

Catching Up: Strategies of Helping Learners with Attendance Problem

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Abstract: This phenomenological study investigated the strategies used by primary-grade teachers to combat poor attendance among learners in Compostela West District, Division of Davao de Oro. Through in-depth interviews with seven (7) public school teachers, thematic content analysis revealed two critical findings on the challenges of teachers in helping learners with attendance problem such as socioeconomic barriers and unresponsive parents. Meanwhile the coping strategies of teachers in helping learners with attendance problem had yielded the key themes namely building positive relationships and supportive environment and engaging parental and guardian involvement. Further, this study drew insights from the lived experiences of the participants. The insights were strengthening flexible and inclusive teaching strategies and engaging collaboration of school stakeholders. The findings highlighted the urgency of multi-stakeholder collaboration, advocating for targeted parental engagement programs and community-based support systems to address economic hurdles. These findings likewise emphasized that sustainable attendance improvements require institutionalizing holistic partnerships between schools, families, and local stakeholders. By embedding these strategies into school practices, educators can cultivate a more equitable and stable learning environment for all students.

Keywords: *Catching Up, Strategies of Helping Learners, Attendance Problem.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Student attendance is often associated to student success. It is the primary indicator of students' engagement levels in the academic discipline. Students with attendance problems often acquire low level of learning and they are at risk of dropping out of school. Attendance problems among learners can significantly hinder academic progress, social development, and long-term success, making it a critical issue for educators and policymakers to address. This thesis explores effective strategies for helping students with attendance problem catch up academically.

Ancheta, et.al (2021) postulated that class attendance enhances class performance because through physical presence in the class, students can participate in all classroom activities. Also, students can interact with their teachers and ask questions. So, going to the class enables students to learn from teacher and classmates.

In conjunction, SYDLE (2024) posited that low attendance can result instudents' being reported, diminished

knowledge production, hindered education quality, and individual results being compromised. Aside from losses for each learner, education institutions can lose students, which harms business results. This all carries a risk to larger society, since education is a key pillar in a country's social, cultural, and economic development.

In the global spectrum, school absenteeism is a challenge in many countries. Still, there are few comparisons between countries, which is partly due to a lack of shared definitions of concepts (Fredriksson,et.al, 2023). Flanders (2024) asserts that schools across the country are grappling with fewer students in classrooms, causing a ripple effect on learning, funding, and engagement. Research shows that the number of chronically absent students has nearly doubled, from about 15 percent in the 2018-2019 school year to around 30 percent in 2021-2022.

In the Philippines, Conel (2022) articulated that absenteeism is one of the major and continuous issues in the field of academe in the country. It has a big impact on the learning of the students because the larger the number of absences the students acquire, the lesser lessons the students

would be able to attend in class. This would also mean that there would be lesser and disconnected concepts of learning. The students who are regularly absent have greater tendency to drop the school at early age and will not continue schooling, and this might lead to unemployment, low average incomes, and poverty in the country.

Moreover, Cepada and Grepon (2020) noted that recent statistics from the Department of Education publicized that the overall student absence rate in the Philippines is 4.5%. This means that one in ten school children are classified as "persistently absent". Accordingly, middle schools had a higher rate of persistent absence compared to primary schools. Moreover, unauthorized absence or absenteeism, whether persistent or not, also increased.

In Davao City, the implementation of intervention program for students with critical absenteeism is implemented. The Dropout Reduction Program (DORP), implemented by Department of Education (DepEd), aims to tackle the increasing dropout rates in both public and private elementary and secondary schools. The program's objective is to improve student learning outcomes and ensure equal access to quality education for all Filipino students (Balubayan, 2023).

In our locality, particularly in the Compostela West District in Davao de Oro Division, teachers initiate measures to help learners having attendance problem. Based on the record of the guidance office, the problem on students' attendance is the primary concern of teachers. Various interventions and initiatives are developed by the teachers to help students catch-up with the daily lessons. For students at risk of dropping, the popular home visitation is often employed by the teachers. In the midst of the growing concern of student absenteeism, this study endeavors to explore the strategies and challenges teachers in helping learners who have attendance problem.

The ultimate intent of this study is to contribute knowledge in mitigating the attendance problem of learners particularly in Compostela West District in Davao de Oro Division. The findings may be applicable to other schools outside our district and thus recommendations of this study could be utilized in others schools to address the attendance problem of learners. Exploring in this noteworthy endeavor and socially relevant study ignite my enthusiasm as the researcher

II. METHOD

The qualitative phenomenological research design was used in this study to collect the data necessary to answer the research questions. Information gathering includes participant in-depth interviews offering opportunity for participants to speak openly and candidly. In a phenomenological study, the informants engaged in discussions regarding their observations and experiences related to the phenomenon under investigation. The phenomenological method in qualitative research, as noted

by Flood (2010) and cited in Tomaszewski et al. (2020), focused on the essential components of a lived experience or phenomenon, which could be experienced or felt by people from a variety of viewpoints.

This study unveiled the strategies of teachers in catching up and helping learners who had attendance problems. This study had seven (9) participants who were primary grade teachers from a public school in Compostela West District, Division of Davao de Oro. The participants in this study were purposively selected as informants. As part of the inclusion criteria, the participants had at least 3 years of teaching experience in the primary grade level. To obtain a variety of information and to facilitate triangulation, the informants were chosen from different school environments categorized as small, medium, and large schools in Compostela West District, Division of Davao de Oro.

Moreover, as part of the standard in conducting research, I had to adhere and comply with the ethical standards set prior to the conduct of this study. Primarily, this study involved human participants; hence, it was crucial that researchers observed the ethical principles to protect the dignity, rights, and welfare of research participants. In-depth interviews served as the primary data collection method for this phenomenological study. These interviews allowed for deep, reflective conversations with nine primary grade teachers, each with at least three years of teaching experience. The use of well-structured, open-ended questions, coupled with active listening and thoughtful probing, enabled participants to share their lived experiences regarding of the strategies they used and the key obstacles they encountered along the way.

As the researcher for this study, my contribution was essential in generating reliable research outcomes. Primarily, I was responsible for guiding the interviews and discussions by employing research questions and probing statements. I thoroughly explored the phenomenon through the lived experiences of the participants. By using insightful questions and expressions during the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, I aimed to gather meaningful and substantial information that illuminated the phenomenon. My responsibility was to thoroughly explore the phenomenon through the participants' lived experiences. The primary approach involved in depth discussions that integrated and related the findings, thereby enriching the phenomenological investigation with depth and nuance.

In the data analysis of this study, I meticulously reviewed the transcriptions and assessed the key arguments presented by the participants in relation to the research questions. The data was organized based on the primary themes or concepts that emerged from the transcriptions. It was essential to accurately represent the genuine intent behind each statement made by the participants during the discussions. The analytical approach was referred to as Thematic Content Analysis, which, as noted

by King (2004) and cited in Dawadi (2020), sought to uncover themes that encapsulated the narratives present within the data sets. This process entailed the meticulous identification of themes through thorough reading and re-reading of the transcribed material. In particular, the analytical procedures employed to examine the data obtained from instructor participants are grounded in the framework established by O'Connor and Gibson (2003), which underpinned the systematic and thorough methodologies utilized.

In addition, I employed triangulation of the collected information. Nightingale (2020) described triangulation as a methodological strategy for analyzing the outcomes of a single study by utilizing various data collection techniques, thereby enhancing the validity and reliability of the results. As Vivek (2023) contended, environmental triangulation was a research strategy that mandated data collection from diverse contexts to bolster credibility and reliability of qualitative findings, while mitigating potential biases from studying phenomena in singular or limited environments

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This chapter presents the findings of the study on how teachers address learner absenteeism through various strategies. It provides a detailed analysis of the gathered data and explains the steps taken to identify and group the emerging themes from interviews with teacher-participants. Regarding the challenges teachers face in helping learners with attendance problems, the following themes surfaced from their shared experiences:

➤ *Socioeconomic Barriers*

Socioeconomic barriers remain a major challenge for teachers in addressing learners' attendance problems. Factors such as poverty, lack of transportation, and unstable home environments often prevent students from attending school regularly. These are complex issues that go beyond the classroom, calling for strong collaboration among teachers, families, and communities to develop lasting solutions that support vulnerable learners. Absenteeism has long been a persistent concern in schools, with many intervention plans implemented over the years but fading over time. Parents play a crucial role in improving attendance, yet in many cases, especially in today's circumstances, they are unaware that their child is frequently missing school.

➤ *Unresponsive Parents*

The participants observed that the lack of active parental involvement in monitoring their children's school attendance is a major factor contributing to the ongoing attendance problem. Unresponsive parents create a significant challenge for teachers, as many fail to engage due to work obligations, indifference toward education, or the belief that attendance is solely the school's responsibility. Keppens (2023) emphasized that absenteeism negatively affects students' academic performance, making it a difficult issue for teachers to manage.

Whether due to unexcused absences, illness, or school exclusion, missed school days inevitably hinder learning. To address this, schools should actively reach out to families to understand the reasons behind poor attendance and work together to address them. As the CSDE (2024) highlights, it is also essential to educate both students and parents about how absences result in lost learning time.

Meanwhile, teachers used a variety of strategies to encourage learners to attend school regularly. By addressing the root causes of absenteeism and adopting proactive engagement methods, they play a vital role in helping students overcome barriers to consistent participation. From the participants' accounts, the following themes emerged regarding the coping strategies teachers employed in addressing attendance problems:

➤ *Building Positive Relationships and Supportive Environment*

Based on the participants' accounts, this study revealed that fostering positive relationships and cultivating a supportive school environment are key factors in improving learners' attendance. They emphasized that when students feel emotionally safe, valued, and connected to their teachers and peers, they are more motivated to attend school regularly. The K12 Coalition (2021) supported this view, noting that the effort teachers invest in creating a nurturing environment can significantly boost attendance rates. Research further showed a direct link between poor school climate and absenteeism, highlighting that building a positive atmosphere and strong relationships is closely tied to improved attendance (Destination Knowledge, 2022).

➤ *Engaging Parental and Guardian Involvement*

Another theme that emerged in the coping strategies teachers use to address attendance problems is the active engagement of parents and guardians. This approach plays a crucial role in tackling attendance challenges by fostering a strong partnership between home and school. Vidyalaya (2023) emphasized that teachers and schools must work closely with families, noting that personalized learning paths can help motivate students to attend regularly. Similarly, Parker (2019) affirmed that parents are key to improving attendance, and that proactive communication from the school demonstrates genuine care and concern for students' well-being.

Furthermore, this study offers practical recommendations to enhance efforts in addressing learners' attendance problems. It highlights the importance of strengthening flexible and inclusive teaching strategies while fostering collaboration among all school stakeholders. By promoting a culture of shared responsibility, attendance can be reframed as a collective priority rather than solely a teacher's concern, supported by a network of committed partners. The study also recommends adopting blended learning approaches, such as recorded lessons, modular materials, and asynchronous assignments, to

ensure that students who miss classes do not fall significantly behind. This approach provides all learners with the opportunity to continue progressing in their formal education.

Overall, the study calls for a holistic approach to improving attendance by strengthening flexible and inclusive teaching strategies and fostering collaboration among school stakeholders. Together, these efforts can create supportive ecosystems that make regular attendance both achievable and meaningful for all learners. The findings align closely with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Bandura's Social Learning Theory, providing a strong theoretical basis for addressing learner absenteeism. Maslow's framework highlights how unmet basic needs can hinder attendance, while strategies like mentorship and community partnerships help meet these needs, allowing students to focus on learning. Similarly, Bandura's theory, which emphasizes observational learning and environmental influences, supports the study's insights on the value of positive teacher-student relationships and parental involvement. When students see trusted adults modeling commitment and experience a supportive, inclusive school climate, they are more likely to attend regularly. Together, these theories reinforce the study's call for comprehensive interventions that address both individual needs and broader social contexts to sustain consistent school participation.

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