

Behavioural and Academic Problems in the School Setting among Secondary School Students

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Abstract:

This study aimed to identify behavioural and academic problems in the school environment among secondary school students by examining manifestations of school violence, bullying and academic underachievement. To achieve the study's objectives, a descriptive approach was adopted. A questionnaire consisting of 33 items distributed across three dimensions was administered to a purposive sample of 68 male and female students in the second year of secondary school (Arts and Philosophy track) at Mohamed Bouni Secondary School in the wilaya of Annaba during the 2024/25 academic year. The data were analysed using frequencies, percentages, the arithmetic mean and the standard deviation.

The results showed that manifestations of school violence occurred to a moderate degree, with an arithmetic mean of 1.72 and a standard deviation of 0.9188. The findings also revealed certain manifestations of school bullying, such as mocking/sarcasm, social exclusion, and hurtful/insulting words. Additionally, the results indicated some manifestations of academic delay, such as difficulty understanding new concepts, poor concentration, forgetting what was learnt and needing more time to grasp lessons. These findings highlight the importance of addressing the behavioural and academic issues that secondary school students may encounter in the school environment.

Keywords: Behavioural and academic problems, school violence, school bullying, academic delay, secondary school students.

Introduction

The school environment is considered one of the fundamental settings that contribute to adolescents' psychological, social and educational growth and development. A school's role is not just to provide knowledge and academic instruction, but also to provide a space for social interaction, relationship-building, and acquiring various skills and experiences. This stage is particularly important because adolescents undergo a range of changes that may affect their behaviour and adjustment at school, as well as their educational journey.

Despite its role in providing a safe and supportive educational environment, schools may experience problems that affect students, their relationships with others, and their academic performance. These problems include school violence, which can manifest in various ways, school bullying, which involves repeated aggressive behaviours, and academic delay, which is linked to difficulty keeping up with academic requirements and achieving the expected level.

These issues are important aspects of school life as they can influence how students interact with the school environment and their psychological and social adjustment. They may also impact

participation in the educational process and the student's academic path. Therefore, it is important to address these phenomena and identify how they manifest among secondary school students, as this allows for a better understanding of the problems they may encounter within the school environment. The present study therefore investigated the manifestations of school violence, bullying and academic delay among secondary school students using a descriptive approach to determine the prevalence of these issues among the study sample.

1. Problem statement

Secondary school is an important stage in an adolescent's life, given the psychological, social and academic changes that are characteristic of this period. These changes may affect the behaviour and adjustment of students within the school environment. During this stage, students may encounter various issues, including school violence, school bullying, and academic delay. These problems can impact their interaction with the school environment and their educational journey.

Therefore, it is necessary to identify the nature of certain behavioural and academic problems that may arise among secondary school students within the school environment, particularly those related to school violence, bullying and academic underachievement. This can be achieved by examining the extent to which these problems manifest among the study sample. The main research question can therefore be formulated as follows:

What is the level of manifestation of school violence, bullying and academic delay among secondary school students?

Sub-questions

- What is the level of manifestations of school violence among secondary school students?
- What is the level of school bullying among secondary school students?
- What is the prevalence of academic delay among secondary school students?

2. Study hypotheses:

General hypothesis: There are manifestations of school violence, school bullying and academic delay among secondary school students.

Sub-hypotheses:

- There are manifestations of school violence among secondary school students.
- There are manifestations of school bullying among secondary school students.
- There are manifestations of academic delay among secondary school students.

3. Objectives of the study

The present study aims to:

- identify the level of manifestations of school violence among secondary school students.
- identify the level of manifestations of school bullying among secondary school students.
- identify the level of academic delay among secondary school students.

4. Significance of the study

The importance of this study stems from the significance of the secondary stage, during which psychological, social and academic aspects converge in adolescents' lives. The study's significance can be highlighted through the following points:

- Shedding light on certain problems that secondary school students may face within the school environment, such as school violence, bullying and academic delay.
- Contributing to the identification of the extent of these issues among the study sample.

- Drawing the attention of those involved in the educational process to the importance of the early detection of behavioural and academic problems faced by students.
- The possibility of using the study results to inform preventive, educational and psychological initiatives within educational institutions.
- Providing data that subsequent studies addressing adolescents' problems within the school environment may benefit from.

5. Terms and concepts of the study

Behavioural and academic problems

In this study, these refer to the set of manifestations addressed through the questionnaire dimensions, namely school violence, school bullying, and academic delay among secondary school students.

School violence refers to the set of violent behaviours measured by the school violence dimension in the questionnaire administered to the sample.

School bullying: In this study, it refers to the set of behaviours and practices measured by the school bullying dimension in the questionnaire administered to the sample.

Academic delay: In this study, this term refers to the set of academic indicators and difficulties measured by the academic delay dimension in the questionnaire administered to the sample.

Secondary school students

In this study, this term refers to students enrolled in secondary school, particularly those included in the study sample.

6. Previous studies

Study 1: Saoudi Chaima (2021)

Title: "The Sociology of School Violence and Its Relationship with Adolescence in Middle Education".

This study was conducted at Ahmed Draia University. The study aimed to identify the impact of school violence on adolescents' academic achievement and to determine methods to protect students from various forms of school violence and improve their academic performance. The study used an analytical descriptive approach and was conducted with a sample of 25 participants selected at random. A questionnaire was used to collect data. The study was carried out at Martyr Khalifa Ali Middle School.

It concluded that various types of school violence—verbal, moral and physical—directly affect students' outcomes and academic achievement (Saoudi, 2021, pp. 45–65).

Study 2: Cheaaoui, S. and Sakhri, I. (2022)

Title: "School Bullying among Adolescents Enrolled in Middle Education".

This study was conducted at the University of 8 May 1945 in Guelma. The study aimed to determine the level of school bullying among enrolled adolescents and identify differences in bullying behaviour according to gender and academic level. The study employed a descriptive approach and a school bullying scale to collect data. The sample consisted of 50 male and female students, aged 11–14 years, selected using stratified random sampling from a target population of 507 students enrolled in 'Malek Ben Nabi' Middle School in Guelma during the 2021/22 academic year.

The study found that the level of school bullying among adolescents in middle education was low. It also indicated statistically significant differences according to gender (Cheaaoui & Sakhri, 2022, p. 65).

Study 3: Bounab, I. and Qararieya, M. (2022).

Title: “Problems of Adolescent Students and Their Relationship to Their Psychological and Social Adjustment”

This study was conducted in several middle and secondary schools in the Guelma wilaya, at the 8 May 1945 University of Guelma. The study aimed to identify the nature of the problems faced by adolescent students in relation to psychological and social adjustment, including the following two issues: school violence and school bullying.

The study relied on a descriptive approach. Instruments were used to measure the following: adolescents’ problems; school violence; school bullying; and psychological and social adjustment. The results showed no statistically significant correlation between the problems experienced by adolescents and their psychological and social adjustment. The study also found that adolescents experienced a problem of school bullying, whereas the hypothesis relating to them experiencing a problem of school violence was not supported. Furthermore, the study revealed a low level of psychological and social adjustment among these students (Bounab & Qararieya, 2022, pp. 96–97).

Study 4: Sawsan Abbas (2015)

Title: “Academic Problems among Students in the Second Cycle of Basic Education in Tartus Governorate and Their Relationship to Some Variables”

This study addressed academic problems among students in the second cycle of basic education. It found that students in the second cycle of basic education in Tartus Governorate experience academic delay at a moderate level (Abbas, 2015, p. 142).

Theoretical framework:

1. Academic Delay

Academic delay is defined as falling behind or experiencing a deficiency in achievement due to physical, social, or cognitive/motivational causes, resulting in a level of achievement that is more than two standard deviations below average (Mahadayn & Al-Nawaysa, 2009, p. 114).

2. Types of Academic Delay

General academic delay refers to a student obtaining slightly less than half of the total maximum score in all academic subjects, particularly those included in the current academic year. The student’s IQ ranges between 90 and 80 or below, but not below 70.

Specific academic delay refers to a student who obtains less than half of the minimum passing score in one subject only. This may be due to a weak relationship with that subject or a frustrating experience in the early stages of schooling, such as fear of the teacher or the school’s disciplinary system.

3. Reasons for academic delay

The main reasons are:

1. Psychological and emotional health: such as lethargy, dullness and laziness; low self-confidence; feelings of deprivation and resentment towards authority; and resistance to school rules and regulations. These factors may lead the student to incur school disciplinary punishments.

2. Physical, Bodily and Organic Causes: These include general weakness, such as severe/acute anaemia and iron-deficiency anaemia, frequent colds, tonsil enlargement and infection with parasites or viruses. Consequently, the student is unable to utilise their cognitive abilities normally.

3. Weakness of the senses among academically delayed students, such as weak hearing and vision and difficulty perceiving things through touch. It may also include weakness of the vocal cords, leading to difficulty speaking and expressing oneself.

Second Axis: School Violence

1. Definition

School violence refers to harmful physical or psychological practices inflicted upon students by teachers or other students within the school setting (Mahadayn & Al-Nawaysa, 2009, p. 117).

2. Types of School Violence

Verbal violence occurs when words, sentences and expressions are used to describe others in a negative and offensive way, thereby harming their reputation. This can include insults, swearing, slander, accusations, mockery and sarcasm.

Physical violence involves the use of the body, weapons, or other tools to cause injury. It aims to cause physical harm and can range from minor injury to severe physical damage.

Behavioural and moral violence is related to moral and value-based behaviour. It is expressed through unethical actions and movements that cause harm to others.

3. Manifestations of School Violence

Self-Harm

Here, the student neglects their own well-being and applies the principle of 'be different so that you are known'. The student may also attempt to demonstrate rebellion and refusal to accept reality.

Material (property) violence

This can manifest as graffiti on desks, walls and toilets, and may escalate to breaking desks and blackboards, smashing glass, and damaging light fixtures and electrical outlets.

Violence against peers

This involves belittling others and hating outstanding or diligent students because of their behaviour and commitment. It also includes accusing them of flattery, 'femininity', cowardice, and claiming a certain group. It involves forming an alliance of rejected students and directing it against others.

Violence against Teachers

This occurs gradually in several stages: first, studying the teacher's personal characteristics; then creating problems to provoke the teacher and test their reaction; next, testing the teacher's responsiveness through disruption, cheating and obstructing the educational process; finally, seizing opportunities to commit violence and impose new rules for 'the game' (Gharib, 2019, p. 140).

4. Reasons for the Manifestation of School Violence

Reasons attributable to the educational institution itself include its design or construction, overcrowded classrooms, a lack of essential facilities and services, and their scarcity or absence.

Reasons related to teachers include frequent absences from classes, substitution by other teachers, which may encourage students to disregard classroom order, and inappropriate teacher behaviour.

Reasons attributable to the students themselves include the socialisation process they have undergone; drug use; feelings of injustice; compensating for failure; associating with peers of a negative influence; the ease with which students can obtain weapons; and being influenced by films depicting violence.

Reasons related to education include the use of unsuitable teaching methods, outdated curricula and academic materials that do not meet contemporary requirements, the absence of committees to monitor students and a lack of cultural and recreational programmes.

Organisational reasons include the absence of committees responsible for disciplining students, and a lack of cooperation between the school and parents/guardians.

Legal reasons include the absence of clear laws governing work within educational institutions and the lack of mechanisms to address conflicts arising among the elements of the educational process, namely teachers, students and the school administration (aissaoui, 2007, pp. 38–39). (Aissaoui, 2007, pp. 38–39).

Third Axis: School Bullying

1. Definition

School bullying is an aggressive behaviour involving an imbalance of power between the bully and the victim that is repeated over time. It is also described as a non-social disorder characterised by a combination of aggressive and non-social conduct. It is marked by continuity and persistence, and is not limited to defiant and oppositional acts. This deviant behaviour is prevalent in a child's relationships with their peers and is often more common in a school environment than at home (Mebarki, 2022, pp. 28–29).

2. Forms of bullying

Smith and Hayfrenrich clarified that bullying can be divided into four main forms:

Psychological (emotional) bullying: In this type, the bully seeks to diminish the victim's status by ignoring, isolating, mocking, scorning, and excluding them from their peer group. It may also involve aggressive staring, soft laughter, and hostile physical gestures. This form of bullying is considered to be one of the most influential and can have serious effects on the victim's mental health.

Physical bullying refers to any bodily contact intended to cause physical harm to an individual. It can take various forms, such as pushing, slapping, hitting, kicking, spitting at or attacking the victim, or damaging their personal property. Physical bullying often does not result in substantial injury to the victim. It is also less common among females, who tend to use indirect and less explicit forms, such as inciting conflict, spreading rumours and excluding someone from the group.

- Social bullying: This involves isolating the victim from the peer group, monitoring their behaviour, harassing them, rejecting their friendship, preventing their participation in activities and intentionally ignoring them.

- Verbal bullying involves the bully making threats towards the victim in front of a group of peers with the aim of causing harm through ridicule, undermining the victim's status, harsh criticism and public humiliation/defamation. It also includes disgracing the victim or injuring their feelings through harassment, name-calling or insulting language (Al-Dasouki, 2016, pp. 20–21).

3. Causes of school bullying

The problem of bullying is attributed to a number of causes. Researchers have classified these causes into several categories:

Individual (personal) causes: such as jealousy, anger, aggressiveness, intimidation/bullying by force, asserting power and seeking to dominate or show off to others.

Family causes are related to the parenting style adopted by parents, which may lead to differences in rules at home, the parents' educational and cultural level, the family's socioeconomic status, and the child's birth order among siblings.

- School activities: including a lack of effective activities to occupy students' leisure time and meet their psychological and social needs. This can result in students resorting to violence as a means of relieving psychological stress and discharging negative emotions.
- Causes related to the teacher: such as the teacher failing to instil positive values in students, being tolerant when controlling them in class, resorting to violence as a teaching method, and failing to use positive alternatives to punishment.
- Causes related to school regulations: such as unclear school rules that students are expected to follow and inconsistent application of those rules. This contributes to an increased prevalence of violent behaviours among students, including bullying. For example, this could be due to students not being distributed fairly across classes, or disciplinary procedures for addressing bullying behaviour being too lenient.
- Bad peer influence: the desire to belong to a particular peer group can affect students' behaviour and may compel them to engage in certain behaviours solely to feel accepted by their friends.
- Social causes: such as the spread of violence within society. (Sayhi, pp. 84–88).

Methodological framework

1. Research method

The descriptive approach was adopted as it is appropriate to the nature of the topic and the research objectives. This was achieved by describing certain behavioural and academic issues that arise among secondary school students in a school setting, specifically school violence, school bullying and academic lateness (or delayed academic achievement).

2. Study population: The study population consisted of all students at the Secondary School of Jowamaa Mohamed El-Bouni in Annaba during the 2024/25 academic year, across all streams and specialisations. The total number of students was 1,054 (both male and female).

3. Study sample: The initial sample included 81 students from the second year (Arts and Philosophy stream). After excluding 13 questionnaires due to failure to meet the required conditions for answering, 68 questionnaires were retained for final processing: 35 females and 33 males. The sample was selected using purposive sampling (intentional selection).

4. Research instrument: The study relied on a questionnaire as the data collection tool. In its final form, it contained 33 items distributed across three dimensions, with 11 items per dimension: School violence, school bullying and academic lateness.

The instrument was submitted to six referees/experts to verify its validity. Based on their feedback, some items were modified and others were removed. Reliability was also assessed using Cronbach's alpha for internal consistency. The reliability coefficients were as follows: Violence = 0.96, Bullying = 0.98, Academic lateness = 0.94.

5. Methods of statistical analysis: Data were processed using SPSS, relying on frequencies, percentages, arithmetic means and standard deviations, in accordance with the objectives of the study and the nature of the collected data.

Presentation of the study results

First: Results of the first research question:

What is the level of manifestations of school violence among secondary-level students?

The results showed that the overall arithmetic mean for the dimension of school violence (consisting of 11 items) was 1.72, with a standard deviation of 0.9188. According to the criterion adopted in the

study for interpreting the mean, this value falls within the medium range (1.67–2.33). This indicates that manifestations of school violence are present among the study sample to a moderate degree.

Second: Results of the Second Research Question

What is the level of school bullying among secondary-level students?

The findings indicated that school bullying is present among the study participants, with an overall approval rate of 31.68% for its manifestations. Some manifestations were more prevalent than others, including:

- sending mocking/sarcastic messages: 73.53%
- social exclusion: 55.88%
- use of hurtful/abusive language: 60.29%

Meanwhile, the approval rate for behaviours related to harassment or awkward physical closeness was 35.29%.

Third: Results of the Third Research Question

What is the level of manifestations of academic lateness (or delayed academic performance) among secondary-level students?

The results showed that the average number of responses indicating the option “I agree” across the items of the academic lateness dimension was 35.3, compared with 27.8 for “I do not agree” and 4.8 for “Sometimes”. These results suggest a general tendency to agree with statements reflecting the challenges associated with academic lateness.

At the level of specific manifestations, the following were most evident:

- difficulty understanding new concepts (mean = 1.65).
- forgetting what was learnt after the lesson (mean = 1.56).
- taking more time to understand lessons (mean = 1.37).

Additionally, weak concentration during lessons appeared with a mean of 1.66.

Discussion of the study results

1. Discussion of the first research question: School violence

The study results showed that the level of school violence among secondary-level students was moderate, with an overall arithmetic mean of 1.72. This indicates that some forms of violent behaviour do occur within the school environment among members of the sample, albeit at a moderate level.

This finding partially aligns with the results of the study by Saoudi, Shayma (2021), in terms of the presence of manifestations of school violence among students, despite the different indicators used in each study.

However, the current result differs from the findings of Bonab and Qurairiya (2022) regarding school violence, as their study did not confirm the hypothesis that adolescents suffer from this problem.

This outcome can be interpreted in light of the nature of the school setting and the diversity of interactions among students. Accordingly, some violent behaviours may occur among students to varying degrees without implying that such behaviours are highly prevalent among all members of the sample.

Discussion of the study results:

2. Discussion of the Second Research Question: School Bullying

The results showed that manifestations of school bullying are present among the study sample. However, some manifestations were more prevalent than others, particularly sending mocking/sarcastic messages, social exclusion, and the use of hurtful/abusive language.

This finding is consistent with bounab and Qurairiya (2022), who concluded that adolescents at school suffer from the problem of school bullying. However, it differs from chayaoui and Sahri (2022), who reported that the level of school bullying among secondary school students was low.

This variation may be attributed to differences in educational level, characteristics of the samples and school environments. It may also be related to differences in the measurement tools and the conditions under which the studies were conducted.

3. Discussion of the Third Research Question: Academic Lateness (Delayed Academic Achievement)

The study results indicated that participants showed a greater tendency to agree with statements related to certain challenges associated with academic lateness. The most prominent manifestations included difficulty understanding new concepts, weak concentration, forgetting what was learnt, and taking longer to understand lessons.

These results partially overlap with those of Sawsan 'Abbas (2015), who found that students in the second cycle of basic education in the Tartous governorate experienced academic lateness to a moderate degree.

Overall, these findings suggest that the problems under study do not affect all members of the sample equally; rather, their manifestations vary from one behaviour to another and from one problem to another. This emphasises the importance of addressing both behavioural and academic aspects together within the school environment.

Conclusion:

This study has revealed that secondary school students may experience a range of behavioural and academic issues that can impact their school life. These issues include school violence, bullying and academic lateness (delayed academic performance). The study aimed to identify these problems among secondary-level students using a descriptive approach and a questionnaire structured around three main dimensions.

The results showed that manifestations of school violence occurred at a moderate level. Meanwhile, the findings relating to school bullying indicated the presence of several manifestations among the sample, particularly those relating to mocking/sarcastic messages, social exclusion, and hurtful/abusive language. The results also revealed certain manifestations of academic lateness, including difficulty understanding new concepts, weak concentration, forgetting what was learnt, and the need for more time to understand lessons.

Based on these findings, the study highlights the importance of paying attention to behavioural and academic problems within the school environment and addressing them through early detection and intervention, in cooperation between families, educational institutions and psychological specialists. This could help to create a school environment that is more conducive to students' psychological and social development, as well as their academic achievement.

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