

Management Practices Use by Schools to Improve the Attendance of Advanced Level (A/L) Students

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Received: 19 February 2023; Revised: 13 March 2023; Accepted: 21 March 2023;

Published: 19 April 2023

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to find out the strategies and measure taken by the school management and the teachers for boosting the attendance of Advance Level students. The study was focused to get an insight idea on student related factors for students' poor attendance, to find out strategies use by teachers to minimize students' poor attendance and to recommend suggestions to uplift students' attendance. Concurrent mix methodology was adopted for the study and the data was collected by survey questionnaires and by interviews. The questionnaires were given both students and parents who selected randomly for the sample. The survey sample was consisted of 92 Advance Level students and 46 of their parents. 8 Advance Level class teachers were selected purposively for interviews. Descriptive statistical methods such as tables, graphs and percentages were used for analyzing and presenting quantitative data and thematic analysis was used for analyzing data which gathered from interviews. The study revealed that major student related factors that caused for poor attendance were; attending tuition classes and negative peer pressure and less motivation. Other than that expecting just a pass from the A/L exam, less interesting to study in school are caused in minor level. Identifying the most absent students by checking students' attendance books once a month, discussing with parents of absent students were the most of strategies that followed by school management for the particular situation. As the suggestions for uplifting attendance of students; covering the syllabi quickly in schools, starting revision classes, increasing co-curricular activities, starting to teach from middle of syllabi and regulating feedback classes and subject conferences could be found out by the study.

Keywords: Attendance, Type 1AB Schools, Advanced Level Education, Management Practices

INTRODUCTION

Sri Lankan education has a long history. Although Sri Lanka is a developing country, literacy level of Sri Lanka is at a competitive level when compared to developed countries. One of the major reasons for this is the well-structured free education system in Sri Lanka. Sri Lankan students are given a traditional classroom experience through this free education system which includes primary, junior secondary, senior secondary and collegiate stage (Aturupane and Little, 2019). Among these, collegiate stage (Advanced Level) is building on senior secondary education. It is in the position of in between senior secondary education and tertiary education. Students receive their senior secondary and collegiate stage education during their teenage years. Therefore, it is very important to handle them without troubling their personal character. Although high degree of school participation showed in primary education, when it comes to senior secondary level it can be observed a considerable dropout. The main reason for this is cost of schooling (Aturupane and Little, 2019). These dropouts can be minimized by improving the quality of education. It is necessary to manage linguistic, communicative and social aspects of classrooms and this can be done by planning lessons, syllabus, techniques and teaching methods and instructional supervision (Kumari, 2019, 2021a, 2021b, 2022a and 2022b). Then only the quality of Advanced Level education is increased.

In Sri Lankan education system, Type 1AB schools are offering education from grade 1 to 13 or grade 6 to 13 and General Certification of Education Advance Level in all streams. Arts, Commerce, Science and Technological streams are available in Advanced Level education (Aturupane and Little, 2019). Although the facilities in 1AB schools are comparatively higher than that of others, still there is a problem of poor attendance of students. It is important to manage students well and motivate them to engage in learning process. Strong interrelationship between students and teachers are essential for successful classrooms (Wickramanayake and Kumari, 2022b). If such relationship is not happening students do not attend school properly. Absenteeism defines a student being absent from school. It can be happened motivationally based or structurally based (Birioukov, 2016). There are many factors that directly and indirectly influenced for the attendance of the school in the secondary school level. Student attendance is one variable that has a significant impact on student achievement (Demir and Karabeyolu, 2016). Absenteeism interrupts the learning process and it reduces the success because, students miss their education time. And also it indirectly makes a difficulty to solid foundation of discipline.

Absenteeism is not a good practice in schools. Students who group outside the school are acquiring bad habits and gradually move away from the formal social structure. Absent students may be acquired unnecessary behaviors as a result of interactions with the people who are not belong to school (Akkus and Cinkir, 2022). And also, poor attendance of school causes for loosing subject discussions, Poor coordination with teachers and peers, unclear concepts and the students may have to repeat the learning sessions also (Khalid, 2017). Not only that but also, when students are disliking to teachers, they avoid school. Less parents' attention on students also leads absenteeism (Yahaya et al, 2010). Several factors are cause for poor attendance of students. Some personal factors which cause for the school absenteeism are; interest in subject, motivation, influence of peers and social life (Conaty et al, 2008). Conaty and colleagues further mentioned that the course related factors such as time of class, difficulty of materials, quality and style of teaching, availability of course notes and stage of year also could cause for poor attendance.

Most of schools follow management strategies such as exams results, progression and completion rates. It is important to do it in a formal and systematic way. Performance management and self-evaluation can be proceeded to get a more recognition to the school (Sarrico et al, 2012). Therefore, it is important for the school management to take good care of the students who show poor attendance. Not only that, parental involvements, guiding and counselling students, rewarding the regular comers and encouraging good communication are also good strategies that can be followed by school management. (Assefa, 2018). Specially, it is essential for the teachers in charge of Advanced Level classes to be alert about poor attendance. They better follow suitable strategies to uplift the students' attendance. Teacher is a responsible leader of promoting the concept of sustainable education in the minds of students (Kumari and Wijekoon, 2021). If the teachers have lower level administrative skills, they are unable to take disciplinary actions against students and the dropout rate increases. But punishment is not a good answer for the problem. Government also should interfere for this and better to establish policies that could lower the absenteeism (Masogo, 2015).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Educational reforms have published in several periods of time with aiming to improve the quality of education and to provide education for all. Free education in Sri Lanka is for everyone but, only 93% of enrolment could be observed in 5 to 14 years age group in 2000 (Arunatilake, 2006). But, it can be observed considerable dropouts, when it comes to the secondary and collegiate stage. It is highly observable the attendance of students of Advanced Level classes get decrease with the time. Almost all types of schools in Sri Lanka are facing this problem and they are seeking better solutions for this problem. Ministry of Education has published a circular indicating a compulsory requirement of 80% of student attendance for

sitting the General Certification of Education Advanced Level Examination. But with the problem of absenteeism, a reasonable doubt has arisen about fulfilling this 80% school attendance requirement. Student achievement level declines with the absenteeism as they are failing to cover the subject matters and practical sessions. On the other hand, teachers also face problems of continuing subject matters with poor attendance of students as the students those who absent are missed the previous lessons. Not only that but also, attendance should be regulating for managing the human resource of the classroom (Wickramanayake and Kumari, 2022a). Because of all of the above reasons there is a necessity to look deeply into this matter and find the most practicable and suitable solutions to overcome this problem. Therefore, the study focused to identify the strategies use by teachers to minimize poor attendance and to recommend suggestions to boost students' attendance.

Purpose and objectives of the study

The primary objective of this research was to identify the factors that affect to poor attendance of Advanced Level students. On that account, the specific objectives of the study were to;

1. To identify student related factors for students' poor attendance
2. To find out strategies use by school management to minimize students' poor attendance
3. To recommend suggestions to uplift students' attendance

Research questions

The following research questions were developed to direct the study.

1. What are the student related factors for students' poor attendance?
2. What are the strategies use by school management to minimize students' poor attendance?
3. What are the actions that can be taken for students prevent from poor attendance?

METHODOLOGY

The foundation of the study was concurrent mix methodology. Mix methodology gives a great strength to a research by laying a foundation that has both quantitative and qualitative data interpretations. And also, it includes the analyzes of both forms of data. A better triangulation is happening in mix methodology research. Mix methodology expands the understanding of the research problem, so that the problem can be integrated and benefited (Creswell, 2008). Therefore, the research employed descriptive surveys which consisted of both quantitative and qualitative data and interviews.

Concurrent Triangulation Design

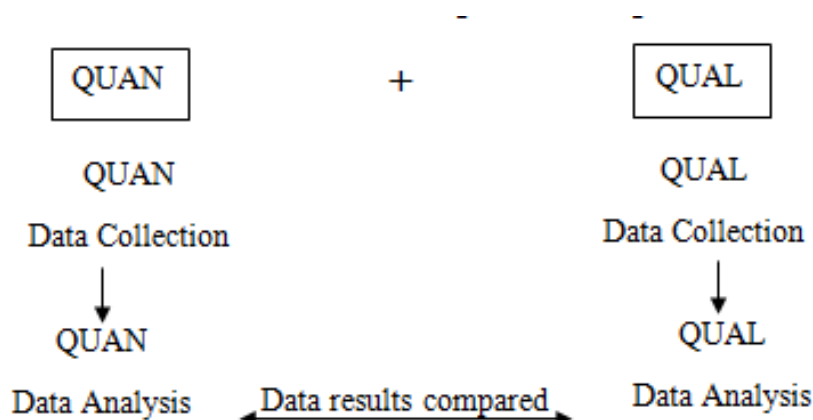


Figure 1: Concurrent Triangulation Design- Adapted from Creswell 2008

Accordingly, there were two phases of the research as quantitative phase and qualitative phase. These two phases were conducted independently from each other. The survey questionnaires were distributed among the students and parents separately to gather all the quantitative information and some of qualitative information. The quantitative questions were almost multiple choice questions while qualitative questions designed as open ended questions. While gathering the information using questionnaires, the qualitative phase was conducted with relevant teachers. The collected data was analyzed separately.

Study Sample

The population used here were students who were not attended than 80% for school in 1AB schools in Mulatiyana zone, Southern province of Sri Lanka. Nine 1AB schools were located in Mulatiyana education zone. 119 of Advanced Level students of 4 randomly selected 1AB schools were noticed as showing poor school attendance during a 3 months period of time. 92 students among them were selected randomly as the study sample. 46 parents of that students were selected randomly (during parents' meetings) as respondents of parents' questionnaire and 8 of Advanced Level class teachers were purposively selected for interviews.

The sample of students was consisted as follows (According to the subject stream).

Table 1 Study Sample of Students

	Advance Level Subject Stream					
	Arts	Commerce	Mathematics	Biology	Technical	Total
Frequency	21	35	13	18	05	92
Percentage	22.8%	38%	14.1%	19.6%	5.4%	100%

The gender distribution of the study sample of students is briefly presented in the figure 2 below.

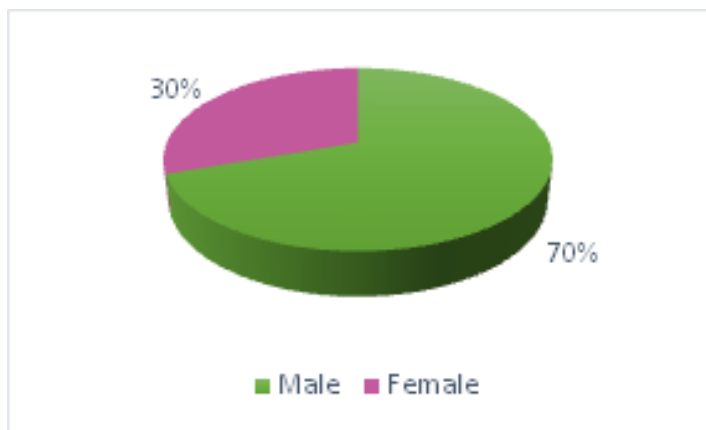


Figure 2: Gender distribution of the sample of students

The sample of parents was consisted as shown in table 2 (According to their occupation) below.

Table 2 Sample of Parents

	Occupation				
	Government	Private	Self employed	Missing	Total
Frequency	14	18	13	01	46
Percentage	30.4%	39.1%	28.3%	2.2%	100%

The sample of teachers was consisted as shown in table 3.

Table 3 Sample of Teachers

	School 1	School 2	School 3	School 4	Total
No. of Teachers	2	2	2	2	8
Percentage	25%	25%	25%	25%	100%

Data collection instrument

The researcher herself developed all of data collection instruments. A survey questionnaire and semi-structured interview protocol were used to collect the necessary information from the sample in order to achieve the specific objectives of the study. Two questionnaires were distributed for students and parents. It is important to understand that the questionnaire is a tool and it is important to be able to use it so that the reader can easily understand, interpret and complete it. This increases the accuracy of responses. Concerns about reliability and validity are essential in designing a questionnaire as a research tool (Adams and Cox, 2008). Likert scales can be considered as one of the primary and widely used psychometric tools in educational and sociological research questionnaires (Joshi et al, 2015). Therefore, the two questionnaires that used for collecting data were consisted of five sections. Five-point scale with a response mode of Strongly Agree (5 points), Agree (4 points), Uncertain (3 points), Disagree (2 points) and Strongly Disagree (1 point) was used to measure the item responses.

One of the most common format of data collection in research is interview. In such cases, semi-structured interviews are very important. Semi-structured interviews are a format with broad and in-depth open-ended questions which prepared before eliciting responses (Jamshed, 2014). The interview protocol of the research consisted of 4 open ended basic questions and some unstructured questions were asked during the period of interviewing. Purposively selected 8 teachers were interviewed. All the instruments were pilot tested in order to make sure about the validity and reliability. The reliability of the questionnaires was tested using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. Because of the Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient of the set of data was 0.697 and therefore, internal consistency of the items in the scale was acceptable. The exercise was completed within one and a half months.

Data analysis

As this research was based on concurrent mix methodology, both the data that collected from surveys and interviews were analyzed at same time and summarized, as summary statistics and tabulations. Data analysis is basically done to quantify the evidence in the data. Appropriate methods, computational tools and languages should be used to assess the strength of evidence for specific hypotheses (Stephanie and Roger, 2019). Accordingly, for analyzing quantitative data, frequency distributions and percentages which come under descriptive statistics were mainly used and also cross-tabulation, histograms and pie charts were used to show the analyzed results. And also data collected from semi-structured interviews was analyzed using themes and codes which come under thematic analysis.

FINDINGS

Objective 1: To identify student related factors for students' poor attendance

For achieving the first objective of the study, several students related factors could be found out which highly caused for school absenteeism of Advanced Level students as attending tuition classes, peer pressure and demotivation of attending school. Table 1 shows student related factors that could cause for students' poor attendance.

Table 1

Student related factors for school absenteeism

Student related factor	Percentages			Total
	Strongly Agree/ Agree	Neutral	Strongly Disagree/ Disagree	
Attending tuition classes	69%	15%	16%	100%
Affect friends for school attendance	64%	15%	21%	100%
Expectation of just a pass from A/L exam	44%	16%	40%	100%
Less inert motivation to attend school	58%	19%	23%	100%
Less interesting to study in school	21%	11%	68%	100%
Attitude of high result of A/L give better opportunities	65%	22%	13%	100%

According to the above table 1, Three major factors could be identified as attending tuition classes, peer pressure and demotivation which cause for poor attendance. During the interviews, all of the teachers (100%) claimed this situation as below.

“Children have no interest in coming to school. They prefer to go to tuition classes than to come to school. The main reason for that is that they get a chance to study freely there. They like that freedom.”

(All Teachers)

According to the teachers, students absent because of their friends. 88% of teachers mentioned that peer pressure is affected for students’ poor attendance. Teachers further explained although they advised to students to attend to school regularly, group wise they absent sometimes. And also, least of teachers claimed that teenage affairs are caused for decreasing attendance.

“As this is adolescence period of children, they sometimes engage in romantic relationships. Because of this, they skip school and tend to attend tuition classes together as it gives freedom that they expect.”

(Teacher 1 and 4)

Many of students, parents and teachers mentioned that less motivation of student is a reason for poor attendance. Some teachers explained the students’ demotivation to attend school due to less extra activities in school and problems in their families.

Objective 2: To find out strategies use by school management to minimize students’ poor attendance

For achieving the second objective, several strategies could be found out which used by school to minimize the absenteeism of students. Below is the figure that shows the results of thematic analysis for the second objective.

Theme	Coding
Conduct practical sessions	Students need a deep understand of some subject matters which cannot be taught by theories Students like to engage in activities Lack of psychomotor skills causes child imbalance
Principal directly interview with parents about absenteeism	Principal intervenes and directly engages in conversation with parents Principal asks teachers to send parents to him
Class teachers monthly recheck the attendance book	Teachers get records of attendance of students once a month Teachers short list the absent students monthly Attendance records are checked Attendance book recheck monthly and list out the regular absentees
Minimize leaves of teachers	Some principal limited the teachers' leaves Limited number of AL teachers are getting leaves
Internal supervision of teachers by principal	Teaching learning process is checked by the school management Vice principals normally supervised teachers by observing their way of teaching

According to the above figure 3, one of the strategies was rechecking the students' attendance books by class teachers and list out the most absent students and report them. Most of the teachers were following that with aim of identifying such students and to advise them. And also, some of teachers claimed that the principals of their schools are directly talk to the parents about their childs' poor attendance according to the class teachers' reports. Teachers explained this as below.

“We recheck students' attendance records once a month to identify students who are absent frequently and report them. After that we inform their parents to come to the school and meet us and then sometimes even the principal intervenes and directly engages in conversation with those parents. In such cases, parents reveal various facts about their children before us.”

(Teacher 1, 3 and 6)

As mentioned in the figure 3, other strategies that followed by schools to minimize poor attendance were doing practical sessions for certain subjects and minimizing leaves of Advanced Level teachers. Two teachers claimed it as follows.

“We conduct practical sessions frequently to increase student attendance. It is essential to conduct practical tests for some subjects in our subject stream. Sometimes the principal follows up on this. And also, only a limited number of Advanced Level teachers are able to approve leaves. When approving the leave, such

teachers should submit some work for his/her classes.”

(Teacher 2 and 3)

Objective 3: To recommend suggestions to uplift students’ attendance

For achieving the third objective, suggestions of students, parents and teachers for uplifting the attendance were analyzed using thematic analysis.

Theme	Coding
Adding co-curricular activities	Co-curricular activities are essential for AL students It is important to add co-curricular activities to AL timetables Co-curricular activities help to shape up students
Grading students according to term marks and conduct subject conferences	Students better to be grading according to term tests marks and allocate the weak students for subject conferences to improve their subject knowledge Conducting conferences for AL subjects
Starting middle of the syllabi	Start teaching from the middle of syllabi as students already touch the basics from tuition classes
Doing revision classes	Revision is necessary for Advanced Level Revision classes can be done after school
Monitoring revision classes by principal	Principal should regulate revision classes Revision classes are better to be monitored by schools’ upper management

Through the questionnaire also it could be found out that 70% of students suggest to cover syllabi quickly and 62% of students mentioned to conduct more practical sessions. And also, 55% of students suggested to increase co-curricular activities for Advanced Level students to get some motivation to attend school. Other than that; doing more revisions for every subjects, proper guiding of teachers and making more friendly environment in school were their suggestions.

During the interviews also, several teachers expressed their ideas as follow.

“We suggest to start from the middle of the syllabus when teaching in school. Since the syllabi start early in the tuition classes, the students show reluctance to study in those subject matters again. It would be better if revision classes are formalized in school for each subject and the principal regulates it as well.”

(Teacher 1, 5 and 8)

According to the above statements and as mentioned in the figure 4, some teachers have suggested that start to teach from the middle of the syllabi, doing revision classes and monitoring them by the principals are better solutions for the problem. Some teachers suggested the practices which should be followed for enhancing the attendance of students as below.

“It is very important to provide opportunities for Advanced Level students to do co-curricular activities. It helps to make a balance student. So, we suggest to the school management to make it true. Also, if the conferences for subjects are happening, students would come to school. Not only that, feedback classes can be arranged after school to improve subject knowledge of students. This can be done by grading the students from the term marks and by facilitating them to participate that classes.”

(Teacher 6 and 7)

According to the above statements, it could be further found out that co-curricular activities and conferences also support for increasing the attendance of Advanced Level students.

DISCUSSION

Both students and teachers mentioned that attending tuition classes is a major cause for poor attendance. There should be a strong reason for attending tuition classes rather than attending school. Teachers mentioned this happens because of freedom to learn in tuition classes rather than schools. And also, 63% of teachers claimed through the interviews that students lost their interesting in studies. But according to the survey, only 21% of students mentioned that they have less interesting in studies. Some contradictions can be seen in these two situations. Therefore, it is important to have an open conversation about the matter.

According to the survey results, students were having an attitude of getting high result of A/L exam gives them better opportunities. If so, they definitely should attend school regularly. But it had not really happened and still the attendance is poor. Although it was discussed about student related factors through the study, there are other factors such as school related factors and family related factors which are caused for poor attendance of students. This was further supported by Aturupane and Little (2019) and Conaty and his colleagues (2008). Some of that factors are, loss of enthusiasm of schooling, not satisfying with teaching methods, heavy work load, monthly income of parents, education level of parents, number of siblings and so on (Wickramanayake and Kumari, 2023).

The study found out that some teachers were rechecking the students' attendance book monthly wise to identify the most absent students. It is a good practice to follow up by all class teachers to bring down the poor attendance of students. Some teachers admirably mentioned about the principals' direct involvement to meet and discuss with parents of absent students. That situation indirectly shows that teachers expect the help of school management to overcome problem which related to poor attendance. Assefa (2018) also has suggested the above strategies which could uplift the attendance of students. But, Masogo (2015) has gone beyond the school level and has suggested to establish policies by governments which could bring down the absenteeism.

As some subjects have practical sessions to complete, students highly expect it from school. If that is not happening in school, they try to skip the school. According to the study, 62% of students suggested to conduct practical sessions more to increase their attendance to school. But, 25% of teachers mentioned that they were doing practical tests. As these two incidents have a mismatch, that should be concerned by the school management.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

According to the results of this study, it could be concluded that there are some student related factors which affect for poor attendance of students. Attending tuition classes, peer pressure and less motivation are the major factors while students' attitude of just passing from A/L exam, teenage romantic affairs and less

interesting of study in school are minor factors. Conaty and his colleagues (2008) also has explained the personal factors which cause for poor attendance. These personal factors can be further connected with other factors such as school related factors and family related factors. Therefore, when finding solutions for this problem, it is suitable to look into all the probable factors.

Schools were used several strategies to overcome the absenteeism of students. Identifying the most absent students by rechecking students' attendance books once a month, discussing with parents of absent students were the most of strategies that followed by school management for the particular situation. Very few of schools were doing practical sessions to minimize the matter. These measures are not enough to overcome this problem. As this is a critical situation, it is very important the interference of school management for this matter to solve it sustainably. Teachers should be internally supervised by the school management to get rid of teachers' unawareness of managing human resource (students) of classroom. Not only that but also, it is better to be monitored well. According to Kumari (2022c), although internal supervision of teachers is happening in some of Sri Lankan schools, post observational discussions are not frequently occurring there. Monitoring of all the activities is necessary to maintain a quality service.

And also, it could be unveiled several suggestions to uplift the attendance of students through the study. Covering the syllabi quickly in schools and starting revision classes are the most important suggestions which were suggested from students. As they are Advanced Level students, they expect to cover syllabi and prepare to face for the most important examination of their lives. They wish to do past papers more and more to get a pre-experience for the examination. School management should understand this situation and should facilitate and support students. Therefore, it could be concluded that covering syllabi quickly and starting revision classes improve the attendance of students. By teachers' side, they suggested to start teaching from middle of syllabi. And also, they suggested to regulate feedback classes and subject conferences. That also a practical solution for the situation. Increasing co-curricular activities also a better suggestion as it helps to balance students. At present, children are cooperating only with studies and avoid other tasks due to high competence in education in Sri Lanka. That could create the environment for paralyzing them mentally. It is very important to engage in sports, mental development programs, drama, musical performances etc. for a well-balanced personality. Therefore, it can be recommended to increase co-curricular activities for Advanced Level students.

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