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2.0 Literature Review

The purpose of the literature review is the examination the identified problem in order to determine its causal factors, as established by both theoretical and empirical research. The wealth of research which exists on school tardiness, absenteeism and non-attendance, testifies both to the presence and significance of the problem. All of tardiness, absenteeism and non-attendance are incontrovertibly critical problems whose damages and long-term consequences are not limited to individual students but extend to impinge upon the progress of entire communities and stand as a threat to national economic growth. Consequently, not only is the identification of the causal factors imperative but the design of strategies for the correction and eventual elimination of the tardiness problem are equally important.

The current section shall review a representative selection of the literature on tardiness, published within the past five years, from a variety of perspectives. The aim of the review is the articulation of a comprehensive listing of the variables affecting tardiness.

2.1 *Magnitude of the Problem*

A review of the literature clearly establishes the magnitude of the defined problem throughout the country. Saratoga County, Florida, reported that approximately 435 elementary and middle school students were tardy on a daily basis (Hawes, 1996). The results of a 1996 national poll indicated that 49% of urban and rural school teachers defined tardiness as a serious problem (National Center for Educational Statistics, 1996).

More recent statistics indicate an escalation of the problem. Chaker (2005) reports that while 1994 statistics established tardiness across the country's public schools at an already high 24.9%, by 2000 it had risen to 32.4%. Statistics for 2002 show an additional increase of approximately 5% (Chaker, 2005).

The literature on tardiness is in firm agreement over two points. The first is that there problem is serious and the second is that it is continually increasing in magnitude, establishing the imperatives of designing and implementing effective solutions (Hawes, 1996; Hung and Liu, 1999; St. Pierre, 2000; Chaker, 2005; Zierold, Garman and Anderson, 2005). As the subsequent sections, however, shall demonstrate, there tends to be controversy over the causes of tardiness.

2.2 Causes of Tardiness

There is an abundance of academic literature on the causes of tardiness. Indeed, the phenomenon appears to have been dissected from all imaginable angles, from the management to the psychological, from the economic to the sociologic. A review of the mentioned literature, as this section hopes to establish, lends to the conclusion that there is no single cause but a multitude.

2.2.1 The Psychological Perspective

Child, development and educational psychologists have taken a great interest in the causes of, and solutions to, tardiness and accordingly have invaluable contributed to a more thorough understanding of the phenomenon. Within the context of this particular perspective, a number of causal factors have been identified.

A significant body of the literature on the psychological dimensions of tardiness has contended that the problem stems from commitment. Kirkpatrick, Crosnoe and Elder (2001) educational psychologists, maintain that school attendance is significantly impacted by the extent to which students' sense of belonging. Students who feel comfortable and at ease in their school environ tend to have significantly lower tardiness and absenteeism figures than those who feel alien to that environment (Kirkpatrick, Crosnoe and Elder, 2001). In an earlier study, Osterman (2000) arrived at the same conclusion, emphatically stating that if students do not feel

at home in their school environments, they take it upon themselves to reduce the number of hours they spend in that environment per week, either by being tardy or absent.

The above stated has been supported by empirical studies. In 2000, Crosnoe survey approximately 500 students in 10 elementary and middle to high schools. Half of those students had extremely high attendance and on-time records and the other half, extremely poor ones. When questioned about what attracted them to school as opposed to that which repelled them, the answers were extremely straightforward. Those with high attendance and on-time records, reported that they had many friends at school and felt a sense of social belonging there. Those with low attendance and on-time records reported the opposite, stating that they had hardly any friends at school and felt a sense of social isolation within the school environment Johnson, Farkas and Bers, 1997; (Furman, 1998; Crosnoe, 2000; Crosnoe, 2001). On the basis of this study, and others which have replicated the stated findings, belonging emerges as one of the causal factors of tardiness (Phillips, 1997; Battistich and Hom, 1997; Urdan, 1997; Smerdon, 1999; Kirkpatrick, Crosnoe and Elder, 2001).

While other researchers have supported the correlation between tardiness and isolation within the school environment, or absenteeism and absence of the sense of belonging, they have identified teachers as primarily responsible for the stated. In their review on the literature on absenteeism and tardiness, Hung and Liu (1999) argue a correlation between student engagement with learning and teachers' professional commitment. Teachers who exhibit a strong sense of professional commitment usually influence their students' towards higher levels of engagement in their learning process and, more significantly, tend to have much higher classroom on-time attendance rates than teachers who do not display the stated (Hung and Liu, 1999). Other studies have effectively upheld the aforementioned conclusion, incontrovertibly establishing a direct

correlation between students' attendance records and teachers' professional attitudes (Solomon et al., 1997; Leithwood and Jantzi, 1999; Freese, 1999; Solomon et al., 2000; Fassett and Warren, 2004).

As is apparent from the above stated, psychological variables are a key determinant of tardiness and absenteeism. Within the context of this finding, one of the solutions to absenteeism appears to lie in the fortification of students' sense of belonging both through the enhancement of teachers' levels of professional commitment and the design of school cultures which engender a sense of affiliation and loyalty among the student body

2.2.2 The Social Perspective

The literature on tardiness is hardly limited to an analysis of the psychological factors influencing absenteeism and lateness but further includes, as a vital component, an investigation of the sociological variables which influence the same. Indeed, sociologists have gone so far as to claim the problem to be a primarily sociological one, as opposed to a psychological or economic one (Fassett and Warren, 2004). Irrespective of the merits of the aforementioned claim, the fact is that the sociological body of literature on tardiness does expose a number of critical causal factors.

Pope (2003) maintains that one of the more important reasons behind the ever-escalating tardiness rates affecting the nation's elementary, middle and high schools is the absence of the parents from the home. Statistics indicate that the greater majority of school children either come from single parent or two-parent-working homes, with the implication in either case being that the primary caregiver is often absent from the house and therefore, not in a position to supervise education and attendance. Of greater significance is that fact that the absence of the adult primary caregiver generally means that the children in question have to perform a number of

chores around the home, including, in the case of the older siblings, the responsibility of the younger children in the house. In such instances, the children in question are often left too stressed out or tired to wake up in the morning and attend school on time (Pope, 2003).

Concurring, Conaway (2006) adds that the tardiness problem partly lies in the fact that, due to the aforementioned circumstances, children are not seen as students first and foremost but parent-helpers first and students second.

The sociological perspective on tardiness further contends that the mentioned phenomenon is also a consequence of the familial or community culture, resulting in tardiness assuming the form of a race-related problem. Fuller (2004) quite succinctly summarizes this argument. As he explains, some families and communities are supportive of learning and emphasize it as an overriding priority while others simply do not. In the majority of instances, the aforementioned familial and communal attitudes towards learning tend to fall along class and race divides. Hence, the majority of white, middle-class families are supportive of learning and perceive of it as a child's primary responsibility while a sizeable, although indeterminate, percentage of lower-middle to lower class minority communities do not perceive of education in quite the same light and may even regard it as a waste of time. This attitude, naturally, spills over to school children and affects their own perception of school and education, naturally influencing higher tardiness rates (Fuller, 2004). Consequently, the literature on tardiness further suggests that communal and familial attitudes towards school and education can either function to motivate or de-motivate students and, hence, influences tardiness.

The sociological interpretation of tardiness tends towards the identification of class and familial conditions as the root causes of the phenomenon. While there is no doubt that sociological factors influence tardiness and that it is virtually impossible to combat the problem

without addressing this set of causes, the sociological argument certainly does not invalidate either the psychological or the economic ones. Hence, to gain a fuller picture of the problem, it is further imperative to review the literature on the economic factors influencing tardiness and absenteeism among school children.

2.2.3 The Economic Perspective

The literature on the economic causes of tardiness compliments the literature on both its psychological and sociological causes. As Mcewan suggests (2000), the economic causes rarely operate in isolation but tend to give rise to, or exacerbate the already existent sociological or psychological factors.

Zierold, Garman and Anderson (2005) concede that familial and communal culture influence tardiness but suggest that economic factors are at the roots of the stated. Within the matrix of lower-class neighborhoods there is a perceptible lack of regard for education, including a tendency to define regular and punctual attendance as a waste of time. A deeper investigation into these attitudes indicates that they are rooted in the belief that education is a luxury. Insofar as high school students are concerned, the predominant belief within these neighborhoods is that these students would benefit more from employment than they would from education (Zierold, Garman and Anderson, 2005). The implication here is that economic circumstances often force high school students to seek part-time employment and that this, insofar as it burdens the students in question with responsibilities other than their school work, is physically exhausting and mentally strenuous. It leads to their increasing neglect of their school work and ever-escalating tardiness rates, if only because of exhaustion (Mortimer et al., 1996; Markel, 1998; Mcewan, 2000; Greenberger and Steinberg, 2003; Zierold, Garman and Anderson, 2005).

A review of the literature on the economic factors influencing tardiness further indicates that socio-economic differentiations within a student body can contribute to increased tardiness. Parcel and Dufur (2001) maintain that students who emanate from a lower socio-economic class than the majority of their colleagues are generally subjected to verbal barbs which, besides undermining their self-esteem and affecting their academic performance, influence them towards deliberate tardiness. Quite simply stated, in order to reduce the opportunities for interaction, implying verbal teasing, they come to school late (Parcel and Dufur, 2001). Duncan and Brooks-Gunn (1998) concur, adding that one of the consequences of pronounced poverty, as which sets a student apart from his colleagues, is both tardiness and eventually, prolonged periods of absenteeism.

As may be determined from the literature briefly reviewed in the above, not only does the economic status of students give rise to independent tardiness causal factors but exacerbates existing psychological and sociological causal factors.

2.2.4 The Effect of Nutrition on Tardiness

As the literature on tardiness indicates, nutrition is an important cause of both tardiness and absenteeism. Studies on the relationship between diet and the defined research problem have squarely identified nutrition as the source behind two reasons for tardiness. In the first place, and as Taras (2005) outlines, malnutrition, whether insufficiency or deficiency, has an adverse effect on both cognitive functioning and energy levels. Students who suffer either form of malnutrition generally tend towards high tardiness and absenteeism rates. The reasons, quite simply stated, lie in the fact that they simply do not have the energy to go to school on time, if they go at all. Over the course of a semester or a school year, the consequence is that malnourished students often fall very far behind in their school work and, hence, are de-

motivated. That means, that apart from the fact that they do not have the physical energy required to do their school work, they lose whatever psychological motivation they may have had to try in the first place. Indeed, the situation may escalate to the point where dropping out of school is perceived of by this group of students as the only viable option (Taras, 2005). In other words, not only is there a definite correlation between nutrition and tardiness but malnutrition indirectly influences drop-out rates.

The second relationship between nutrition and tardiness comes in the form of obesity. Schumacher and Queen (2006) explain that obese children tend to have both very low energy levels and self-esteem, in addition to which they are prone to a wide array of health complications. As established by empirical studies, low energy levels directly influences tardiness, while low self-esteem influences deliberate tardiness as a strategy for the avoidance of interaction with others (Schumacher and Queen, 2006). In other words, obesity contributes to tardiness in more than one way.

Within the context of the literature on the relationship between nutrition and tardiness, not to mention absenteeism, research has established an immediate correlation between the two, thereby identifying proper and balanced nutrition as one of the solutions to the defined problem.

2.3 Findings

As the above, albeit brief, review of the literature has tried to establish, educational scholars and researchers have, with near-unanimity, defined tardiness as one of the more severe of the problems currently confronting the nation's schools and its children. The exigencies of designing and implementing corrective strategies for the reduction and elimination of tardiness, are incontrovertible and widely acknowledge. Prior to that, however, it is important to acquire a comprehensive understanding of the causes of tardiness and the factors which affect it.

Academic literature and studies on tardiness have established a multitude of causal factors, divisible into four broad categories: (1) psychology, (2) sociology, (3) economics and (4) health and nutrition. The contributory weight of each of these factors, not to mention how they may be combated or offset, shall be explored within the context of the dissertation, exploiting both primary and secondary data sources. In the subsequent section, the researcher's strategy for the collection and analysis of this data will be outlined.

3.0 Methodology

Research methodology references the procedural rules for the evaluation of research claims and the validation of the knowledge gathered, while research design functions as the research blueprint (Creswell, 2003). As Sekaran (2003) further clarifies, research methodology may be defined as academia's established regulatory framework for the collection and evaluation of existent knowledge for the purpose of arriving at, and validating, new knowledge. Cooper and Schindler (1998) maintain that the determination of the research methodology is one of the more important challenges which confront researchers. This is because the quality and value of a research are largely predicated on the extent to which the researcher has clearly articulated his methodology, on the one hand, and has selected the most appropriate research approach, on the other. Accordingly, given the importance of research methodology, this chapter shall both outline and justify the current research's selected methodological design.

3.1 Research Purpose

Research scholars have identified three main purposes to the research activity. These are the exploratory, the descriptive and the explanatory purposes (Saunders et al., 2000). Patton (1990) identifies a fourth purpose which he defines as the prescriptive objective. Proceeding from Jackson's (1994) contention that the researcher should identify the purpose(s) by correlating the research questions to the research objectives, this is precisely the strategy that the current research shall adopt.

3.1.1 Exploratory

Exploratory research unfolds through focus group interviews, structured or semi-structured interviews with experts and a search of the relevant literature (Saunders et al., 2000). Its primary purpose is the exploration of a complex research problem or phenomenon, with the

objective being the clarification of the identified complexities and the exposition of the underlying nature of the selected phenomenon. In other words, and as Robson (2002) explains, exploratory research investigates a specified problem/phenomenon for the purpose of shedding new light upon it and, consequently, uncovering new knowledge.

The research question, “Why do students face difficulties in coming to school on time?,” is fundamentally explorative in nature. Answering this question is dependant upon exploring the variables which influence tardiness, both through a review of the literature and an analysis of primary data in the form of school attendance records.

3.1.2 Descriptive

Punch (2000) explains the purpose of the descriptive research as the collection, organisation and summarisation of information about the research problem and issues identified therein. Similar to the descriptive research, it renders complicated phenomenon and issues more understandable. Dane’s (1990) definition of the descriptive research and its purposes coincides with the stated. Descriptive research entails the thorough examination of the research problem, for the specified purpose of describing the phenomenon, as in defining, measuring and clarifying it (Dane, 1990). Jackson (1994) contends that all research is partly descriptive in nature, insofar as the descriptive aspect defines and describes the research’s (1) who, (2) what, (3) when, (4) where, (5) why, and (6) how.

The aims and objectives of the current research impose a partially descriptive purpose upon the study, insofar as they lend to such questions as: (1) what is tardiness?; (2) among which group of students is tardiness a chronic/serious problem?; (3) why is tardiness identified as an educational problem? (4) what are the most popular tardiness-reduction strategies? (5) how may schools implement a proactive response to the identified problem? These questions, immediately

correlate to the research objectives , are integral to the testing of the hypotheses and are essential for the answering of the primary research question. More importantly, these questions are descriptive in nature, shall be answered through the literature review and, as such, impose a descriptive purpose upon the research.

3.1.3 Explanatory

Miles and Huberman (1994) define the function of explanatory research as the clarification of relationship between variables and the componential elements of the research problem. Explanatory research, in other words, functions to highlight the complex interrelationships existent within, and around, a particular phenomenon and contained within the research problem (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Expounding upon this, Punch (2000) asserts that explanatory, or causal research, elucidates upon the nature of the problem under investigation and explains the basis for the proposed solution. It is an explanation of the complex web of interrelated variables identified and follows directly from a clearly stated central research hypothesis and research question.

Insofar as the primary research question demands an explanation for tardiness, the research has an explanatory purpose. Indeed, it is virtually impossible to explore the problem of tardiness without identifying its causal factors and explaining the interrelationship between them, as in how these factors/variables produce tardiness. Accordingly, the research shall further adopt an exploratory purpose.

3.1.4 Prescriptive

Hair et al. (2003) defines prescriptive research as studies which purport to propose well-defined solutions to the investigated research problem. A prescriptive research does not simply prescribe a set of solutions or recommendations but presents a well-defined, comprehensively

explained and implementable blueprint for a specified solution. Patton (1990) contends that the prescriptive research purpose builds upon the other purposes but extends beyond them in one key aspect. Whereas the descriptive, exploratory and explanatory purposes focus upon facts on ground, the prescriptive approach focuses on what should be. Research scholars, concurring, have determined that research which embraces the prescriptive purpose tend to be more valuable than those which eschew it, insofar as they add to a field and expand its parameters (Patton, 1990; Jackson, 1994; Punch, 2000; Cooper, 2003; Hair et al., 2003; Ghauri and Gronhaug, 2005).

The current study does not simply aim towards the provision of an explanation for tardiness but the design of a strategy for the reduction of the aforementioned. In other words, the penultimate aim of the study is the prescription of a well-articulated, effective and above all, practical prescription to the problem. It is, thus, that aims of the research impose a prescriptive purpose upon it.

3.2 Research Approach

Selection of the research approach is, according to Creswell (2003) a critically important decision. The research approach does not simply inform the research design but it gives the researcher the opportunity to critically consider how each of the various approaches may contribute to, or limit, his study, allow him/her to satisfy the articulated objectives and design an approach which best satisfies the research's requirements (Creswell, 2003).

The research approach, as explained by Hair et al. (2005) embraces the positivist versus the phenomenological, the quantitative versus the qualitative and the deductive versus the inductive. Each set of approaches is commonly perceived of as referring to polar opposites, in the sense that a research is either inductive or deductive, positivist or phenomenological, or

quantitative versus qualitative (Hair et al., 2005). Jackson (1994) takes issue with this perception and contends that a researcher should not limit himself to a particular approach but, instead should use a variety of approaches, if and when required by his study.

3.2.1 Positivism versus Phenomenology

The positivist approach, as outlined by Cooper (2003), is popularly associated with the sciences. It is characterised by the detached and systemic analysis and exploration of the research phenomenon. When employed within the context of the social sciences, their choice is generally indicative of the researcher's belief that the study of human behaviour should, and can, follow the same procedural guidelines employed vis-à-vis non-complex organisms (Cooper, 2003). While many social scientists have disputed that, citing the prevalent tendency towards unpredictability among human subjects, Jackson maintains that its utilisation is invaluable insofar as it ensures the implementation of an objective and systematic research approach. In further clarification of the positivist approach, Punch (2000) notes that it is generally inductive and utilises quantitative data.

In direct comparison, the phenomenological approach is predicated on the belief that, being essentially unpredictable, is not measurable. According to Cooper (2003) it further assumes that the comprehension of social phenomenon imposes upon the researcher the imperatives of engaging with, rather than detachedly observing, the phenomenon in question. The phenomenological approach maintains that meaning and relationships between variables are not static but fluid. They are fluid because they are immediately influenced by their social environment and therefore, have to be understood from within the parameters of varying environments or, at least, the particular environment in question (Ghauri and Gronhaug; 2005).

Even though the positivist and phenomenological approaches seem to completely contradict one another, Bryman and Bell (2004) maintain that a researcher should not select one or the other but, instead, should weave the two together. In other words, for those aspects of the research problem which can be better served if explored through a scientific approach, the positivist methodology should be employed whereas those which require the researcher's more active engagement or an analysis of the social environment, the phenomenological approach should be used. The implication here is that the two approaches can coexist within a single study and can be used to explore different aspects of the research problem (Bryman and Bell, 2004).

Rather than select the one approach over the other, the selected research approach shall combine between the two. As such, the researcher shall engage in the objective analysis of tardiness behaviour through the analysis of attendance records while, at the same time, monitoring 20 students for a period of 12 weeks for the purpose of closer and more critical observation of the dimensions of the defined problem and the behavioural and situational variables which induce it. The effects of the corrective strategies which shall be deployed vis-à-vis these 12 students shall also be observed. To this extent, the research unfolds within a phenomenological framework.

The research, however, is not restricted to the phenomenological approach as a thorough investigation of the problem also necessitates the adoption of positivist approach. Therefore, for a better understanding of the social and environmental factors influencing tardiness, the researcher will survey faculty members and homeroom teachers and interview the two school administrators responsible for the control of the problem. The researcher shall, in other words, explore the socio-environmental factors influencing tardiness.

3.2.2 Quantitative versus Qualitative

The data gathered shall be analysed from both the qualitative and quantitative approaches. As Punch (2000) emphasises, within the context of social science research, both approaches must be used in order to arrive at both an objective, measurable understanding of the phenomenon and a humanistic comprehension of its socio-environmental dimensions. While attendance records and the effects of the corrective strategies on the twenty students under observation shall be qualitatively analysed, the variables which influence tardiness rates, both increase and decrease, shall be qualitatively analysed as a strategy for uncovering the socio-environmental factors influencing tardiness rates. In other words, both qualitative and quantitative data analysis approaches shall be used for the purposes of arriving at a more holistic understanding of the phenomenon.

3.2.3 Deductive versus Inductive

Marcoulides (1998) defines the deductive approach as a testing of theories. The researcher proceeds with a set of theories and conceptual precepts in mind and formulates the study's hypotheses on their basis. Following from that, the research proceeds to test the proposed hypotheses. The inductive approach, on the other hand, follows from the collected empirical data and proceeds to formulate concepts and theories in accordance with that data (Marcoulides, 1998). While not disputing the value of the inductive approach, the research opted for the deductive approach, or the 'top-down,' as opposed to the 'bottom-up' method.

3.3 Data Sources and Data Collection Methods

For the purposes of this research and given that both primary and secondary data are needed, three data collection methods will be used. Apart from the desk-based data collection method traditionally associated with secondary data collection, primary data will be collected

through the archival records (attendance sheets), interviews with two school administrators, a survey of faculty opinion, and the researcher's own observations..

3.4 Credibility of Research Findings

Ultimately, the data collected is used to inform the research findings. If the data is not verifiable, the implication is that the findings are potentially suspect. Accordingly, it is incumbent upon the researcher to validate his/her findings (Sekaran, 2003).

3.4.1 Reliability

A study is reliable only if another researcher, using the same procedure and studying the same phenomenon, arrives at similar, or comparable, findings (Sekaran, 2003). Accordingly, it is important that the researcher maintain a comprehensive protocol of his study, in case others may be interested in checking its reliability (Sekaran, 2003).

Even with the best of intentions in mind, the researcher is often confronted with a variety of variables which may impinge upon the reliability of his findings. Quite simply stated, if he is partly drawing conclusions on the basis of questionnaire and interview data, it could very well be that respondents were biased or, simply not in the mood to answer the questions with any degree of interest. It is not at all uncommon for respondents to simply tick of response options without reading or considering them (Sekaran, 2003). Accordingly, research scholars advise researchers to carefully select their respondents, ensure that they are, indeed, willing participants in the study and will answer the questions with the minimum degree of bias (Hair et al., 2005). To ensure that this, indeed, is the case, when in-putting the questionnaire data, the researcher should carefully read through them to ensure that there are no logical flaws and that the responses given by any one respondent are not contradictory (Hair et al., 2005). In addition, and to better ensure reliability, the researcher should schedule interviews at the respondent's convenience and,

further, when distributing questionnaires, should give participants several days to answer. By pursuing this advice, the researcher would, at least, be minimising the chances that the interview be rushed and the questionnaires blindly answered (Hair et al., 2005).

To enhance the reliability of the current research, the cited advice shall be considered and meticulously applied.

3.4.2 Validity

Saunders et al. (2000) contends that a research is valid only if it actually studies what it set out to study and only if the findings are verifiable. There are three methods for establishing validity. As Saunders et al. (2000) explains, construct validity entails the establishment of accurate operational measurements for the research's core concept. This is done by establishing a chain of evidence throughout the data collection process; by verifying key information through the use of multiple sources of information; and by presented informants with a draft of the study for review. Besides establishing construct validity, social science researches need also establish external validity by testing the applicability of the findings to external case studies (Yin, 1989).

While conceding to the importance of external validation methods, they are beyond the scope of the current research. Consequently, the research shall seek the verification of its findings through construct validation.

3.5 Conclusion

As may have been deduced from the above, the research shall adopt a mixed methodological approach. The selection of the aforementioned and above explained methodology was imposed upon the research by the nature of the phenomenon under investigation, the multi-layered nature of the research problem and the imperatives of satisfying the study's diverse, but interrelated, objectives.

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