

Original research article

Truancy for online school classes at school in Urun Islampur, Sangli Maharashtra, India

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Abstract

Background: Truancy is considered as any planned and intentional unlawful and illegal absence from compulsory schooling. The COVID-19 crisis has forced education systems to use online teaching and learning by teachers and students on an unprecedented scale. Purpose of the study was to identify the factors that contribute to truancy for online school classes at School in Urun Islampur. Sangli. Maharashtra India.

Material and Methods: Present study was cross sectional, observational study, conducted in parents of children of class 1st to 5th students, who are attending online classes & had usage of smart phones more than 4 hours, willing to participate, underwent predesigned questionnaire according School Refusal Assessment Scale-Revised: Parent Version (SRAS-R-P).

Results: In present study, majority of children were from 8-9 years age group (35.5%) & 10-11 years age group (32.5%). Boys (57.5%) outnumbered girls (42.5%). Device used for online learning were mobile phones (92.75%) & Tablets (4.75%). Duration of online classes was 4-5 hours (81.25%), 5-6 hours (12%), 6-7 hours (6.5%) & > 7 hours (0.25%). As per School Refusal Assessment Scale-Revised: Parent Version (SRAS-R-P), mean scores of 4 major functions such as. School stimuli (11.41±3.56), Evaluative situations (10.59±4.23), Seeking caregivers attention (12.24±4.01), Tangible reinforcements (10.45±3.74), while total score was 11.31± 4.25.

Conclusion: Developing strong attitudes towards learning can help students overcome some of the potential challenges posed by online learning.

Keywords: school refusal behaviour, truancy, online classes, primary school

Introduction

Truancy is considered as any planned and intentional unlawful and illegal absence from compulsory schooling. It may also refer to those students who attend school but do not take their classes. Truancy is regarded as irregular and non-school attendance behaviour and also considered as a delinquent and anti-social behaviour ^[1].

Studies show that better attendance is related to higher academic achievement for students of all backgrounds, but particularly for children with lower socio- economic status. Additionally, students who attend school regularly score higher tests than their peers, who are frequently absent ^[2]. However, for a student(s) to be truly engaged in their learning; s/he must participate socially, academically and intellectually in their schooling ^[3].

The COVID-19 crisis has forced education systems worldwide to find alternatives to face-to-face instruction. As a result, online teaching and learning have been used by teachers and students on an unprecedented scale. Purpose of the study was to identify the factors that contribute to truancy for online school classes at School in Urun Islampur, Sangli, Maharashtra.

Material and Methods

Present study was cross sectional, observational study, conducted in department of psychiatry, at Prakash Institute of Medical Sciences & Research and Prakash Public School, Urun-Islampur, Sangli, India. Study duration was of 1 year (December2020 to December2021). Study approval was obtained from

institutional ethical committee.

A sample size of 400 participants was taken from Prakash Public School, Urun Islampur. Study was explained to parents in local language & written consent was taken for participation & study. Risks and benefits were explained to the school management and parents. Children with prior physical illness or prior chronic medical illness were excluded. Parents of children of class 1st to 5th students, who are attending online classes & had usage of smart phones more than 4 hours, willing to participate, underwent predesigned questionnaire according School Refusal Assessment Scale-Revised: Parent Version (SRAS-R-P) [4].

This instrument is a 24-item measure of the relative strength of four hypothesized functions of school refusal behavior in children and adolescents. Six items are devoted to each functional condition in this order: items 1, 5, 9, 13, 17, and 21 investigate the avoidance of stimuli provoking negative affectivity function; items 2, 6, 10, 14, 18, and 22 deal with the escape from aversive social and or evaluative situations function; items 3, 7, 11, 15, 19, and 23 check the attention-seeking function, and items 4, 8, 12, 16, 20, and 24 explore the tangible reinforcement function. Items are rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale from 0 (never) to 6 (always).

Data was collected and compiled using Microsoft Excel, analysed using SPSS 23.0 version. Statistical analysis was done using descriptive statistics.

Results

In present study, majority of children were from 8-9 years age group (35.5%) & 10-11 years age group (32.5%). Boys (57.5%) outnumbered girls (42.5%). Device used for online learning were mobile phones (92.75%) & Tablets (4.75%). Duration of online classes was 4-5 hours (81.25%), 5-6 hours (12%), 6-7 hours (6.5%) & > 7 hours (0.25%).

Table 1: General characteristics

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Age group		
6-7	128	32.00%
8-9	142	35.50%
10-11	130	32.50%
Gender		
Boys	230	57.50%
Girls	170	42.50%
Device used		
Mobile Phones	371	92.75%
Tablets	19	4.75%
Computers (PC)	7	1.75%
Laptops	3	0.75%
Duration of online classes (Hours)		
4-5	325	81.25%
5-6	48	12.00%
6-7	26	6.50%
> 7	1	0.25%

Prior 2 months attendance of majority students was 41-60% (26.25%), followed by 61-80% (22.25%), 21-40% (19%) <20% & > 80% (16.25% each).

Table 2: Prior 2 months attendance

Attendance	Frequency	Percentage
< 20%	65	16.25%
21-40%	76	19.00%
41-60%	105	26.25%
61-80%	89	22.25%
>80%	65	16.25%

As per School Refusal Assessment Scale-Revised: Parent Version (SRAS-R-P), mean scores of 4 major functions such as. School stimuli (11.41±3.56), Evaluative situations (10.59±4.23), Seeking caregivers attention (12.24±4.01), Tangible reinforcements (10.45±3.74), while total score was 11.31±4.25.

Table 3: School Refusal Assessment Scale-Revised: Parent Version (SRAS-R-P)

Variables	Mean± SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
School stimuli	11.41±3.56	0.32	0.85
Evaluative situations	10.59±4.23	0.24	0.73
Seeking caregivers' attention	12.24±4.01	0.25	0.69

Tangible reinforcements	10.45±3.74	0.21	0.46
Total	11.31±4.25	0.3	0.68

Discussion

School is a place that nurtures the potential of individuals and the entrance to academic excellence of our next generation. Teaching and learning with technology, prior was mostly limited to subsidiary collaboration tools for communication, learning management systems and electronic texts ^[5, 6].

Truancy remains an issue which has drawn the concern of parents, society and the government as it is the forerunner to many social and discipline problems among students ^[7, 8]. Due to COVID 19, online platforms were being utilized to such an extent, a lot of flaws have come up to the forefront. One of the major drawbacks has been the attendance and the inconsistency of a particular student while attending a class on any digital platform.

Shah, S. A. *et al.*, ^[9] conducted a cross-sectional study involving 556 Malay student's, overall prevalence of truancy is 30.2%. The predictors to truancy are age, students who frequenting entertainment center, students who have not completed Quran recital, coping strategies using problems solving methods and time spent watching television/video. There is a significant association between truancy and psycho-behaviour such as watching video/internet, frequenting entertainment center, smoking, motorcycle racing and dating a special friend.

In study by Nayak A *et al.*, ^[10] school refusal was seen in 3.6% of children. 77.8% of the children had a psychiatric diagnosis, most common being depression (26.7%), followed by anxiety (17.7%). Prevalence of psychiatric disorders was significantly higher in the study population than community ($p<0.05$). A best-fit model of 4 factors: academic difficulties, adjustment problems at school, behavioral problems and parental conflicts is suggested ($p<0.05$). School refusal is associated with significant psychopathology, most commonly depression, followed by anxiety.

In study by Rukmani Devi ^[11], demographic measures were implemented and the study showed a high incidence rate of SRB in primary school students in Selangor (94.9%). The analysis showed there were no gender differences although the SRB in both categories were high (M=3.9). Similarly, the study also found there were no significant differences between single parent and two-parents; and low-class and middle-class family with SRB; although the occurrence of SRB in both categories were high.

Gupta & Lata ^[12], suggested that some individual factors include desire to escape boredom, inadequate parental supervision, unable to cope with stress and peer pressures. It needs to be comprehensively addressed as chronic absenteeism may result in students being expelled, especially students with behavioral issues and extremely low grades. Similarly, poor classroom management, poor relationships with teachers and peers, poor support from teachers, as well as disrespect from teachers may also induce chronic absenteeism amongst the students ^[13].

Attendance policy correlated with better academic performance. Reducing absenteeism, probably contributed to the improved academic performance of the students. Whether it is because of incentivizing attendance or inculcating a sense of commitment that has led to better attendance and better performance is yet to be explored ^[14].

Since lockdowns may be introduced again in the future until effective vaccines or therapeutics become available, it is of utmost importance for governments to reflect on the main difficulties that students, parents, teachers and school principals have encountered in adapting to this phase of massive online learning and intervene to better harness the potential of online learning. Positive attitudes towards learning, self-regulation and intrinsic motivation to learn play an important role in improving performance at school in general, but may be especially important should online learning continue.

Conclusion

Friendly, encouraging and facilitated environment in school and home might be ensured for students. Developing strong attitudes towards learning can help students overcome some of the potential challenges posed by online learning such as, attendance, remaining focused during online classes or maintaining sufficient motivation.

Parents need to make school a priority. Students must not miss school to help the family with household works, or go on vacations that fall during the school academic period. Allowing students to miss school for reasons other than illness or family emergencies sends the message that school is not important. Decreasing these would be helpful.

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