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Causes, Consequences and Counselling Strategies for Managing Lateness among Secondary School Students in Awka Education Zone, Anambra State

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Abstract: Lateness to school among secondary school students has become a persistent behavioural challenge affecting academic performance, classroom management, and school discipline in Nigeria, particularly in Awka South Local Government Area of Anambra State. This study investigated the causes, consequences and counselling strategies for managing secondary school students' lateness to school in Awka Education Zone of Anambra State. A descriptive survey design was adopted. The study population comprised all 65 school counsellors in public secondary schools across the five Local Government Areas in Awka Education Zone; including Awka North, Awka South, Aniocha, Njikoka and Dunukofia. Census sampling was adopted and all 65 counsellors served as the study sample. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire validated by experts in Educational Psychology and Guidance and Counselling. Reliability was established using Cronbach's Alpha with acceptable coefficient of 0.78. Data were analyzed using mean and standard deviation. Findings revealed that lateness is caused by poor parental supervision, peer influence, distance to school, weak self-discipline, environmental challenges, and lack of motivation. The consequences include poor academic performance, disruption of classroom instruction, indiscipline, reduced instructional time, and strained teacher student relationships. Counselling strategies such as self-management techniques, behavioural modification, group counselling, and parental involvement were found effective in managing lateness. The study concludes that lateness is a multi-dimensional behavioural problem requiring integrated counselling and school-based interventions. It recommends strengthening school counselling services and adopting behavioural intervention programmes in secondary schools.

Keywords: lateness, secondary school students, counselling strategies, behaviour management, Awka Education Zone.

INTRODUCTION

Secondary education occupies a strategic position in the educational system because it serves as the bridge between primary and tertiary education. At this level of education, students are expected to develop intellectually, socially, emotionally, and morally in preparation for adulthood and future career responsibilities. Hence, students are enrolled in schools not only to acquire knowledge and understanding of the world phenomenon but also to become better citizens and contribute positively to the growth and development of the

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society (Ofoegbu & Igbokwe, 2021). Secondary schools are therefore expected not only to provide academic knowledge but also to instill discipline, punctuality, responsibility, and acceptable social behaviours in learners. However, the achievement of these goals has continued to face serious challenges due to behavioural problems exhibited by students within the school environment. One of the most persistent and disturbing behavioural problems confronting secondary schools in Nigeria is lateness to school.

Lateness refers to the act of arriving at school, class, or any scheduled activity after the stipulated time while Lateness to school is a commonly used phrase in educational management, particularly in Nigerian studies regarding student punctuality. Lateness to school has generally been considered a problem in research literature ever since compulsory school was introduced. While various studies on this topic have been conducted, there is no single individual credited with inventing or first using the specific phrase lateness to school. Lateness occurs in all facets of life – work and career place, religious and worship, family and friends; personal development, marriage ceremony, fellowship and classes among others. The first known attempt to curb lateness to school in the south east region of Nigeria, was carried out by the Individual missionary schools who enforced attendance from the 1920_s after the establishment of Methodist College Uzoakoli as the first secondary school in the Southeast in 1923, the first serious nationwide attempt to monitor lateness and absenteeism occurred with the introduction of the universal primary education scheme in 1976. Subsequent policies, including the universal basic education Act of 2004 further formalized these attempts. (Thisday, 2019) Before now, the 18th-century European laws, such as the 1736 Konfirmations forordningenin Denmark, made it necessary for children to attend school on time to be confirmed, tying it to church and social duty. (Frellesvig, 2004) Research into the history of education shows that punctuality problems have always been linked to the failure of school times to match the logistical realities of students' daily lives, such as agricultural or domestic work. Frydenlund, Knage, & Knage, (2026). The problem seems to have eaten deep into the Nigerian system and has now turned to a national problem. Little wonder the cliché “Nigerian Time”. (Heyne, Gren-Landell, Melvin, & Gentle-Genitty, Thisday, 2019). In the educational setting, punctuality is regarded as an important virtue because it reflects discipline, responsibility, and readiness for learning.Studies carried out in Awka south L.G. A by Anyamene & Anakwuba (2022) observes that it has increasingly become normal to observe students walking slowly to school after the resuming time (between 7:45 am and 8:00 am) and therefore missing the first/second lessons of the day. What appears to be more concerning is students' attitude toward tardiness, which they appear to have accepted as a "normal element" of our culture.

According to Oguzie and Nwokolo (2019), Students who come to school early are more likely to settle emotionally and mentally for classroom activities, participate actively in lessons, and benefit fully from instructional activities. On the contrary, students who habitually arrive late often miss important classroom instructions, disrupt ongoing lessons, and struggle academically and socially. Oghuvwu (2018) noted that lateness disrupts school organisation and reduces instructional efficiency, while Ojigbo and Obeta (2013) described lateness as one of the major administrative problems affecting discipline and classroom management in Nigerian schools.

Over the years, lateness among secondary school students has become increasingly common in many parts of Nigeria. Teachers and school administrators continue to express concern over the growing number of students who arrive late to school assembly, classroom lessons, and other school activities. In Awka Education zone, the situation appears particularly alarming as many students consistently resume school after the official time. This behavioural

trend has become a source of concern because it negatively affects effective teaching and learning and weakens discipline within the school system.The problem of lateness has attracted considerable attention from researchers because of its influence on students' academic achievement and behavioural adjustment. Academic research has consistently linked punctuality with academic success. Students who attend classes regularly and punctually tend to perform better academically than those who arrive late frequently. According to Ancheta, Daniel, and Ahmad (2021), regular attendance and punctuality significantly improve academic performance because students are exposed to complete instructional activities and classroom discussions. Similarly, Nwobodo, Ogben, Onu, and Ebegbulam (2023) found that lateness negatively affects students' academic achievement in secondary schools because students who arrive late often miss important lesson introductions, assignments, and explanations necessary for understanding academic concepts.Apart from its academic implications, lateness also affects school administration and classroom management. Teachers often experience disruptions whenever late students enter the classroom during lessons. Such interruptions distract other students and affect the smooth flow of teaching activities. Nakpodia and Dafiaghor (2021) observed that lateness remains a major challenge confronting school administrators because of its persistent occurrence and resistance to control measures. Okoko and Ossai (2023) further explained that habitual lateness creates difficulties for administrators in maintaining discipline and orderliness in schools.

Studies have shown that lateness among students is influenced by multiple factors. One of the major causes identified in literature is poor parental supervision. Parents who fail to monitor their children's morning routines or enforce punctuality at home may indirectly encourage lateness behaviour. Adegunju, Ola-Alani, and Agubossi (2019) identified parental neglect and weak supervision as major causes of lateness among students in Nigerian schools. Similarly, Oghuvwu (2018) explained that poor parental involvement contributes significantly to lateness and absenteeism among students.Another important factor associated with lateness is distance to school and transportation difficulties. Students who travel long distances to school often face transportation challenges, traffic congestion, and delays that make punctuality difficult. In urban and semi-urban areas such as Awka Education zone, transportation problems and poor road conditions frequently contribute to late arrival at school. Maile and Olowoyo (2017) emphasized that environmental conditions and transportation challenges are major contributors to lateness behaviour among secondary school students.Peer influence also contributes significantly to lateness behaviour among adolescents. Secondary school students are strongly influenced by their peer groups, and they often imitate behaviours that are considered acceptable among friends. Eka, Risma, Rizky, Zamroni, Eni, and Devy (2024) observed that students' lateness behaviour is shaped by peer interactions and school culture, especially where lateness is normalized among students. This suggests that when students associate with peers who are habitually late, they are likely to develop similar behavioural patterns. Lack of self-discipline and poor time management have equally been identified as major causes of lateness. Some students fail to prepare adequately for school activities because of laziness, excessive sleeping, poor planning, or low motivation toward education. Maile and Olowoyo (2017) found that weak self-regulation and poor time management skills contribute significantly to lateness among students. Marwan (2024) also described lateness as a multifactorial behavioural problem influenced by personal, environmental, institutional, and psychological factors.

The consequences of lateness extend beyond academics and school administration. Habitual lateness may lead to emotional and social difficulties among students. Students who regularly arrive late may experience embarrassment, punishment, criticism, and rejection from

peers and teachers. Over time, these experiences may lower students' self-esteem and reduce their motivation toward schooling. Furthermore, lateness may encourage the development of other negative behaviours such as truancy, absenteeism, indiscipline, and poor commitment to schoolwork.The persistent nature of lateness among students has increased the need for effective intervention strategies.

Counselling has emerged as one of the most effective approaches for addressing behavioural problems in schools. Counselling involves helping individuals understand themselves, identify behavioural problems, and develop positive adjustment strategies. School counsellors therefore play a vital role in helping students overcome lateness behaviour through guidance, behavioural modification, and emotional support.Behavioural counselling strategies have proven effective in reducing lateness among students. Adeyemo, Adamu, and Usman (2020) found that self-management counselling techniques significantly reduced lateness behaviour among secondary school students in Borno State. Similarly, Ofoegbu and Igbokwe (2021) reported that self-management strategies effectively improved punctuality among students in Imo State. Danjuma (2020) also established that shaping counselling techniques were effective in reducing lateness among junior secondary school students. Epstein, (2011) stated that group counselling and peer mentoring programmes have also been identified as useful strategies for managing lateness. Through group discussions and peer interactions, students are encouraged to examine the consequences of lateness and develop positive behavioural habits. Counsellors may also involve parents in intervention programmes to improve supervision and monitoring of students at home.

Despite the various intervention measures adopted by schools, lateness continues to persist among secondary school students in Awka Education zone. This suggests that existing disciplinary measures alone may not adequately address the underlying causes of the problem. Furthermore, there appears to be limited empirical attention focusing specifically on the causes, consequences, and counselling strategies for managing lateness in the area. It is against this background that this study investigated the causes, consequences, and counselling strategies for managing lateness among secondary school students in Awka Education Zone of Anambra State.

Statement of the Problem

Lateness among secondary school students in Awka Education zone has become a persistent behavioural challenge affecting effective teaching and learning. Despite school rules, disciplinary measures, punishments, and warnings, many students continue to arrive late to school regularly. This situation has continued to generate concern among teachers, counsellors, parents, and school administrators because of its negative effects on academic performance, discipline, and classroom management. Teachers frequently experience disruptions during lessons whenever late students enter the classroom. These interruptions affect concentration, reduce instructional effectiveness, and sometimes force teachers to repeat already taught concepts. Oghuvwu (2018) noted that lateness disrupts school organisation and reduces instructional efficiency, while Ojigbo and Obeta (2013) described lateness as a major administrative challenge confronting Nigerian schools. In addition to disrupting classroom instruction, lateness contributes to poor academic performance among students. Students who arrive late regularly miss important lesson introductions, assignments, and explanations necessary for effective learning. The persistence of lateness therefore raises concern about students' academic engagement and commitment to education. Although schools often rely on punishments and disciplinary measures to address lateness, the problem continues to persist. This suggests that disciplinary measures alone may not adequately address the underlying causes of the behaviour. It also indicates that factors such as parental supervision, peer

influence, environmental conditions, and personal discipline may not be receiving adequate attention. Furthermore, there is limited empirical research specifically focusing on lateness among secondary school students in Awka Education zone. This creates a gap in understanding the specific causes, consequences, and counselling strategies relevant to the area. It is therefore necessary to investigate the causes, consequences, and counselling strategies for managing lateness among secondary school students in Awka Education zone of Anambra State Nigeria.

Research Questions

1. What are the causes of lateness among secondary school students in Awka Education zone?
2. What are the consequences of lateness on students' academic and behavioural outcomes?
3. What counselling strategies are effective in managing lateness among secondary school students?

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The design was considered appropriate because it enables the collection of data from a representative sample in order to describe existing conditions without manipulating variables. This study investigated the causes, consequences and counselling strategies for managing secondary school students' lateness to school in Awka Education Zone of Anambra State. A descriptive survey design was adopted. The study population comprised all 65 school counsellors in public secondary schools across the five Local Government Areas in Awka Education Zone; including Awka North, Awka South, Aniocha, Njikoka and Dunukofia (Post primary schools service commission (PPSSC), Anambra State, 2026). Since the population was manageable in size, census sampling was adopted, and the entire population of 65 school counsellors is served as the study sample.

The data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled "Causes, Consequences and Counselling Strategies for Managing Lateness Questionnaire (CCCSMLQ)." The instrument was validated by experts in Educational Psychology and Guidance and Counselling to ensure clarity, relevance, and adequacy of the items in measuring the intended variables. The reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronbach's Alpha method, which yielded reliability coefficients of 0.78, indicating that the instrument was internally consistent and suitable for data collection. The questionnaire was administered personally by the researcher with the assistance of trained research assistants. Copies were retrieved immediately after completion, ensuring a high response rate and reducing the likelihood of data loss. Data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions. A criterion mean of 2.50 was used as a benchmark; items with mean scores of 2.50 and above were accepted, while those below 2.50 were rejected.

RESULTS

Causes of Lateness among Secondary School Students

The data related to the causes of lateness among secondary school students is presented in table 1.

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation on Causes of Lateness among Secondary School Students

S/N	Items	Mean	SD	Remark
1	Long distance from home to school causes lateness	3.42	0.71	Accepted

2	Peer influence contributes to lateness	3.31	0.68	Accepted
3	Lack of self-discipline leads to lateness	3.18	0.75	Accepted
4	Environmental challenges (traffic, weather) cause lateness	3.55	0.60	Accepted
5	Keeping late nights results in morning lateness	3.22	0.70	Accepted
6	Weak school discipline contributes to lateness	3.28	0.73	Accepted
7	Uninteresting teaching methods reduce punctuality motivation	3.12	0.77	Accepted
8	Bad peer company leads to lateness	3.25	0.69	Accepted
9	Early morning domestic chores cause lateness	3.05	0.74	Accepted
10	Long distance from home to school causes lateness	3.40	0.72	Accepted
	Grand mean	**3.28**	**0.71**	**Accepted**

The findings in Table 1 indicates that lateness among secondary school students is influenced by a combination of home, school, personal, and environmental factors. Major causes include long distance from home to school, peer influence, lack of self-discipline, environmental challenges such as traffic and weather conditions, and late sleeping habits. Other contributing factors are weak enforcement of school rules, unengaging teaching methods, negative peer association, and early morning domestic responsibilities. The grand mean value of 3.28 which is above the criterion mean value, indicates a generally high level of agreement among respondents that these factors collectively contribute to lateness. This suggests that lateness is widely recognized as a multidimensional problem rather than being caused by a single factor. The **standard deviation values** show close clustering of responses around the mean, indicating that respondents shared relatively similar opinions with minimal variation.

Consequences of Lateness among Secondary School Students

Table 2 presents data related to Consequences of Lateness among Secondary School Students.

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation of the Consequences of Lateness among Secondary School Students

S/N	Items	Mean	SD	Remark
11	Lateness leads to poor academic performance	3.60	0.65	Accepted
12	Lateness disrupts classroom teaching	3.48	0.72	Accepted
13	Lateness reduces instructional time	3.35	0.69	Accepted
14	Lateness causes indiscipline in school	3.50	0.66	Accepted
15	Late students miss important lesson content	3.20	0.74	Accepted
16	Lateness leads to punishment and sanctions	3.18	0.76	Accepted
17	Lateness affects teacher–student relationship	3.25	0.73	Accepted
18	Lateness leads to absenteeism and truancy	3.40	0.70	Accepted
19	Lateness encourages examination malpractice	3.10	0.78	Accepted
20	Lateness negatively affects student motivation	3.22	0.75	Accepted
	Grand mean	**3.33**	**0.71**	**Accepted**

The data in Table 2 indicates that lateness has serious academic, behavioural, and administrative consequences for secondary school students. Key consequences include poor academic performance, disruption of classroom instruction, reduced instructional time, indiscipline, missed lessons, punishment, weakened teacher–student relationships, truancy, examination malpractice tendencies, and reduced motivation toward learning.The grand mean value of 3.33 shows strong agreement that lateness has significant negative effects on students' academic and behavioural outcomes. This confirms that respondents collectively recognize lateness as a major barrier to effective teaching and learning.The standard deviation values indicate low variability in responses, showing that participants had similar perceptions of the consequences.

Counselling Strategies for Managing Lateness among Secondary School Students

The data related to Counselling Strategies for Managing Lateness among Secondary School Students is presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviation on Counselling Strategies for Managing Lateness among Secondary School Students.

S/N	Items	Mean	SD	Decision
21	Self-management counselling helps reduce lateness	3.58	0.62	Accepted
22	Behaviour modification techniques reduce lateness	3.40	0.70	Accepted
23	Group counselling helps improve punctuality	3.25	0.73	Accepted
24	Parental involvement improves punctuality	3.62	0.58	Accepted
25	Reward system encourages punctuality	3.30	0.71	Accepted
26	Cognitive behavioural therapy is effective	3.28	0.69	Accepted
27	Role modelling improves student punctuality	3.22	0.72	Accepted
28	School counselling programmes reduce lateness	3.35	0.68	Accepted
29	Time management training helps students arrive early	3.41	0.66	Accepted
30	Regular school monitoring improves punctuality	3.38	0.70	Accepted
	Grand mean	**3.38**	**0.67**	**Accepted**

The findings in Table 3 reveal that various counselling and behavioural strategies are effective in managing lateness among secondary school students. These include self-management counselling, behaviour modification techniques, group counselling, parental involvement, reward systems, cognitive behavioural therapy, role modelling, time management training, and regular school monitoring. The grand mean value of 3.43 indicates a high level of agreement that these strategies are effective in reducing lateness. This suggests that respondents broadly support counselling-based and behavioural approaches as appropriate interventions. The standard deviation values show little variation in responses, indicating a high level of agreement among respondents regarding the effectiveness of the strategies.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study revealed that lateness among secondary school students is influenced by multiple interrelated factors such as long distance from home to school, peer group influence, weak self-discipline, environmental challenges, and poor home routines. This aligns with the work of Adegunju et al. (2019) study on factors responsible for students'

lateness in Nigerian schools, who reported that parental supervision, environmental constraints, and student personal habits are major predictors of lateness in school settings. Similarly, Maile and Olowoyo (2017) study on causes of late coming among high school students found that transportation difficulties, peer influence, and lack of self-discipline significantly contribute to habitual lateness among adolescents.In addition, the findings are consistent with Marwan (2024) review of student lateness behavior, which emphasized that lateness is a multifactorial behavioural issue shaped by home environment, school discipline systems, and individual motivation. However, the present findings contradict studies such as Santillano (2010) study on personality traits and tardiness, which suggested that personality traits like anxiety and low self-esteem are major causes of lateness. In this study, these internal psychological factors were not strongly supported, indicating that environmental and social factors may play a more dominant role in the local context. This implies that intervention strategies should prioritize environmental restructuring, parental engagement, and school discipline systems rather than focusing primarily on personality-based interventions. Schools may need to introduce structured morning routines, improve monitoring of student movement, and strengthen collaboration with parents to address external causes of lateness effectively.

The study also found that lateness negatively affects academic performance, classroom instruction, discipline, and instructional time. This agrees with Ancheta et al. (2021) study on class attendance and academic performance, which established that punctual attendance significantly enhances academic achievement by ensuring full exposure to instructional content. Similarly, Nwobodo et al. (2023) study on lateness and academic achievement confirmed that students who arrive late frequently miss key lesson introductions and perform poorly in examinations.These findings also support Oghuvwu (2018) study on absenteeism and lateness in Nigerian secondary schools, which reported that lateness disrupts classroom management and reduces teaching effectiveness. However, there is a slight contradiction with findings from some behavioural intervention studies which suggest that lateness may sometimes serve as a symptom of deeper learning or emotional difficulties rather than directly causing academic failure. Despite this, the dominant evidence supports the present finding that lateness is academically harmful. This shows that schools must treat lateness as an academic risk factor rather than a minor disciplinary issue. Early identification and intervention are necessary to prevent long-term academic underachievement. Teachers should also adopt instructional strategies that minimize disruption when late students arrive, while counselling units should provide corrective behavioural support.

Furthermore, the study established that counselling strategies such as self-management training, behavioural modification, parental involvement, reward systems, cognitive behavioural therapy, role modelling, and structured counselling programmes are effective in managing lateness. This supports the findings of Adeyemo et al. (2020) study on self-management counselling and lateness reduction, which demonstrated that self-management techniques significantly reduce lateness among students by improving time awareness and personal responsibility.Similarly, Danjuma (2020) study on shaping techniques and lateness behaviour found that behavioural shaping and reinforcement strategies are effective in gradually improving punctuality habits. The findings also align with Ofoegbu and Igbokwe (2021) study on self-management techniques in schools, which confirmed that structured counselling interventions significantly improve punctuality behaviour.However, the findings contradict punitive-based approaches supported in earlier traditional school discipline studies such as those suggesting flogging, suspension, and public punishment as effective deterrents. In contrast, this study supports a shift toward positive behavioural

interventions rather than punishment-based systems. This indicates that schools should strengthen counselling units and adopt structured behavioural intervention programmes instead of relying on punitive disciplinary methods. Counsellors should be trained in cognitive-behavioural techniques, self-management strategies, and parent-focused interventions. Schools that implement these approaches are more likely to achieve sustainable behavioural change and improved student punctuality.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study, the researcher concludes that long distance from home to school, peer influence, lack of self-discipline, environmental challenges such as traffic and weather conditions, and late sleeping habits, weak enforcement of school rules, unengaging teaching methods, negative peer association, and early morning domestic responsibilities poor academic performance, disruption of classroom instruction, reduced instructional time, indiscipline, missed lessons, punishment, weakened teacher, student relationships, truancy, examination malpractice tendencies, and reduced motivation toward learning, are the causes of lateness. Furthermore, the researcher concludes that the major consequences of lateness include poor academic performance, disruption of classroom instruction, reduced instructional time, indiscipline, missed lessons, punishment, weakened teacher–student relationships, truancy, examination malpractice tendencies, and reduced motivation toward learning.It also concludes that, various counselling and behavioural strategies are effective in managing lateness among secondary school students. These include self-management counselling, behaviour modification techniques, group counselling, parental involvement, reward systems, cognitive behavioural therapy, role modelling, time management training, and regular school monitoring.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, it was recommended that:

1. School counselling units should be strengthened and adequately equipped to address lateness through structured programmes such as self-management counselling, behavioural modification techniques, cognitive behavioural therapy, reward systems, and regular guidance sessions focused on discipline and time management.
2. Parents and guardians should actively supervise students' morning routines and ensure proper preparation for school, while schools should work closely with parents and counsellors to design and implement coordinated intervention strategies for improving punctuality. Parents should improve supervision of students' morning routines and school preparation.
3. School administrators and teachers should consistently apply positive behavioural strategies such as reinforcement and reward systems, alongside clear and fair discipline structures, to encourage punctuality and reduce habitual lateness among students.

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