

General conclusions to draw from the Special Issue on
the special issue of European Education on
*“Comparative perspectives on school
attendance, absenteeism, and preventive
measures in Europe and beyond”*

Seminar

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General conclusions

- Methods
- Dimensions of comparison
- Terms and theories
- Who are the absent students being studied?
- What is done about problematic school attendance?
- How successful are preventive methods?
- Future research

Methods

- **Large-scale studies:** data from a convenience sample of caregivers of neurodivergent youth and community youth (Granieri et al.); data from the 2018 German PISA study - analyze the results from a representative sample of 15-year-old students in Germany (Heine and Sälzer)
- **Document analysis:** policy analyze of how the federal states in Germany intend to handle issues related to absenteeism according to official documents (Enderle et al.)
- **Case studies:** on the organization of how to handle absenteeism (Harling and Strandler; Sundelin et al.)

Terms and theories

- Different types of school attendance problems in literature, such as school refusal, truancy, school withdrawal, and school exclusion (Heyne et al.).
- Absenteeism is defined in different ways in the articles.
- “Problematic school absenteeism” (Strandler and Harling) - how this has been defined at the school they studied
- “School refusal” (Granieri et al.), youth which according to their caregivers, refuse to go to school
- “Truancy” (Heine and Sälzer), how this has been measured in the PISA studies - students’ self-reported absenteeism from whole school days, absenteeism from lessons and late arrival
- A neoinstitutional theoretical approach (Strandler and Harling)
- “Focus on young people’s own perspectives and sense-making through an interactionist approach where interpretations of norms, resources, and opportunities are both structured and contingent” (Sundelin et al .)

Dimensions of comparison

- Enderle et al. describe the situation concerning policies in Germany through analysis and comparison of the policies in the 16 German federal states and focus on one of these states;
- Strandler and Harling, as well as Sundelin et al. take into account (sometimes contrasting) perspectives of teachers and other professionals in education
- Granieri et al. compare different groups of neurodivergent youth
- Heine & Sälzer investigate if different chronotypes, like early risers or late sleepers have an influence on achievement and truancy of youth

Who are the absents being studied?

- Granieri et al. looked specifically at neurodivergent youth, and found that two groups with high school refusal emerged: students with higher autistic and ADHD traits were at higher risk of absenteeism compared to the other groups.
- Heine and Sälzer, looked at how students' chronotypes influenced their attendance at and lateness to school, concluded that students who had to adjust their sleep habits to the socially defined schedules at school tended to have a higher degree of truancy than other students.
- The other articles were more interested in applied policies to support students in or on their way back to school. For Strandler and Harling, the focus was on such students who already had a severe history of attendance problems; Sundelin et al. study upper secondary education for students with extensive learning gaps

➔ If absenteeism is being studied, the cases that catch interest are often the ones where the problems are severe already

What is done about problematic school attendance?

- Enderle et al.: different policies in the German federal states
- Sundelin et al.: how a Swedish remedial introduction programme in compulsory school may affect school attendance and the transition to further studies or work.
- Strandler & Harling: an ethnographically inspired case study of a school in Sweden that identified increased school absenteeism where different actors' work with "problematic school absenteeism" are analysed and compared (e.g., teachers, mentors, special educators, principals, school nurses, psychiatrists)

How much do we know about preventive methods?

- Enderle et al. highlight the policy changes in one of the German federal states (Schleswig-Holstein) that they signalize a change in current German policies towards prevention.
- Strandler and Harling point to a conflict between different actors concerning the purpose of preventive actions: Is the purpose to focus on students' well-being or knowledge development?
- Granieri et al. show that “externalizing symptoms, bullying victimization, and academic and social support needs should be considered within the context of the school setting, and providing needed supports may help to maintain school engagement”.
- Sundelin et al. discuss the consequences of absenteeism and note that students with a history of problematic school attendance often fail to complete compulsory education and that these students are at risk of early school leaving and also run increased risks of weak connections to the labor market, poor health, and social vulnerability.
- Heine & Sälzer suggest that education policy-makers may need to rethink the tight structures of compulsory education that demand that students have lessons at school during the morning hours, regardless of their priorities or inner body clock.
- It can be noted that the only article that empirically presents results supporting the preventive measure discussed is the one by Sundelin et al. The students they interviewed consider the remedial introduction programme they attended “a positive alternative learning environment that may prevent school dropout and early school leaving by enabling school success and rebuilding students' self-confidence as learners and appreciated members of a school class.”

Future research on school attendance, absenteeism, and preventive measures from a comparative perspectives

- The perspectives of different actors—such as students, caregivers, teachers, other professionals, and policy-makers—on challenges and solutions related to school attendance.
- Understanding different actors' focus on the role schooling plays in either learning or well-being, and the need to connect these dimensions.
- Detangling the orientation of education policies between punishment for school absenteeism and support for students to be, and stay, in school.
- ➔ More literature on early intervention and prevention needed.

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Project: **School Attendance Problems in an International Comparative Perspective**
<https://www.su.se/english/research/research-projects/school-attendance-problems-in-an-international-comparative-perspective>