the occurrence of problematic behaviors observed within the prekindergarten classroom. The researcher was then able to determine whether student absences and tardiness have a correlation to the occurrence of student behaviors within the pre-kindergarten classroom setting.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to determine whether student absences and tardiness have a correlation to the occurrence of student behaviors, within the pre-kindergarten classroom setting.

Data was collected on absences, tardiness, and behaviors. A total sum was constructed for absences and tardiness, and then a correlation was run. Displayed in Table 1 are the measures of central tendency and in Table 2 the correlation analysis.

Table 1.

Measures of Central Tendency

	Mean	N
Sum of Absent and Tardy	3.17	12
# of behaviors	5.83	12

Table 2.

Correlation Analysis

		Sum of Absent and Tardy
Sum of Absent and Tardy	Pearson	1
	Correlation	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	
	N	12
# of behaviors	Pearson	.817**
	Correlation	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001
	N	12

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to determine whether student absences and tardiness have a correlation to the occurrence of student behaviors within the pre-kindergarten classroom setting. Data analysis in Chapter IV indicated a statistically significant correlation between the sum of absences and tardiness and the number of misbehaviors. The square of the correlation coefficient of .817 is .67, denoted as R, represents the amount of area in common between the two variables. Thus, 67% of the area of misbehavior and absence or tardiness overlaps.

Threats to Validity

This study has several major threats to external validity. The size of the sample is a threat to validity because it is small, as it was a random sampling of only 12 students from only one classroom. The sample is limited to only one school, and data was analyzed in one grade level. A larger group of students would have provided a broader range of results and more credibility to the research. In addition to this, the duration of the study was short and does not give an accurate account of the behaviors, absences and tardiness, that would represent the data of an entire school year. Another threat to external validity would be the child's home practices. Some children have parents that promote positive behavior and school attendance at home, and other children do not. This could be due to a wide range of factors, including the education level of the parents, socio-economic status, the parents' work schedule, and simply the parents' own beliefs and interests regarding behavior and attendance.

There are internal threats to validity – so called design threats – that limit the strength of the study. Threats to internal validity include history, maturation, testing, instrumentation, regression, selection, mortality, and selection interactions.

The pre-kindergarten classroom was used for this study. This is a convenience sample simply because the students were easily accessible to the researcher. There are only 18 students in the AM session and 18 students in the PM session. The researcher chose to select every third student, as a random sample. As a result of this type of random selection, the sample size was limited to six students in the AM session and six students in the PM session, twelve students in all. The size of the group in this study may be a threat to validity. The small sample size weakens the power of a statistical test and the ability to detect a real correlation.

Sample students were chosen randomly through a number system. Two students that participated in this study have Individualized Education plans. Their behavior may have been impacted due to their disability. All the students in the study attend a Title I school and are from at-risk, lower socio-economic backgrounds. This may have impacted the study in that these students often have limited resources, supervision and/or structure at home. The characteristics of this sample may not represent the characteristics of an entire population of pre-kindergarten students.

Maturation could pose a threat in this study because the typical age of students age of the students in this study is 4 and 5 years old. This age group could be a validity threat in that the behaviors could be due to their age and maturity level. Many pre-kindergarten aged students have difficulty sustaining attention and following rules due to their lack of school experience and

maturity level. If this same group of students was tested at a different age or a different grade level, this study may indicate different results.

The instrumentation could pose a threat as the observer could either become experienced or careless with data collection, which could result in difficulty deciphering between an occurrence and a nonoccurrence. This study could be affected if the observer was either recording an occurrence that did not happen or not recording an occurrence that did actually happen. The observer for this study would need to carefully record the data for the results to accurately reflect this sample and to detect a real correlation.

One last validity threat to take into consideration was the amount of time the students were observed, and data was collected. Data was collected from April 1 through May 3, which included 23 full days of school and one early dismissal day. The data collection took place just before and right after a holiday. The school's spring break also fell during this data collection period. This holiday break may account for an increase in students' misbehavior due to the fact that students can become overly excited around holidays. Another factor that may have contributed to an increase in the occurrence of misbehavior would be that students are home for an extended period of time and lose the structure and routine of the normal school day. During this period of time, there could have been an increase in student absences and tardiness due to the fact that many families choose to travel during spring break and holidays. This may have contributed to students missing school on those days.

Comparison of the Results to Literature

Many other studies have been conducted that have analyzed whether student absences and tardiness have a correlation to the occurrence of student behaviors. Results from this study support the research found by Raftu (2017), reporting that school absenteeism can lead to many issues that can include academic challenges, grade retention, disengagement from school, and problems with behaviors. However, Raftu's study primarily focused on the factors that contribute to absenteeism and school dropout rates. Raftu attributes these results to family causes and the student relationship with their academic environment. He also looks at the causes that can contribute to students having a poor relationship with their academic environment.

Results from this study also support research conducted by Van Eck et al. (2017), reporting that students who are chronically absent are more likely to have behavior issues, which contributes to a negative classroom environment. Their study also finds that students who exhibit disengaged behavior will then model this behavior to the other students, suggesting that chronic absence affects both youth who are absent and also who attend school. The primary focus of this study was to look at the relationship between school climate and absenteeism. While it did not analyze the same data, the study did support the results found within this study.

Summary, Conclusions, and Directions for Future Research

The researcher asked the question: Do school absences and tardiness have a correlation to students' behaviors? The data analysis indicated a statistically significant correlation between the sum of absences and tardiness and the number of students' misbehavior.

The limitations or threats to validity and reliability should be considered when determining a plan for future research. One suggestion recommended for future researchers would include extending this study to go through the course of an entire school year. In addition, a larger sample size, perhaps including multiple grade levels, or even multiple schools, would potentially provide more opportunity to yield statistically significant results. Increasing the number of students sampled will give more credibility to the research. Additionally, increasing the number of grade levels and schools sampled would give even more credibility to the research. Additional research could also include a longitudinal study for an increased number of school years. This change of input can change the data results as the students mature. It also allows for more data to be collected, analyzed, and compared, which may help to give better insight to the relationship between student behaviors and absences and tardiness.

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