A Study of Chronic Tardiness

"Why are students late and what can professors do about it?"

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It has been quite a long time since college education in Japan became popular. In recent years, the percentage of high school students going on to college has increased to about 40 percent. However, not all of these students continue to practice the study habits they developed in high school.

Almost all Japanese students graduate from high school. However, once they become college students, many seem puzzled because they are no longer in the compulsory system they experienced and grew accustomed to in high school.

Looking at these college students, it seems puzzling to me as well why these students behave in unscholarly ways. Some are late for classes, some take naps right in the middle of class, while others are awake but not paying attention, talking in whispers right in the middle of class.

Of course, to a certain degree there will be bad students and good students everywhere. As teachers, however, it is a professional responsibility to try to save the bad students from themselves by curing their bad habits. One way is to try to stop them from coming late.
I would like to take up this problem as an "Action Research Project". My plan is to:

1. Collect Information (by survey) from (a) students, and (b) teachers
2. Find out why students decide to be late
3. Make suggestions on how to stop these students from being late (taking into account the decision-making processes of the students)
4. Distribute the results of my research to interested parties (colleagues, etc.) by hand, submit to academic journals.

The theme for this project will be "Why are students late, and what can teachers do about it?"
RESULTS
QUESTIONNAIRE

Summary
of 100 student’s responses

(1) Have you ever been late for class?
   1. Yes 65%
   2. No 4%
   3. Once in while 31%

(2) How many times were you late last year?
   1. 1–2 times 22%
   2. 3–4 17%
   3. 5–6 23%
   4. I don’t remember how many times 31%

(3) How many minutes were you usually late?
   1. about 5 minutes 23%
   2. about 10 38%
   3. about 15 27%
   4. about 30 23%

(4) Have you been late more than 50 minutes?
   1. Yes 23%
   2. No 61%
   3. I’m not sure but I might have 10%

(5) Would you say you were habitual?
   1. Yes 58%
   2. No 38%
(6) What were the main reasons you were late?
1. overslept 61%
2. tired due to studying the night before 7%
3. tired due to working part-time 36%
4. missed bus, train, etc 46%
5. didn’t feel like studying 21%
6. thought that lecture was dull 16%
7. professor didn’t take attendance 22%

(7) Did you feel guilty when you were late?
1. Yes 60%
2. No 5%
3. Not really 37%

(8) Did you feel like you had bothered other students?
1. Yes 41%
2. No 17%
3. Not so much 37%

(9) How did you feel when you came late?
1. Not concerned 16%
2. wondered how the professor felt 45%
3. wondered how my classmates thought 9%
4. felt I was so irresolute 17%
5. determined not to do it again 25%

(10) When you were late, what did you do?
1. ignored the professor 8%
2. felt like apologizing, but didn’t 68%
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3. apologized after class 3%

4. never mentioned any reasons or excuses 32%

5. avoided looking the professor in the eye 17%

(11) Do you care when someone comes late?

1. a little 48%

2. no at all 29%

3. I'd be lying if I said No 31%

4. don't like it because it interrupts flow of class 5%

(12) What would you think if a student came extremely late, for example, 40 to 50 minutes late?

1. very offensive 15%

2. the student shouldn't have bothered to come if he was going to be so late 46%

3. very rude to professor and other students 17%

4. wouldn't feel anything in particular 30%

(13) What would you think if a student came into the classroom noisily or without consideration to the other students?

1. very rude 64%

2. It's a pity that such a student is with us 18%

3. wouldn't don't feel anything in particular 7%

4. What others do is none of my business 12%
SUMMARY

"Why are students late and what can professors do about it?"

The most surprising result of the questionnaire was that 96 of the 100 students surveyed had been late on at least one occasion. I was struck dumb with astonishment. Moreover, looking at the number of times students were late, 23% were late 5 or 6 times, and 31% didn't remember how many times they were late. I think it goes without saying that when 54% of the students are habitually late, there is a serious problem which can't be overlooked.

Judging from the length of time they were late, we can see that the largest number of students were about 10 minutes late (38%) and 23% were as late as 30 minutes! It is easy to imagine how difficult it is for professors to teach under these conditions.

The most popular reason for the tardiness is oversleeping, (more than 60%) followed by missing the bus, train etc., (46%). I would say that the reasons why they come late are primarily related to oversleeping. Another reason mentioned was being tired from working at their part-time jobs. This is a problem which we have to seriously consider. I sometimes wonder whether the students come to school to learn, or too simply enjoyably pass 4 years.

I have also made an unexpected discovery examining the students'
attitudes about their tardiness. In response to the question “Did you feel guilty when you were late?”, almost half of the students said “No” or “Not really”. Moreover, 54% of the students answered “No” or “Not really” to the question, “Did you feel like you had disturbed other students?” In response to the question, “When you were late, what did you do?”, 68% of the students felt like apologizing but didn’t, and one fourth of the students ignored their professors or avoided looking at him or her in the eye. Only 3% actually apologized. This unfortunate situation shouldn’t be overlooked.

On the other hand, we need to observe the students who come on time. About 80% of them care when someone comes late. Judging from these matters, tardiness is an important issue for both teachers and students. However, it is also true that about 40% of the earnest students responded that they do not care at all about late-comers. It’s hard to say definitively, but this result may be indicative of the typical modern student’s philosophy of life.

We have thus far considered in general terms the questions of why so many students come late and what other students think about late comers. When we learn that nearly 100% of them came late at some time during the year, it is very difficult to find a solution to this problem. Nevertheless, it is sure to become one of our most important responsibilities in the future.

What were the reason for the tardiness?
Looking back to their experience in junior and senior high school, I can offer the following possible explanations:
1. Regulations not enforced and control not exerted by teachers

   Students are free to smoke and drink in public even if they are not yet 20 years of age. No one cares about their behavior.
2. They no longer need to worry about studying for entrance exams. That's why they don't concentrate on their studies. Accordingly, they are free to do whatever they want. Consequently, it is a secondary matter for them to be at school on time.
3. Students only need to study hard for one of two exams during the year. Accordingly, students work hard at part-time jobs which they really don't need, and spend the money they earn on leisure activities, such as drinking, eating and the like. As a result, their nerves are frazzled from working at their part-time jobs. This results in many cases of tardiness as well as absences. At the worst, I wouldn't be surprised if students end up quitting school. Another reason for these problems could be that students' parents pay tuition, not the students themselves.

In light of the above-mentioned points, teachers must seriously think about their students and help them correct their problems. This is the big issue that professors must consider seriously in the future.

It is not too much to say that the responsibility for these problems, which have existed for such a long time, rests with the teachers.

There are quite a number of students who complain that their professors give only lectures, without regard to whether the students understand them or not. It's definitely impossible to build an atmosphere of mutual trust in the classroom under these conditions.
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As my last task of this project, I would like to present the results, of this study of Chronic Tardiness to my colleagues. I do hope this project will enable educators to further develop and maintain an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect in the classroom. If teachers recognize and take prompt action to correct the problems I have discussed in this paper, the quality of higher education in Japan can only improve.