

Reflections on the recording, reporting and using of school attendance data: A comparative perspective

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Background

INSA Call for Papers for a Special Issue of Orbis Scholae:

- 'Recording, Reporting and Using School Attendance Data: Variations Within and Across Countries'



Prof. Dr. Dominik Dvorak
Orbis Scholae



Prof. Dr. David Heyne
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Lack of comparative perspective on SAPs

ST062

In the last two full weeks of school, how often did the following things occur?

(Please select one response in each row.)

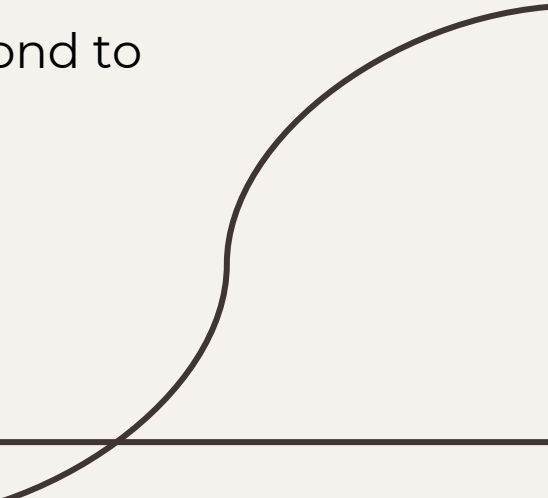
		<i>Never</i>	<i>One or two times</i>	<i>Three or four times</i>	<i>Five or more times</i>
ST062Q01TA	I <skipped> a whole school day.	<input type="checkbox"/> ₀₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₀₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₀₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₀₄
ST062Q02TA	I <skipped> some classes.	<input type="checkbox"/> ₀₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₀₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₀₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₀₄
ST062Q03TA	I arrived late for school.	<input type="checkbox"/> ₀₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₀₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₀₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₀₄

Centralized attendance monitoring

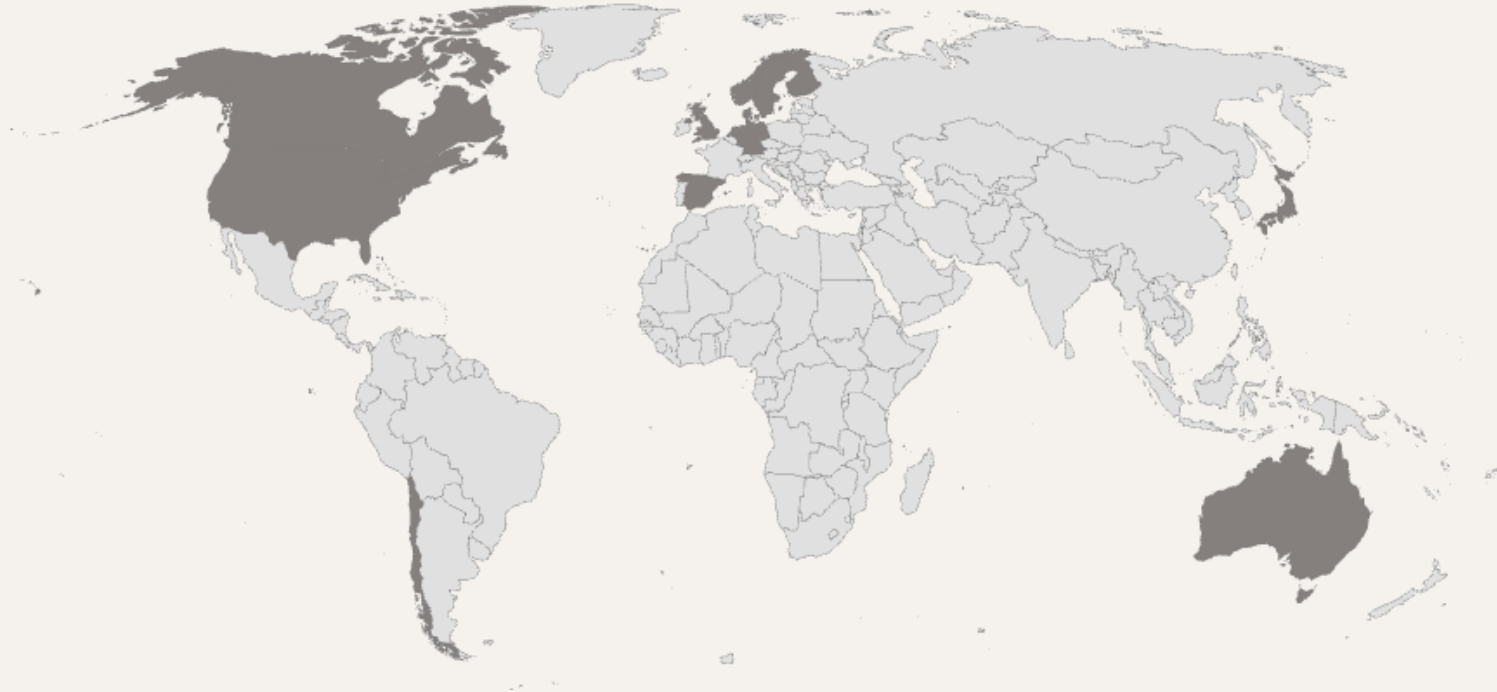
- All(most) countries teachers / school staff register student attendance
- All(most) countries invest in centralized attendance monitoring.
- However, we know little on these different approaches that are used to define, record and report SA/A.
- Can these SA/A data be used for reaching a more comparative perspective on SAPs?




Aim of the special issue

- 1) How is school absenteeism conceptualized in your country ?
 - 2) What indicators of absence are being recorded ?
 - 3) How is this data reported ?
 - 4) How do schools and central authorities respond to this data ?
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Contributions from around the world



This presentation

- A reflection on these contributions.
 - How to move towards a comparative perspective on school attendance (data)?
 - What are the shortcomings and limitations in that process?
 - Not an analysis of limitation within a single country
 - But analysis of similarities between contributions
 - How to move forward?
 - Recommendations
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- Kearney, C. & Child, J. (22 Sep 2022)
 - Improving school attendance data and defining problematic and chronic school absenteeism: the next stage for educational policies and health-based practices. *Preventing School Failure: Alternative Education for Children and Youth (Online First)*.

Lack of data quality

Reliability

- Are data accurate and consistent?
- Many countries use (too) broad categories of absenteeism
 - Excused vs. unexcused absenteeism
 - There is a lack of clear definitions for these different types of school absenteeism

Sweden, Finland & Germany

There are no clear definitions of excused and unexcused absence, which leaves it up to the teachers and schools to make their own interpretations

Kreitz-Sandberg et al., 2022

Norway & Denmark

The absence categories used are clearly defined, but further specifications are still up to the individual municipality or school

Japan

The official definition of school attendance in Japanese compulsory education schools is rather flexible, which is eventually left to the judgement of each school principal or local education authority

Maeda , 2022

Lack of data quality

Construct validity

- Whether an operational definition of a variable reflects the true meaning of a concept
 - Are data capturing the true meaning of SAPs?
 - Data rely often on a single measure or dichotomy \leftrightarrow multifaceted and dimensional nature of SAP
 - The categories used do not represent the true meaning of SAPs
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Chile

One major limitation to attendance data in Chile is that the platform used to collect the data includes only three options when entering attendance data: 'present,' 'absent,' or 'withdrawn'. It is not possible to record partial attendance (i.e., late arrivals or early departures), nor whether absences are excused or unexcused.

Lack of data quality

Integrity

- Auditing information for validation or fidelity purposes.
 - Are data susceptible to corruption or tweaking by school officials?
 - Under- or overreporting of true absenteeism rates by school officials if these rates are used for funding
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Chile

The direct link between monthly school attendance reporting and the government subsidies has had repercussions. There are reports of discrepancies between what is recorded in the class book and what is reported in the centralized system. Some hypothesize that attendance-based subsidies cause untenable economic uncertainty for the schools and leads to misreporting information. If misreporting occurs frequently, the data's utility could be questioned.

To sum up

Comparing administrative SA/A data:

- 1) Lack of reliability
- 2) Lack of construct validity
- 3) Lack of integrity

Recommendations

- We need more insight on how this lack of quality in data effects the (comparative) use of administrative A/A data
 - Estimating the degree of bias of our measurement systems
 - Keppens, G., Spruyt, B., & Dockx, J. (2019). Measuring school absenteeism: Administrative attendance data collected by schools differ from self-reports in systematic ways. *Frontiers in Psychology, 10*(2653).
 - Weak association between self-reported and registered unauthorized school absenteeism
 - Some groups of students received systematically more registered absence compared to what they reported themselves
 - Boys, Minority groups, low SES, poverty received more registered absence > self-reported absences
 - Large differences between schools

Recommendations

- We need to estimate the degree of bias of our measurement systems
 - Lomholt, J., Jonhsen, D. ... & Thastum, M. (2020). Feasibility study of Back2School, a modular cognitive behavioral intervention for youth with school attendance problems. *Frontiers in Psychology, 11*(585).
 - Discrepancies between school-based and parent-reported attendance data
 - The sample consisted of 24 families seeking treatment for SAPs, and based on parent-reported attendance data in the last three months, the youths were on average missing 67% of school and all youths missing more than 10% of school.
 - However, when compared with the administrative data, the schools reported no school absence in the same time-period for 7 (27%) of the included youths.


Recommendations

- We need qualitative research to understand how statistics are used within schools
 - Keppens, G. & Spruyt, B. (2021). Uitdagingen voor de implementatie van een spijbelbeleid op schoolniveau: een onderzoekende houding ten aanzien van registratiegegevens als casestudie. In: Devos, G. & Tuytens M. *Verschillen in Onderwijs. Politeia*.
 - 'Challenges to implement school absenteeism policy at schools: How schools use their attendance data as casestudy
 - Participant observation and interviews with school attendance officers at schools on how they register absences and use their absences to improve policy and practice
 - In some school there is a lack of belief in the use of attendance data
 - In other schools there is a fear of accountability
 - Some schools are confronted with too many chronic absentees (lack resources)

Recommendations

- Estimate and improve integrity:
 - We need to compare reported absenteeism between schools with similar population + observe how schools register absences
- Estimate and improve reliability:
 - We need to train school attendance officers at school.
 - We need well-defined and full operationalised conceptualisation of (subcategories for) school presence and absence

How to move forward

- Comparing administrative SA/A data
 - Using a raw indicator for school absenteeism
 - All absences are (potentially) problematic (INSA Leiden, 2018)
 - Absenteeism rate = $\frac{\textit{Number of absent days}}{\textit{All school days in 1 school year}}$
 - Attendance rate
 - Administrative data:
 - Public available (e.g., Chile)
 - Available upon request (e.g., Denmark, Japan, The Netherlands ...)
 - Expertise within INSA from each country
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What are we waiting for?

