Student Perceptions of Rules for Classroom Interaction:
The Effects of High School Drop-out Rates, Gender and Race

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Abstract

A considerable amount of research has been conducted on factors distinguishing between students who are at risk for dropping out of high school compared to those who graduate. This study examined attitudes regarding compliance and ratings of the importance of classroom rules for interaction among students from schools varying in dropout rates. A survey was distributed to over 200 students at three high schools differing in dropout rates. Results indicate some gender and ethnic group differences in attitudes about rule compliance and the importance of various classroom rules. Implications regarding the attitudes toward classroom rules are discussed.
Student Perceptions of Rules for Classroom Interaction: The Effects of High School Drop-out Rates, Gender and Race

The problem of high school dropouts has generated increased interest among researchers, policymakers, and educators in recent years (Rumberger, 1986). Much research on high school attrition has focused on the characteristics of students who are at risk for dropping out. The relationship between attrition and communicative factors, such as communication apprehension, has also been studied (Chesebro, et al. 1992). This study examined the attitudes of students in a high risk environment versus students in a low risk environment regarding rules for classroom interaction. The attitudes students have toward rules of interaction may be a function of that environment. Ultimately, the discovery of measurable differences in student attitudes, if they occur, may help educators understand the tendencies that students have in dropping out of school.

Learning the subtleties of interaction is one of the basic processes of socialization (Martin, 1976). Children learn socially appropriate behavior by imitating others when others' behavior is not prohibited and results in positive reinforcement (Kagan, 1988). Children do not learn passively. Rather, children interact with their environment, observing the behavior of others as well as their own behavior (Roedell, Slaby, & Robinson, 1977). However, socialization implies imputing knowledge of those with experience in society to those without that experience.

Socialization is a function of social institutions, such as the family and school, which involves more than a simple matter of teaching children to behave themselves, but involves helping children understand themselves and the world around them.
(Epstein, 1979). In this context, the adult in a supervisory role may act as an authority figure, defining for the child appropriate and inappropriate behavior. The communication behavior which defines the relationship between the teacher and the student is largely the result of the social system and the culture the individuals grew up in (Hurt, Scott & McCroskey, 1978). Rules are set in the classroom by the teacher, or by the school. In the example of the teacher or the school setting the rules, the rules are formally stated and are explicit.

Shimanoff (1980) defines a rule as a prescription which can be followed and suggests behaviors that are obligated, preferred, or prohibited in particular contexts and can be implicit or explicit. Implicit rules are guides which are not formally stated but rather define behavior as appropriate or inappropriate based on actions that are either performed or not performed by the group. Explicit rules are formally stated regulations or customs that define appropriate or inappropriate behaviors for the group.

In school classrooms, rules are essential for the smooth operation of classroom interaction. Expectations of society regarding the purpose of schools include the development in children the ability to interact with others in prosocial ways, to resolve conflict by peaceful means, and ultimately the ability to contribute productively to society (Grusec & Lytton, 1988). In this study, the attitudes of high school students regarding rules for interaction in the classroom will be measured along two dimensions: compliance with the rule, and importance of the rule relative to other rules. Attitudes regarding compliance with the rule are measured to determine if students believe the rule should be followed. Attitudes regarding the importance of the rule are measured to
determined if students perceive the rule as important regardless of whether it should be followed.

**Classroom Rules**

Actions that disrupt, destroy, defy, hurt, or infringe on others' rights are considered rule breaking behaviors in the classroom situation (Charles, 1981). Examples of non-observance of rules, or violations of expected behavior, are evident from the school records of students in high schools. For example, in an Associated Press article (Baton Rouge Morning Advocate, Friday April 12, 1991), seven high school students from Syracuse, New York were arrested for dismantling school property. Stories of students being killed by other students on school grounds are frequently seen in newspapers. To be sure, occurrences of shootings on school grounds in the community in which this study took place have been documented. Prohibition against carrying weapons on school grounds is a formally stated, explicit rule. Other examples of (explicit) rule violations may include fighting, bringing or distributing drugs at school, or setting off fire alarms.

This study is interested in student attitudes regarding rules for student/teacher or student/student interaction in the classroom because these attitudes may demonstrate the potential for academic non-completion. While some students may present discipline problems for school administrators, other students may never get into trouble. The lack of overt behavior does not necessarily demonstrate attitudes which are compatible with the goals of the classroom. While attitude has long been recognized as a precursor to behavior, overt behavior does not consistently indicate attitude (Ruby & Law, 1983). Kim and Hunter (1993) found a strong ($r = .79$) overall
relationship between attitudes and behavior. Attitudes toward rules, therefore, may be related to problematic behavior which leads to students being labeled as at risk for dropping out.

The type of rules of interest in this study involve proxemics, oculesics, regulation of conversation, and rules regarding the use of environment, territory and time. For example, space and territory is communicated through the use of seating arrangements: Students will either choose their own seats or be assigned seats, but some confrontations may result from issues of territoriality. Students who choose to sit close to the teacher in a traditional classroom arrangement typically interact more with the teacher, and are typically less apprehensive about talking to other people (Hurt et al., 1978).

Students are expected to learn and follow these types of rules. As students progress through grades, their grasp of proper behavior should become more acute. Andersen, Andersen, Murphy, & Wendt-Wasco (1985) looked at teachers’ perceptions of students’, grades K through 12, development of nonverbal communication (see also Andersen, Andersen, & Mayton, 1985). They studied five types of nonverbal communication including proxemics, haptics, oculesics, vocalics, and physical appearance. The authors found that teachers perceived that students increased interactional distances between themselves and their peers as well as themselves and adults as grade level increased.

Teachers reported that students decreased the amount of touch given as grade level increased. No difference was found in eye gaze between kindergarten through twelfth grade students. Teachers reported a small but significant increase in the
appropriate use of loudness and rate as students increased in grade. Students were found to be more inclined to be concerned with their physical appearance as they increased in age. And finally, the researchers obtained mixed results regarding the development of kinesic behavior (facial expression). However, Andersen, Andersen, Murphy, & Wendt-Wasco (1985) interpreted the results as being consistent with literature suggesting that inhibition, masking, and display rules act to suppress the expression of affective behavior in older children. This research suggests that appropriate nonverbal interaction is learned through a developmental socialization process in the classroom.

At-Risk Students

For purposes of this study, the term "at risk" applies to students who have a high potential for academic non-completion, i.e. dropping out. How academic non-completion is defined may contribute to the variances in dropout rates reported. For example, a gross definition of the dropout holds that a dropout is an individual who has dropped out of school for such a significant amount of time that it affects their ability to graduate in the standard four year high school period. Cage, et al. (1984) defined a dropout as a pupil who leaves school, for any reason except death, before graduation or completion of a program of studies and without transferring to another school. This definition, therefore, does not count the individuals that return to school or otherwise complete their high school equivalency. Using this definition the dropout rate has been estimated at 27 percent. A net definition holds that a dropout is an individual who is not enrolled in school at a particular time, yet this individual may return to school
at a later time and finally graduate. Using this definition the dropout rate has been estimated at 12.3 percent (Barro & Kolstad, 1987).

Students who have been diagnosed by school personnel as having a high potential for dropping out of school have been labeled "at risk" students. Typically, at risk students are diagnosed according to academic and disciplinary records, as well as underachievement and defiance (Kagan, 1988). If student who violates rules gets into disciplinary trouble, then perhaps the question to ask is why do they violate the rules. Before answering that question, however, one has to determine if there exists a connection between the violation of rules and the potential for dropping out.

Education research has focused on the characteristics of at risk students and dropouts. Several researchers have defined the main problem areas that accompany the tendency to drop out as family environment, school environment, and personal issues (Adams, 1989; Bull, Salyer, & Montgomery, 1990; MacDonald, 1989; Widmann & Housden, 1988). Specific characteristics of dropouts in the family environment category include low socioeconomic status (Wittenberg, 1988), single parent or broken homes (Mizell, 1987), parental support of education (Bull et al., 1990), parental education level (Egginton, Wells Gaus, & Esselman, 1990; Fernandez & Velez, 1989), child abuse (Kaesler & Hooper, 1983), student pregnancy and/or parenthood (Castallo & Young, 1988), student work (Gastright, 1987), and a critical life event (Wittenberg, 1988). Specific characteristics in the personal category include over age for grade (Adams, 1989), low self-esteem and low ambition of student (Binkley and Hooper, 1989), poorly developed self-concept (Marin, 1990), communication apprehension (McCroskey & Payne, 1984), poor social development (Barro & Kolstad, 1987),
negative school experiences (McCaul, 1988), poor student-teacher relationships (Self, 1985), lack of interest by student (Wittenberg, 1988), and chemical dependency (Marin, 1990; Mizell, 1987). Specific characteristics in the school environment category include academic failure (Castallo & Young, 1988), grade repetition (Anton, 1982), learning disabilities (Kaesar and Hooper, 1983), poor reading skills (Self, 1985), poor academic performance (Sherman, 1987), low standardized test scores, little extra-curricular activities by students (Mizell, 1987), lack of specialized studies (Mueller, 1990), absenteeism (Fernandez & Velez, 1989), disciplinary problems (Barro & Kolstad, 1987), dangerous school grounds, and poor bookkeeping by school regarding students' location (Kaesar & Hooper, 1983). These characteristics suggest that at risk students violate rules and expectations for classroom behavior. All of these characteristics also may affect socialization and therefore the perceptions and attitudes of students.

**Gender Differences**

Demographic characteristics, such as gender, ethnicity, and social class have also been noted in education research as possible correlates of dropout tendencies. Differences in dropout rates between the genders have been mixed. For example, Shainline (1987) discovered that males and females dropped out at the same rates (male dropouts = 7.99%, female dropouts 7.98%). In studies of dropout tendencies in rural schools, no gender-related differences were found (McCaul, 1988). However, Carpenter (1990), studied dropout tendencies and results indicate that during the 1988-89 school year more girls (52.1%) than boys (47.9%) dropped out of high school. Results of another study show that 61.4 percent of the 1,128 1987-88 dropouts were male (Binkley & Hooper, 1989).
Perhaps the explanation for the differences in results lies in the reasons boys and girls give for leaving school. In one study, the results indicate that for females, falling behind in school is the strongest factor for dropping out, while for males, falling behind, maintaining a low GPA, suspensions, and negative feelings toward school contribute to dropping out (Baca, Burchard, Broyles, & Berglund, 1989). Despite of the mixed results regarding drop out rates by gender, the differences in reasons boys and girls drop out suggest attitudinal differences. Males tend to have more difficulties in their relationships with teachers (Self, 1985) and peers (Barro & Kolstad, 1987).

Racial Differences

Differences in attitude may also be apparent according to racial or ethnic background. To be sure, socialization is a product of one's ethnic culture. Rules that define a cultural group are handed down from one generation to the next. If cultural differences are sufficient, and if assimilation tendencies into mainstream culture are low, then it is reasonable to assume that cultural differences may play a role in the attitudes learned through the socialization process. Whether this is the case, that ethnicity based attitudinal differences effect dropout tendencies, has not been shown in the education literature reviewed. The education literature has focused on racial differences as opposed to ethnic or cultural differences.

Differences in dropout tendencies by racial group have been well documented. For example, Shainline (1987) found that the dropout rate for Blacks was 8.5%, for Whites was 6.9%, and for Hispanics was 9.6%. In a subsequent study, Carpenter (1990) found the dropout rates for Blacks was 12.1%, for Whites was 9.0%, and for Hispanics was 13.5%. Carpenter (1990) argued that significant increases in attrition
occur each year. However, generally, minorities drop out at a higher rate than Whites, and Hispanics drop out at a higher rate than Blacks (Adams, 1989; Sherman, 1987).

Analyses of one study indicate that differences in dropout rates for different race/ethnic groups are substantially reduced when socioeconomic status is held constant (Rumberger, 1983). Yet, differences in dropout rates as predicted by ethnic background may be more a function of socioeconomic status. Most dropouts come from families that are low in socioeconomic status (Sherman, 1987). McCaul (1988) suggested that differences in socioeconomic status were pronounced when considering status as a predictor for academic completion. Other issues relevant to socioeconomic status may include learning ability or parental support. There may be a link, for example, between socioeconomic status and education level. Education level in the parents may affect parental attitudes towards education that are taught to the children through the socialization process.

Hypotheses

The foregoing review of literature suggests that attitudes toward school and classroom interaction may play a significant role in decisions that students make regarding leaving school. These attitudes toward classroom interaction may be revealed through perceptions of compliance with or the importance of implicit rules for nonverbal behavior. The education research cited suggests that demographic variables can determine students' tendencies to drop out of school and also that demographic variables may be related to attitudes toward school and classroom interaction. To examine these relationships, a classroom interaction rules survey was developed and administered to test the following hypotheses:
H1 Students from a higher at risk group (students from a school with a high dropout rate) will be more inclined than their respective moderate or low risk counterparts (students from a school with moderate to low dropout rates) to have negative attitudes regarding compliance to and importance of implicit nonverbal classroom interaction rules.

H2 Students from a higher at risk group (Blacks) will be more inclined than their respective low risk counterparts (Whites) to have negative attitudes regarding the compliance to importance of implicit nonverbal classroom interaction rules.

H3 Males will be more inclined than females to have negative attitudes regarding compliance with and importance of implicit nonverbal classroom interaction rules.

Method

Subjects

The Classroom Interaction Rules Survey (CIRS) was distributed to three schools in the local school district. The local school district’s rate of attrition for the years 1988 through 1991 is 1.25%. Three schools were chosen by rate of attrition: high, average, and low. Group 1 consists of high school students in the tenth grade who were attending a school with a very high dropout rate (9.41%) (N = 81). Group 2 consists of high school students in the tenth grade who are attending a school with a high-average dropout rate (4.41%) (N = 96). Group 3 consists of high school students in the tenth grade who are attending a school with a very low dropout rate, a magnet school with higher entrance requirements and maintenance of grades (0.07%) (N = 67). In order to administer questionnaires to a representative sampling of same-age students,
participants were chosen from sophomore level English classes. All students in the local school system must take this class.

Respondents ranged from 13 to 20 years of age. The average age of 15 accounted for 59.5% of all students, with 70.2% of all students at or below the age of 15 and 29% of all students above the age of 16 (.8% missing). Of all students, 56.6% were female and 43.3% were male. However, differences in the male/female ratio existed in the schools. Group 1 students had 54.3% female students to 45.7% male. The Group 2 sample had an even 50% ratio between males and females while Group 3 had the largest difference with 68.7% female students to 31.3% male students.

Race accounted for the greatest overall variance in the samples. Of all students, 58.2% were Black, 33.6% were White, and 8.2% were either Hispanic, Oriental, other or missing. The sample size of students who were neither Black nor White was not sufficient for meaningful analysis. Therefore, only Black and White students were used in the analysis. By school, race variations were high. The high risk school had 90.1% Black to 9.9% White students. The moderate risk school had 44.8% Black to 55.2% White students. The low risk, magnet school had 38.8% Black to 61.2% White students.

Measures

The CIRS\(^1\) contains 21 statements of rules for nonverbal interaction in the classroom and behaviors which affect classroom tasks and is designed to measure students' attitudes regarding compliance with the rules and the relative importance of those rules. Each rule statement is followed by two seven point Lykert-type scales. The first scale measures students' attitudes regarding compliance from never follow the rule
to always follow the rule. The second scale measures students’ attitudes regarding importance of the rule from not at all important to extremely important. The rules pertain to nonverbal behaviors ranging from haptics, oculesics, and proxemics to mobility and use of time. Table 1 lists the rules for classroom interaction applied in the CIRS. The order of rules on the CIRS was varied to account for order effects and to test for fatigue.

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<td>Rules applied on the CIRS</td>
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Rule 1: Students should maintain eye contact with the teacher to show they are paying attention.
Rule 2: Students should not sleep in class.
Rule 3: Students should not cheat.
Rule 4: Students should not get up and leave in the middle of class.
Rule 5: Students should not use vulgar language.
Rule 6: Students should do their own work, or homework.
Rule 7: Students should clean up after themselves.
Rule 8: Students should not make noise in class.
Rule 9: Students should not throw things.
Rule 10: Students should not publicly display affection, including hand holding.
Rule 11: Students should not pass notes to other students during class.
Rule 12: Students should not be late for class.
Rule 13: Students should sit up straight in their desk.
Rule 14: Students should raise their hand when they want to speak and then wait until they are called on.
Rule 15: Students should maintain a respectful and appropriate distance when speaking to a teacher.
Rule 16: Students should not bring up topics of discussion which are unrelated to the subject matter of the class.
Rule 17: Students should not eat or drink in class.
Rule 18: Students should not talk when the teacher is talking.
Rule 19: Students should not come to class intoxicated or high.
Rule 20: Students should not sit at the teacher's desk.
Rule 21: Students should not drop out of school.
Statistical Analyses

The surveys were coded and analyzed according to the following criteria: exploratory factor analysis using principle components extraction and varimax (orthogonal) rotation in order to determine the existence of underlying rule dimensions. Secondly, tests of reliability were run on each factor discovered in the factor analysis. The resulting factors were analyzed using Pearson product-moment correlation analysis to determine if linear associations exist between factors. If linear associations exist, then a multivariate design is required to test for interaction effects. Due to linear association between factors, a three (school) by two (gender) by two (race) multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was performed to analyze the data.

Results

Underlying Rule Dimensions

Factor analyses were done on the compliance and importance scales, separately. Principal components analysis of compliance variables revealed four factors. These factors include: (a) Laziness, (b) Distraction, (c) Respectfulness, and (d) Politeness. The Laziness factor included rules prohibiting sleeping, cheating, dropping out, throwing things, leaving class, and using vulgar language. Laziness rules pertain to students not performing the required tasks such as throwing trash across the room as opposed to bringing the trash to the waste basket. The Distraction factors included rules prohibiting public displays of affection, eating or drinking in class, sitting up straight, and passing notes. Distraction rules pertain to students' behavior which prevent others from paying attention. Rules about respectfulness included raising a hand to speak, maintaining an appropriate or respectful distance, sitting at the
teacher's desk, and talking while the teacher is talking. Respectfulness rules pertain to student behavior which do not maintain boundaries between the student as student and the teacher. Rules about politeness included maintaining eye contact and cleanliness. Politeness rules deal with demonstration of attention to or concern for others.

Factor one (compliance with Laziness rules) accounted for 34.9 percent of the variance (Eigenvalue = 7.32, a = .77). Factor two (compliance with Distraction rules) accounted for 8.8 percent of the variance (Eigenvalue = 1.85, a = .82). Factor three (compliance with respectfulness Rules) accounted for 5.4 percent of the variance (Eigenvalue = 1.13, a = .73). Factor four (compliance with politeness Rules) accounted for 5.1 percent of the variance (Eigenvalue = 1.07). However, reliability tests on factor four yielded a low alpha of = .46. Therefore, this factor was not considered in later tests.

The exploratory factor analysis of the importance scales revealed three factors. These factors include: (a) Distraction, (b) Laziness, and (c) Respectfulness. Rules about the importance of distraction were the same as the rules for compliance with distraction, except that the importance factor included tardiness. Rules about the importance of laziness were the same as the compliance variable findings with a few exceptions. Rules about leaving class and throwing things were not included in the factor loadings for importance of laziness. Rules about doing one's own work, and intoxication were included in the factor loadings. Interrupting or talking while the teacher is talking were cross-loaded with the compliance of respectfulness rules. Rules about the importance of respectfulness included raising hand to speak and sitting at the teacher's desk as did the compliance of respectfulness factor. Also included in the
importance of respectfulness factor were cleanliness which cross-loaded with the compliance of politeness factor, and throwing things which was cross-loaded with the compliance of laziness factor. Missing from the importance of respectfulness factor when compared to the similar compliance factor were talking when the teacher is talking, and maintaining respectful distance. Factor one (importance of Distraction rules) accounted for 32.6 percent of the variance (Eigenvalue = 6.85, a = .83). Factor two (importance of Laziness rules) accounted for 9.4 percent of the variance (Eigenvalue = 1.98, a = .77). Factor three (importance of Respectfulness rules) accounted for 5.7 percent of the variance (Eigenvalue = 1.21, a = .67).

Correlations were used to determine linear association between factor indices created by using the highest loading items determined by a .60/.40 primary-secondary loading decision rule. The average correlation between Compliance factors was .51 (p < .001) while the average correlation between Importance factors was .52 (p < .001). Due to the correlation between factors, a three by two by two multivariate analysis of variance was used between the three school groups, gender, and ethnic classification of the student. In this analysis, age was used as a covariate due to the significant variance in age between schools.

Tests of Hypotheses

The first hypothesis stated that students from a school with a high dropout rate would have more negative attitudes towards compliance with and importance of implicit rules for classroom interaction when compared to their moderate or low risk counterparts. The second hypothesis stated that Black students would have more negative attitudes towards compliance with and importance of those same rules than
White students. The third hypothesis stated that male students would have more negative attitudes towards compliance with and importance of implicit rules for classroom interaction when compared to female students. When student responses to the questionnaire were compared by school, race, and gender none of the hypotheses were completely supported. However, some very interesting results emerged.

A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was performed to analyze the effects of school, gender, and race, with age as a covariate, on the derived factors measuring the compliance and importance variables regarding rules in the classroom. Age was used as a covariate due to significant differences between the schools in terms of age (F (2, 242) = 19.99, p < .001). The high risk school had the highest mean age (M = 15.83), followed by the moderate risk school (M = 15.28), and the low risk school (M = 14.88).

The MANOVA revealed that no significant differences on compliance factors (F (6,440) = .55, p < .766, Wilks' Lambda = .98) or importance factors (F (6,428) = .76, p < .600, Wilks' Lambda = .97) could be attributed to school. However, significant differences were found between compliance and importance factors relative to gender and race. The MANOVA revealed a significant, multivariate effect for gender on the compliance scale (F (3, 220) = 5.16, p < .002, Wilks' Lambda = .93) and the importance scale (F (3,214) = 7.12, p < .000, Wilk's Lambda = .91). Table 2 displays the gender and race mean values for compliance and importance factors. The univariate F-tests showed that the gender effect for compliance was due to males (M = 5.31) having a more negative attitude toward compliance with Laziness rules than females (M = 5.798), univariate (F (1, 222) = 5.14, p < .024). Males had a more negative attitude (M
= 5.21) toward the importance of Laziness rules than females (M = 5.83), univariate (F (1, 216) = 9.64, p < .002). Compliance and importance of rules of Distraction (compliance (F (1,222) = 2.34, p < .127), importance (F (1,216) = 1.76, p < .185)) and Respectfulness (compliance (F (1,222) = 1.54, p < .215), importance (F (1,216) = 2.22, p < .138)) by gender were not significant.

The MANOVA revealed that no significant differences on compliance factors could be attributed to race (F (3,220) = 1.95, p < .122, Wilks' Lambda = .97). However, a significant, multivariate effect for race was found on the importance scale (F (3, 214) = 4.07, p < .008, Wilks' Lambda = .95). The univariate F-tests showed that the race effect was due to Whites (M = 3.04) having a more negative attitude toward the
importance of Distraction rules than Blacks (M = 3.66), univariate (F (1, 216) = 6.01, p < .015). Whites (M = 5.23) also had a more negative attitude toward the importance of Laziness rules than Blacks (M = 5.82), univariate (F (1, 216) = 8.53, p < .004). Finally, Whites (M = 4.68) had a more negative attitude toward the importance of Respectfulness rules than Blacks (M = 5.37), univariate (F (1, 216) = 9.58, p < .002).

General Discussion

The results revealed that students' attitudes towards rules in the classroom are generally positive (overall M = 4.722) Overall, attitudes held by all students were generally most positive toward laziness rules. Attitudes toward respectfulness rules were moderately positive, whereas attitudes toward distraction rules were neutral to moderately negative. Yet, the findings did not completely support the notion that students who are at risk for dropping out have more negative attitudes toward classroom interaction rules when compared to moderate or low risk students.

The first hypothesis was not supported, although the trends in terms of the means for each factor by school suggest that students from from high risk environments tend to have more positive attitudes toward rules than their moderate or low risk counterparts. These findings suggest a trend in the opposite direction than hypothesized for some of the rule dimensions. Students from the high risk group, as determined by school, tended to have more positive attitudes toward classroom rules than their moderate or low risk counterparts. Conversely, the low risk students, as determined by school, tended to have more negative attitudes toward classroom rules than their moderate or at risk counterparts. Possible explanations for the tendency of students from the high risk group to have more positive attitudes toward classroom
rules could include difficulties with the sampling procedures used to distinguish high risk students from their moderate or low risk counterparts.

A sample of the at risk population was not directly accessible in the local school system. The school system did not have a procedure in place for directly distinguishing between at risk students and nonrisk students. In order to overcome this difficulty, a sample of the at risk population was inferred from the drop out rates of the area high schools. The assumption in this inference is that there are more at risk students at a school with a high dropout rate than there are at risk students at a school with a moderate or low dropout rate. In this case, the school with the low dropout rate was a Magnet school. Magnet schools should have a lower proportion of academically at risk students because there are entrance requirements to gain admission. Yet, there are problems inherent in inferring a higher at risk population based on dropout rates.

There were some gender differences among compliance and importance of the various rules. Males had more positive attitudes toward compliance with distraction rules than females, except for Black males at the low risk school when compared to their female peers. In addition, males had more negative attitudes toward compliance with laziness and respectfulness rules, except for Black males at the low risk school who had more positive attitudes toward compliance with respectfulness rules than their female counterparts. Of these differences, only the attitudes toward compliance with laziness rules were significantly different between males and females.

Males had more positive attitudes regarding the importance of distraction rules than females, except for Black males at the high risk school. Males also had more negative attitudes regarding the importance of laziness and respectfulness rules than
females, except for Black males at the nonrisk school who had more positive attitudes regarding the importance of respectfulness rules than their female counterparts. Of these differences, only the attitudes regarding the importance of laziness rules were significantly different between males and females.

Earlier research cited suggests that the reasons females most often dropped out of school was pregnancy or family problems, or falling behind in school, whereas males had a more difficult time interacting appropriately with the teacher. This suggests that males should have more negative attitudes toward classroom rules than females because of the reasons males had for dropping out. Given the findings in the present study, partial support for the hypotheses can be assumed from differences between males and females in their attitudes regarding the importance of laziness rules.

The race of the student also played a role in determining differences in attitudes. No significant differences were found between Blacks and Whites in attitudes toward compliance with classroom rules. However, some interesting trends did emerge. Black males and females consistently had more positive attitudes toward compliance with rules than did their same-gender White counterparts. An exception to this generalization was that Black males at the low risk school had more negative attitudes toward compliance with laziness rules than their White male peers. This exception may be due to the small number of Black males (N = 8) at the low risk school who took part in the study. The differences noted in attitudes towards rules between schools may be a function of race given the relationship between racial makeup of the school and the school's attrition rate.
Differences in attitudes between Blacks and Whites regarding the importance of classroom rules were significant. For the high and moderate risk schools, Blacks tended to have more positive attitudes regarding the importance of distraction rules than their White counterparts. Black students at the low risk school had more negative attitudes regarding the importance of distraction rules than their White counterparts, although the differences measured were not great. For all schools, Blacks had more positive attitudes regarding the importance of laziness and respectfulness rules than their White peers, although the differences between Black and White students at the low risk school were not great.

Earlier research cited suggests that Blacks are more at risk for dropping out than Whites. The research suggests that one major reason for this difference may be due to peer pressure in the Black student community to behaviorally conform (Barro & Kolstad, 1987). The research also suggests that Blacks should have more negative attitudes toward classroom rules than Whites. Yet, in this study, Black students consistently had more positive attitudes than Whites regarding classroom rules. A possible explanation for this discrepancy is the notion that students who have been typically defined in negative terms may react to the definition in the opposite direction. That is, if Black students are aware that they are defined as having more negative attitudes, they may compensate for that definition by expressing more positive attitudes. Given the findings in the present study, there is no support for the hypotheses when considering differences between Blacks and Whites.

The definition of the at risk student may also affect the interpretation of the results. The definition of the at risk student incorporates characteristics of three major
types: family environment of the student, personality of the student, and the school environment. An examination of the research regarding at risk characteristics suggested a possible relationship between the sponsoring agency of the study of at risk characteristics and the type of characteristics described in that study. For example, the five types of sponsoring agencies considering characteristics of at risk students were: (a) local, state, and federal departments of education, (b) federal agencies, (c) professional education organizations, (d) university studies, and (e) corporate sponsors. There may be a tendency for studies sponsored by a particular type of agency to characterize at risk students according to a particular type of influence, such as family environment, personality, or school environment. A test for association may show researcher bias in the definitions of at risk students.

Researcher bias in the education research of at risk students could lead to faulty conclusions regarding the characteristics of potential dropouts. If this is the case, then the direction of the hypotheses in the present study may have been based on faulty assumptions regarding at risk students. This suggests that further study should be done on determining underlying characteristics of at risk students. To accomplish this goal, some agreement among researchers must be made in coding the characteristics of the at risk population.

Prior research reviewed in this article suggests that students who are at risk for academic non-completion can be distinguished by demographic and behavioral variables. This study revealed that simple characterization of students by demographic variables may not be sufficient to uncover causes, or contributory factors, of academic non-completion. To uncover these causes, further study should be conducted on
attitude formation in the classroom context. Further study should consider more explicitly the relationship between interaction rules in the classroom and the actual tendency for dropping out. This suggests that a longitudinal study measuring attitudes be conducted on a sample of students from an early grade through high school. The attitudes of actual drop outs can then be compared to students who stayed in school. Also, the development of attitudes in the classroom can also be examined. This examination should consider the attitudinal development of at risk students in particular.

Further study may also examine how peer pressure affects attitudes and attitude formation regarding rules in the classroom. Other issues to be studied which may affect these attitudes include socio-economic status of the student, and characteristics of both the school and home environment. A comparison of rules between the home and school environments may also illuminate commonalities or differences in the development of attitudes. Further study should be conducted on the effect negative evaluations of students by teachers have on the attitude formation of those students.
References


Author Note

This article is adapted from the first author's master's thesis directed by the second author.
Footnote

1 Development of the CIRS is documented in the thesis. A combination of educator interviews, student questionnaires, and pilot study was utilized to generate the rules and test the CIRS.