



Lost Hours, Lost Focus: Exploring Students' Experiences in Early Morning Learning Environments

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Abstract

The research, titled “Lost Hours, Lost Focus: Exploring Students' Experiences in Early Morning Learning Environments,” seeks to understand the challenges experienced by students who have their learning sessions as early as 7:00 AM. Although waking up at these early hours of the morning might not seem out of the ordinary, students are not getting enough rest, which affects their levels of alertness during the school sessions. Focusing on students' lived experiences, the study explores how early schedules affect their energy levels, motivation, mood, and overall learning quality. Supporting literature indicates that later school start times are associated with improved sleep duration, better mood, and enhanced developmental outcomes, while earlier start times are linked to increased stress, anxiety, and decreased academic engagement. Sleep deprivation not only affects cognitive performance but also impacts emotional well-being, reducing students' ability to participate actively and confidently in class. The study, by focusing on the lived experiences of students, examines the effects of early schedules on students' energy levels, motivation, mood, and overall quality of learning. According to supporting literature, there are positive effects of late schedules on students' sleep duration, mood, and developmental outcomes. Conversely, early schedules have negative effects on students' stress, anxiety, and academic engagement. Lack of sleep not only affects students' academic performance but also influences their emotional states, hence affecting their active involvement in class.

Keywords: Early morning classes, sleep deprivation, academic engagement, cognitive performance, emotional well-being, motivation, Tanjay City Science High School

Introduction

Many students start their class as early as 7:00 AM, yet only a few are truly ready to learn at that hour. For many learners, the day begins while it is still dark outside. They wake up feeling sleepy, sometimes after only a few hours of rest. Some press the snooze button many times, while others force themselves to get up even though their body still wants to sleep. From the very start of the day, they already feel tired. This early schedule may seem normal, but for many students, it brings quiet struggles that are often not openly discussed.

There are many small but significant difficulties in early morning classes. The students may have problems keeping their eyes open, may fall asleep during class discussions, or may have problems understanding the lesson. Others may be in a hurry to get ready for school without eating breakfast or may leave home without adequate time to get ready.



To get to school on time, one may have to walk a great distance, take a full vehicle, or travel over great distances. According to a study done by Kumari (2025), school transportation problems are problems that hinder children from accessing school in an accessible, safe, and efficient manner. They always have to deal with traffic, full vehicles, and limited access to vehicles, especially if they are from the countryside. When arriving to school, they are already exhausted by the time they enter the classroom. These minor problems may not be of great concern at first, but they eventually influence the students' performance in class, listening skills, and response.

The aim of the present study, titled "Lost Hours, Lost Focus: Exploring Students Experiences in Early Morning Learning Environments," is to understand the real experience of students in the early morning classes at 7:00 AM. This study does not concentrate on the academic performance of the students or their attendance records. This study focuses on determining the possible impact of early schedules on students' motivation, energy, focus, and mood. A data-analysis found that compared with students whose schools started between 8 a.m. and 8:29 a.m., those in schools starting between 8:30 a.m. and 8:59 a.m. had longer sleep duration, less negative mood, and better developmental outcomes including socio emotional health, cognitive development, behavioral health, and physical health, a study of Yip (2023). Students may have hard time participating in group work, following instructions, or responding to questions with confidence if they are tired. Some people may be quiet because they are not yet fully awake to answer questions; they may not know the answer to the question.

In addition, the effects of sleep deprivation may not be limited to academic performance. Students who do not get enough rest may feel irritated, stressed, or unmotivated. Students at schools starting before 8:30 AM reported higher depression, anxiety, and stress scores due to sleep deprivation, with early wake-ups exacerbating mood derangements compared to later-start peers. A study of Singh et al., (2023). They may find it difficult to manage their time, accomplish tasks, or stay positive throughout the day. Over time, this may lower their interest in learning and reduce their participation in school activities. These effects may not always be visible, but they are real experiences for many learners.

This research is grounded in the lived experiences of the learners. The objective of this research is to show the actual impact of early morning classes by gathering their own experiences and honest opinions. The opinions of the students are valuable in this regard because they are the ones who face these schedules in their daily routine. The purpose of this study is to show an increased understanding of the impact of early mornings on the daily routine of school activities in the narrative form by the students. Their experiences can make it easier for others to understand that learning is not only dependent upon intelligence and hard work but also upon mental and physical readiness.

The purpose of this study will not just be to describe the challenges, but also to motivate teachers/schools/decision-makers to find solutions for helping students succeed. Examples include reviewing school timetables, encouraging proper sleep patterns, offering small physical activities early in the morning, or creating a more interactive teaching approach in the morning. A teacher could also use their knowledge of the energy levels of their students to identify appropriate teaching methods to help them engage with the subject matter.

This study also reminds us that the time of day when students arrive at school can have a big impact on their focus, participation, attitude, and achievement. A seemingly simple factor like the start time of school might have a powerful impact on our students' learning. By seeking an understanding of, and recognizing, our students' experiences, we can build a more supportive, more caring environment for our students, an environment in which our students feel better, more focused, more able to accomplish their goals

The typical case is that students go to their classes very early in the morning, yet most of them struggle to remain attentive, alert, and involved in their classes during these hours. Early class times could affect the way students sleep, their level of energy, and their state of mind while at school. It becomes hard for the students to remain attentive, thus affecting their performance and involvement in classroom activities. Nonetheless, amid the common practice, not much is known about the effects that the learning environment has on students when the classes are scheduled very early in the day.

This study specifically tries to answer the following questions:

1. How do students experience early morning learning environments?



2. What difficulties do students face in terms of focus, alertness, and participation in early classes?
3. How do early morning class schedules impact students' motivation and academic performance?
4. What determines students' ability or inability to concentrate during early class hours?
5. What strategies do students use to cope with the challenges of early morning learning?

Through this study, the researchers will be able to achieve a better comprehension of the effects that early classes have on learners' attentiveness, alertness, participation, and the experience of learning. The research will seek to identify the difficulties encountered by the students, the factors affecting their concentration capabilities, and the methods used to deal with the difficulties caused by attending classes early in the day.

Methodology

In this study, the qualitative methodology will be used, with phenomenology being chosen as a research design to gain insight into students' experiences with taking classes at 7:00 AM. In contrast to quantitative research that relies on numbers, this investigation is concerned with the students' personal narratives and emotions.

The goal of this study is to explore how starting school at 7:00 AM influences students' energy, attention, mood, participation, and overall learning experience. By listening directly to students, the researchers aim to uncover how early schedules shape their daily routines, academic performance, and well-being. Understanding these experiences allows the study to present a clearer picture of what learners truly go through each morning.

Participants will be selected through random sampling. The study will involve students who currently attend or have attended 7:00 AM classes and are willing to share their honest experiences.

The data collection tool that will be used in this research will be a semi-structured interview process. The guide questions will serve to steer the discussion, but the students will be provided sufficient room for expressing themselves using their own words and even different languages.

In order to understand and interpret the data collected through interviews, a thematic analysis will be carried out by the researcher. Data collected will be examined carefully; key issues will be identified, and similar concepts will be clustered together under various themes.

This study uses a qualitative research design and follows a phenomenological approach. A phenomenological approach is a qualitative research methodology that seeks to explore, describe, and interpret the essence of individuals' lived experiences of a particular phenomenon. Rooted in the philosophical works of Husserl and later expanded by Merleau-Ponty, phenomenology is grounded in the study of consciousness and the meanings individuals assign to their experiences. It emphasizes returning "to the things themselves," focusing on how phenomena appear to individuals in their lived world, and aims to uncover the essential structures that characterize a shared experience (Husserl, 1913; Merleau-Ponty, 1945). In research practice, phenomenology involves gathering rich, first-person descriptions from participants and analyzing them to identify significant statements, themes, and the core essence of the experience. Rather than seeking causal explanations or generalizations, this approach prioritizes depth, meaning, and the subjective realities constructed by participants (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994).

This approach is particularly appropriate for the present study, *Lost Hours, Lost Focus: Exploring Students' Experiences in Early Morning Learning Environments*, because the research aims to understand how students experience and interpret early morning classes in their own words. The study does not seek to measure academic performance statistically or test predetermined variables; instead, it focuses on students' perceptions of alertness, concentration, motivation, participation, and overall engagement during early morning learning sessions. By using a phenomenological approach, the researchers are able to capture detailed narratives that reveal how students make sense of fatigue, productivity, and classroom interaction within this specific time context. This method enables the identification of common themes across participants' accounts while preserving the richness and individuality of their



lived experiences, ultimately allowing the study to describe the essence of early morning learning as directly experienced by students themselves (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994).

This research will be done using the school environment, and specifically at Tanjay City Science High School. The majority of activities will be carried out at the classroom level as this is where the students spend most of their time attending their lectures. For the purposes of the research, this is an appropriate environment in which to gather data because the classrooms will enable the researcher to get data from the actual location where the students are undergoing their early morning classes.

The classroom environment is deemed suitable for this study since it is a conducive environment that is familiar to the subjects involved in the study. The students are accustomed to interacting and exchanging views in their respective classroom settings. Since they are in a familiar setting, they will most likely be at ease while answering the questions raised by the interviewer. This will provide an environment that allows the students to discuss openly and candidly how early morning classes impact their daily activities.

Also, a classroom can be considered as an environment that is not only safe but also quite conducive to holding qualitative interviews. This type of environment makes sure that there are no disturbances in the process of gathering information. The fact that the interviews will be held in the classrooms of Tanjay City Science High School means that they will also have relevance to the topic under consideration.

The subjects in this study are Senior High School Grade 11 students of Tanjay City Science High School who are already experienced in taking their class schedules at 7:00 in the morning. The participants for the study were chosen through purposive sampling where the subjects were specifically chosen by virtue of the specific criteria set for the study. Purposive sampling is a type of non-probability sampling approach where the subjects are purposely chosen because of certain qualities or experiences that can provide valuable information regarding the objective of the study (Creswell, 2013; Palinkas et al., 2015).

The above methodology will result in diverse viewpoints, thus making sure that the research is not biased, giving room for the inclusion of different experiences. The eligibility requirements for participation in this study involve the following: (a) being in Grade 11, (b) attending classes that commence at 7:00 AM, and (c) being ready to speak out about their experience. Students from Grade 11 were selected because they had spent sufficient time in the senior high school system to see the impacts of the early schedule on their attentiveness and motivation levels.

The main research tool to be used is a structured interview guide. Structured interview guides refer to a set of prepared questions that are asked in a certain order to provide uniformity in data collection (George & Merkus, 2023). As a tool, a structured interview guide is preferred over questionnaires since this study seeks to uncover students' subjective experiences and opinions about attending 7:00 AM classes. Interviewing provides a free platform for participants to respond using their own words. It gives room for in-depth and detailed answers from the participants.

As a method of validation, the research tool will be reviewed by three educational experts. Their contributions will help to improve the validity of the questions to ensure that they are clear, relevant, and suitable for the intended purpose of research.

Pilot testing is another way through which validity will be enhanced. Prior to data collection, three students at the same grade level as the participants will be interviewed to test whether they understand the questions posed to them and whether the flow of the interview process makes it easy for them to give their views on the issue being studied.

To enhance the rigor of this study, several techniques have been used to validate the results in order for them to be credible and have meaning. The technique of semi-structured interviews was employed in order to obtain data from the participants regarding their experiences, as well as allow them the opportunity to expand on what they had already stated. This increases the credibility of the data obtained because participants have the chance to rephrase, correct, or further explain their responses. As per Lincoln and Guba (1985), credibility involves confidence in the authenticity of the results, and this is enhanced when the researcher captures the experiences of the participants correctly.



The study retained its dependability by ensuring that it was documented in such a way that other researchers could review or replicate the process. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), dependability is referred to as temporal stability and stability in identical conditions. The researcher kept track of all actions and decisions made during the research process, making sure that any researcher could review the process to see how the conclusion was arrived at (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

To ensure that the research process is confirmable, researchers maintained a reflective journal where they captured their individual biases and thoughts so that any interpretation would be free of personal bias and based on what the participants expressed. According to Lincoln & Guba (1985), confirmability is evident when there is clear evidence that the outcome of research is based on the results obtained and not from the interference of the researchers.

The issue of transferability was achieved through provision of extensive information about the students' practices, experiences, and challenges so that the reader would be able to judge for themselves whether the findings would be transferable to a similar situation. Transferability pertains to the extent to which research findings can be used in other contexts given adequate information about the context and participants. Thick description of both the context and the participant experience allow the researchers to think about whether findings may be transferrable to other classrooms (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Furthermore, triangulation was also employed by comparing the replies made by different respondents in order to discern any consistent trends and themes. In doing so, this research approach is in line with methods highlighted by Lincoln & Guba (1985) that enhance the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the study via corroborating findings from multiple sources.

It must be noted that the processes of collecting data in this study have been done meticulously to make sure that the experiences and perceptions of senior high school students about early morning learning environments are obtained accurately. As far as the methods of data collection in this study are concerned, it must be noted that they are congruent with the research design used, i.e., phenomenology. This is because in phenomenological studies, one needs to understand the experiences of the subjects in their own natural surroundings, in this case, early morning classes at 7:00 am. In this study, data collecting was done through three processes – before data collection, during data collection, and after data collection.

To prepare for the data gathering process, the researchers engaged in a number of actions in order to conduct the process of data gathering consistently and in accordance with all relevant ethical standards. First, an interview guide was developed, with the questions being aligned to research purposes, as well as exploring students' experiences of having learned in an early morning setting. Next, the researchers made sure that the research questions and interview prompts were validated and appropriate by consulting the experts working in the area of education.

Furthermore, participants were selected using the method of purposive sampling, where Grade 11 students who attended classes at 7:00 AM were selected as respondents. All ethical considerations related to the participants were explained prior to the interviews. Participants received detailed information about the research purposes, their voluntary participation in it, confidentiality of their responses, as well as their freedom to withdraw from the research without negative consequences. Written informed consent was signed by all participants, confirming that they are fully aware of research procedures and agreed to participate voluntarily.

Finally, the researchers performed a pilot review of the interview guide, by discussing it with the participants or colleagues, thus allowing for some amendments to make it better understandable for the participants. Finally, the researchers became familiar with the early morning class setting, thus making sure that all logistics were taken care of. This includes conducting interviews at the best possible times, as well as providing a convenient and confidential setting for participants' answers.

The data collection process involved interviewing the selected participants using a semi-structured approach. In this case, the process began with an introduction and brief explanation of the purpose of the study, which is focused on investigating the influence of early class schedules on students' academic performance, alertness, and wellbeing. After explaining the objectives of the research and the benefits associated with their participation, the researchers assured



the participants that they could withdraw at any time and their responses would remain confidential. At this point, the researchers asked for the participants' permission to proceed with the interview process.

With the participants' permission, the researchers moved forward with the process by asking the prepared questions based on the interview guide validated by three experts in the field. The semi-structured approach allowed the researchers to ask additional questions in response to the participants' responses to obtain more detailed information about their views concerning the effects of attending early class sessions. Additionally, the researchers recorded the interviews using their mobile phones with the participants' approval to provide more accurate data. Using this method, the researchers were able to review the interview recording and transcribe the participants' exact responses.

As previously mentioned, the interviews were performed in a relaxed manner to encourage the participants to freely express their opinions concerning their experiences with attending early class schedules. Additionally, the researchers paid close attention to non-verbal cues such as facial expression, tone of voice, and gestures to gather more information about the participants' reactions and perspectives. These approaches enabled the researchers to obtain accurate and detailed data reflecting the participants' views about their experiences with attending early class sessions.

Upon completion of the interviews, the researchers took care to make sure that all data collected were well organized for completeness and accuracy. Data were sorted out from the answers provided by the participants and were analyzed in order to establish patterns and themes, which can contribute significantly to the understanding of the students' experience in a classroom during early mornings especially focusing on their energy level, motivation, mood, and general learning experience. In cases where there were inconsistencies or any other issues that might affect the integrity of the data collected, follow up was done to rectify these issues. Through this systematic process, the collected data became credible and accurate.

The data collected in the present study were analyzed based on thematic analysis. The thematic analysis is one of the most popular qualitative approaches that involve identification, analysis, and interpretation of patterns in qualitative data. In general, this approach enables researchers not only to organize the entire data set and provide detailed descriptions but also to analyze different aspects associated with the research topic. Thus, the researchers had an opportunity to carefully analyze interviewees' responses to find out the recurring ideas, concepts, and patterns connected to the research problem under consideration. Thematic analysis is typically used when analyzing written qualitative data such as interview transcripts, open-ended responses, and narrative texts since it helps to get insight into participants' experiences and their perception of the studied topic (Caulfield, 2023).

Thematic analysis is a systematic approach to qualitative data analysis. As a result, the researchers implemented a series of procedures that facilitated the interpretation and organization of the collected data. There are several critical components that should be included into the analysis of qualitative data. It is necessary to emphasize that the researchers used the six-step approach to thematic analysis, which involves such processes as data familiarization, coding, theme generation, theme review, definition and labeling of themes, and report writing. These activities enabled the researchers to generate specific themes reflecting the respondents' views and experiences.

The first step in the analysis involved familiarization with the data. During this stage, the researchers carefully read and reviewed the interview transcripts multiple times to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' responses. Repeated reading allowed the researchers to become fully immersed in the data and to recognize important details, ideas, and patterns that may be relevant to the research questions. Notes and initial observations were also made during this stage in order to highlight meaningful statements and insights from the participants. This step is important because it enables the researchers to build a strong foundation for the analysis and to ensure that the interpretation of the data remains closely connected to the participants' actual responses.

The second step involved coding the data. Coding is the process of identifying and labeling important words, phrases, sentences, or ideas that appear in the data and are relevant to the research objectives. During this stage, the researchers carefully examined the transcripts and highlighted significant statements that reflected the participants' experiences and perceptions related to the topic being studied. Each relevant segment of data was assigned a specific code that represented the meaning of the statement. These codes served as labels that helped organize the data into manageable segments. By coding the data systematically, the researchers were able to identify similarities, differences, and recurring ideas within the participants' responses.



After the coding process was completed, the researchers proceeded to the stage of generating themes. In this stage, similar codes were grouped together based on their relationships and meanings. The researchers carefully examined the coded data to determine which codes were connected and could form broader categories. These categories were then developed into themes that represented significant patterns within the data. Themes are considered the central ideas that capture important aspects of the participants' experiences and perspectives related to the research topic. The process of generating themes allowed the researchers to organize the data in a meaningful way and to highlight the most important findings emerging from the participants' responses.

The next step involved reviewing the themes that were initially generated. During this stage, the researchers carefully examined each theme to ensure that it accurately represented the coded data and that it was supported by sufficient evidence from the participants' responses. The themes were checked to determine whether they were coherent, consistent, and relevant to the research questions. Some themes were refined, combined, or removed if they were found to be repetitive, unclear, or not strongly supported by the data. This step ensured that the final themes were reliable and clearly reflected the overall meaning of the collected data.

Once the themes were finalized, the researchers proceeded to define and name each theme. In this stage, the researchers provided clear explanations of what each theme represents and how it relates to the research objectives. Each theme was given a specific and meaningful name that captures the main idea of the grouped data. The researchers also identified the key aspects of each theme and explained how the participants' responses contributed to the development of the theme. Defining and naming the themes helped ensure that the findings were clearly presented and easily understood by readers.

The final stage of thematic analysis involved writing up the findings. In this stage, the researchers organized the final codes and themes into a structured presentation of the results. The themes were presented in tables and explained through detailed narrative descriptions. Supporting statements from the participants were also included to provide evidence and strengthen the interpretation of the findings. These explanations allowed the researchers to clearly demonstrate how the themes emerged from the data and how they relate to the research problem.

Overall, the data were repeatedly examined in order to ensure a thorough understanding of the participants' responses. Significant statements were identified and coded, and similar codes were grouped together to form categories that led to the development of meaningful themes. These themes were used to interpret the participants' experiences, perceptions, and insights regarding the research topic.

Findings and Discussion

This section offers a brief description of the results of this research. This study has examined the experiences of the students enrolled in Grade 11 who attend early morning classes in Tanjay City Science High School by making use of codes and themes in thematic analysis. Theme analysis refers to the approach used in qualitative research where patterns or themes in the data can be identified, analyzed, and reported. It helps in comprehending the data in an extensive way, and thereby interpreting the experience and viewpoint of the participants (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Through this, the researcher has been able to have a comprehensive insight into the difficulties that the students face in terms of their attention, alertness, engagement, and handling the situation in 7:00 am classes.

Theme 1: Lack of Mental Alertness and Cognitive Clarity

Forced to attend classes early in the morning, students are faced with a wide range of challenges which prevent them from being successful academically. Due to the need to wake up before the sun rises to go to school, they tend to come to class without having enough rest, which brings about immediate stress and feelings of rushing time-wise. Sleep deprivation does not only cause fatigue but tends to make the individual feel dizzy, extremely sleepy and in what may be referred to as a 'foggy' state of mind. It makes it almost impossible for him or her to understand the material taught by the teacher because all he/she can think of is sleep, and thus, fails to concentrate on what he/she is supposed to be learning. As a result, the lack of mental capacity in most cases results in very low levels of participation in class activities, whereby the student cannot follow along in class. The consequence of not having understood the subject well means that he or she will be obliged to go through the materials again using their leisure time.



Participant 1 said, *“Personally, the 7:00 AM classes affected my focus, learning, and overall well-being negatively. It made me feel tired during class even though it was still early in the morning, and because of the exhaustion, I could no longer understand and focus properly in class.”*

Moreover, participant 5 added, *“For me, 7 AM classes are a struggle. My mind still feels foggy, making it hard to focus, which affects learning, and overall well-being suffers because I’m always tired and lack sleep.”*

Participant 7 said, *“7 AM classes affect me in a way that I cannot focus on the first subject. In terms of learning, I struggle to understand because my mind is still foggy, and overall well-being is impacted because I feel dizzy and tired.”*

Lastly, participant 9 answered, *“7 AM classes make it harder for me to focus, especially at the start of lessons. I feel sleepy and less mentally active, so I sometimes need to review the topic again later. Over time, it affects my energy and overall well-being because I feel more tired throughout the day.”*

The students who are obligated to visit their classes in extremely early mornings inevitably have to struggle with multiple barriers to success. Since they have to wake up in early morning in order to attend school classes, they tend to come to class feeling unprepared and lack sufficient amount of rest. As a result, this problem creates a certain degree of time pressure and stress that negatively affects the entire studying process. It should be noted that sleep deprivation causes more than just fatigue; it may also result in the development of various health issues such as continuous dizziness, constant exhaustion, and clouded mind that complicates any intellectual process. Consequently, a person finds himself incapable of paying proper attention and understanding anything; thus, it is obvious that a student finds himself unable to follow the lesson and participate actively in class activities, leading to the lack of interaction and discussion. This barrier proves to be a great disadvantage since a person simply becomes incapable of being productive and active in the morning due to a lack of necessary functions of his body. According to the scientific literature, sleep is considered to be the key component in terms of ensuring the activity of the brain and its readiness to absorb new information (Yeo et al., 2023); therefore, the lack of necessary sleep leads to negative outcomes as far as attentiveness and memory are concerned. A lack of necessary alertness and inability to focus leads to an actual mental absence of a person, as he cannot understand what happens to him even when he is physically present in class. Additionally, the students who are obliged to wake up extremely early find themselves incapable of focusing on lessons due to lack of energy (Angga & Elminero, 2025). It should be mentioned that the findings of the foreign research called "High school start times and student achievement: Looking beyond test scores" (Lenard et al., 2020) coincide with ours: early start times decrease academic involvement which means decreased motivation to learn and engage in educational processes. Another article, written by Perez and Santos (2024), supports this idea, claiming that early morning studying negatively impacts students' moods and desire to work.

Theme 2: Transportation and Accessibility Stress

Attending classes in school is an essential activity in any learner's schedule. On the contrary, the experience of reaching the school premises in readiness to join the activities of the day is an entirely different ordeal that all learners do not go through in the same measure. Not all students travel to school using the same transport system because there are those who reside very far away, and there are also those who are blessed to stay very close to their schools. From this analysis of the distances, it is evident that very early morning lessons affect greatly those who stay very far away from school due to the fact that they have to start very early in the morning. By the time they finally arrive at school, they are not just physically tired; they also have to deal with the heavy stress of worrying about being punished or facing consequences for being late to their very first subject. This creates a difficult start to the day that makes it hard to focus on the lessons ahead.

Participant 2 said, *“For me, as a student, it is more difficult than having classes at 7:30 or 8:00 because it is more demanding in terms of sleep and transportation, which greatly affects a person’s focus, learning, and overall well-being.”*

Participant 4 also said, *“In my opinion, 7 AM classes affect overall performance and participation depending on certain circumstances. Students often feel sleepy early in the morning due to insufficient rest the night before, and those who live far away need to travel early as well.”*



It is clear that access and transportation are factors that affect how the students enjoy their early classes and their ability to learn successfully. The fact is that most students have trouble just reaching the school gates in a way that does not leave them enough time to study. Those who live far from campus have to wake up earlier than their classmates, meaning that they sacrifice more hours of precious sleep for themselves to be able to be on time in the mornings. According to Ding and Li (2023) and Chairassamee et al. (2024), longer trips to school correlate with less sleep, higher stress levels, poorer grades and lower health of the students. Moreover, longer travel and an early start can cause fatigue, affecting their desire to attend the school and the ability to perceive information in class (Morris, 2025; Scienmag, 2025). As was mentioned previously in a literature review dedicated to this study, the state of the students' wellbeing and satisfaction is affected by demands to commute (Caballeda et al., 2025). Another relevant example is the research done by Ilagan et al. (2023) which showed that students were facing a "double burden" of academic workloads and long commutes in rush hour conditions, leaving little space for regenerative sleep between classes. What is more, according to the most recent studies, the constant loud noises and crowded public transportation are increasing sensory overload and leaving students unable to pay attention in classes (Thompson & Miller, 2022; Garcia, 2023). Therefore, while the closer students might not experience similar problems in the early mornings, students who travel far and get too little sleep will definitely be affected negatively. Overall, issues related to transportation along with morning class schedules could significantly hinder participation and impair the wellbeing of the students (Frontiers in Psychology, 2026).

Theme 3: After-school Workload Compounds Fatigue

Several students have revealed that morning lessons have become a lot tougher to deal with due to the immense amount of work that they have to do after school. They mentioned that an unending schedule of assignments, projects, and deadlines keeps them up for most parts of the night. As a result, they end up going to school the following morning when their bodies and minds are already exhausted from all the work that they did the previous night. The exhaustion that results from the inability to get sufficient rest is not only debilitating but poses as an insurmountable obstacle that hinders learning.

Participant 6 said, *"For me, 7:00 AM classes are very difficult because I am always sleep-deprived. After class, I go home but instead of resting, I do homework, reports, and chase deadlines, which means I end up sleeping very late at night or even past midnight."*

This topic is relevant for students since their daily routines are filled with activities that include going to school in the morning, doing their assignments after school and even at night, and completing other chores that consume much of their time. Students have to attend school classes from an extremely early hour like 7:00 A.M., so when school duties and homework are additionally included in their schedule, rest cannot be sufficient, which results in less time for sleep, and students are forced to wake up in the morning to catch their classes. Since they do not get enough sleep due to studying, they have no energy to start a new day, and they become tired during their lessons (Widome et al., 2024). In addition, such lack of sufficient sleep makes it extremely challenging for them to focus and be alert during learning processes and participate in classroom discussions (Parker & Hurst, 2025). As stated in the above article, biological reasons play an important role, and the internal biological clock of teenagers makes it extremely difficult for them to get adequate sleep because of a very early morning start (APA, 2024). Another piece of evidence supporting the issue is mentioned in the related studies; according to Ilagan et al. (2023), students' academic performance was significantly influenced by workload and inadequate sleep. Ultimately, the combination of heavy workloads and early morning schedules works together to negatively impact how well students learn and how healthy they feel (Ziporyn et al., 2026).

Theme 4: Attendance vs Mental Presence

The theme is a clear reminder of the notable disparity between physical attendance and mental readiness. Most students work hard to be consistent in attending their morning classes at 7:00 AM, but when they get there, they find themselves struggling with excessive fatigue due to a total lack of sleep that leaves them almost incapable of staying alert. Even though they might be physically seated in the classroom, they are always mentally preoccupied, thoroughly tired, or not able to concentrate on what is being taught. The example clearly demonstrates how physically attending class sessions does not mean that a student will learn anything as one needs to be mentally prepared to do so.



Participant 8 stated that, *“7 AM classes really affect our focus because, as students, we have many tasks both at school and at home. This causes lack of sleep, so even if I am physically at school, my mind is not fully present, making my attendance feel ineffective.”*

Attending classes does not always mean that students can grasp everything that is taught. Due to the chronic shortage of sleep and numerous obligations that need to be accomplished each day, many students may attend their classes in person, yet be unable to concentrate and perceive all the information. The latest findings indicate that when teenagers have insufficient sleep, it negatively impacts their attention spans, memory abilities, and academic outcomes as a whole (Owens & Weiss, 2020). It has been stated that early schedules that most schools implement violate the circadian rhythm of sleep of teenagers' bodies, thus significantly complicating their mental performance during class discussions (Becker et al., 2021). As is explained in another study, with regard to changes in class schedules, grades, punctuality, and attendance improved considerably, which confirms that early-morning schedule has a detrimental influence on the performance of young adults (Dunster et al.). Finally, due to the lack of sleep, the process of transition of information from short-term memory to long-term memory becomes complicated; therefore, being in class does not necessarily lead to the effective acquisition of new knowledge (Miller & Harrison, 2023). Thus, being present both physically and mentally should become an aim for every student.

Theme 5: Adaptability/Manageability

Although most learners have problems with early morning classes, there are some who are capable of adapting to such classes far better than other learners. Regardless of starting at 7:00 AM, the learners are still capable of concentrating, comprehending their classes effectively, and completing their academic assignments successfully. The success proves that a learner's capability to manage his or her time effectively, as well as his or her ability to adjust to a tight schedule, plays an instrumental role in dealing with the effects of early classes. It is evident that not all learners suffer from the effects of early classes, as some are capable of formulating positive approaches that enable them to maintain high marks.

Participant 3 said, *“7 AM classes do not significantly affect my focus or learning because I am still able to understand lessons and complete my tasks properly.”*

Adaptability and personal management seem to affect the experiences of learners at the beginning of the day positively or negatively. Students who are flexible, ensure they rest appropriately, and manage their timetables are unlikely to be fatigued and distracted while attending the class. Scientific investigations indicate that being successful in the early class depends mainly on the physiological body cycle of a learner; "morning-type" students are likely to score higher and have low attendance rates in morning classes than "evening-type" individuals (Alblewi & Mirghani, 2025). In other words, the physiological advantage becomes more significant when learners implement self-regulated learning and plan their time to reduce panic and stress levels (Lourenço & Paiva, 2024). Maintaining a proper and consistent sleeping habit among students ensures the protection of their cognitive skills like memory and attention essential for comprehending lessons delivered at 7:00 AM (Himanshu & Nayak, 2025; Xu et al., 2025). As seen in previous sections in relation to this particular study, the healthy morning habits contribute to enhancing the learners' positive attitude, increasing their readiness to study and making them active participants in classroom discussions. Thus, although waking up in the morning to attend classes could be challenging for students, matching their habits with the needs of the body and applying appropriate planning approaches can help them succeed in their studies.

Theme 6: Motivation and Autonomy

According to many students, the fact that they have to attend classes in the morning makes a serious negative impact on their motivation and the order of their day. Students complain that getting up early in the morning is an unpleasant thing for them because it seems as if they are not fully rested after sleeping during the night. As a result, they do not have enough energy to devote their attention to the studies and become interested in the classes that will follow. It is worth noting that forcing oneself to get up when one's body does not need this has a negative influence on the mood of students in the morning as well as affects their overall mood adversely.



Participant 10 said, *"7 AM classes affect my focus, learning, and overall well-being because I often do not understand the lesson due to lack of sleep. Most students do not want to wake up early but have to, and personally, I have to force myself out of bed, which usually impacts my focus in class."*

The fact is that early classes decrease students' motivation and create a challenging routine, which is hard to follow. The research by Xu et al. (2025) proves the mentioned problem, as they indicate that sleep quality in students has a strong effect on their learning motivation and participation; the higher the sleep quality, the greater the engagement in studying is. As students are forced to get up in the early morning without sufficient sleep time, they tend to feel low motivation and are unable to concentrate on what they have to do. It means that insufficient rest and lack of control over one's life can influence both learning process and health negatively. Additionally, according to the research made by Leaf (2020), school days with later starting time are characterized by more sleeping hours for students, and those people whose days started later were found to be more successful academically than those with early classes. Based on this information, one can say that students with late classes do not encounter problems in studying and show better results in class due to more resting time.

Conclusion

"Lost Hours, Lost Focus: Exploring Students' Experiences in Early Morning Learning Environments" is an inquiry about the lived experiences of Grade 11 students of Tanjay City Science High School taking part in 7:00 AM classes. The study was based on established theories regarding sleep, circadian rhythm, well-being, motivation, and engagement and employed a qualitative phenomenological research design that focused on the narrative accounts of the participants. According to the results, early school start time impacts students' physical state, mental sharpness, and psychological preparedness for learning. Students reported that they felt tired, lethargic, and unfocused at the start of the day, which prevented them from retaining information and engaging in class discussions. Concentration difficulties during the initial lesson often forced the subjects to study the material again during other parts of the day, thus prolonging fatigue. The study's findings suggest that inadequate sleep and physiological misalignment affect attention, learning efficiency, memorization, and academic performance (Becker et al., 2021; Yeo et al., 2023; APA, 2024). Recent scientific publications prove that the body clock of adolescents tends to be naturally delayed, making early school hours inappropriate for students' age group (Xu et al., 2025).

External factors exacerbate the issue, as well. Pupils who spend considerable time on transport need to wake up earlier than others, which means less time spent in bed. Studies have shown that longer commuting time correlates with shorter sleep duration, greater tiredness, and decreased academic functioning (Ding & Li, 2023; Chairassamee et al., 2024). Moreover, academic activities after classes, including studying for tests, working on assignments, and completing projects, usually consume pupils' time until late at night, preventing students from resting. Scientific evidence suggests that excessive school obligations, in combination with a lack of sleep, dramatically reduces students' ability to focus on their work in classrooms (Widome et al., 2024; Parker & Hurst, 2025). The combination of early waking and late sleeping forms a vicious circle of sleep deprivation that negatively impacts one's mood, motivation, punctuality, and productivity (Ziporyn et al., 2026).

One more important observation from the reviewed studies is that there is a difference between being physically present and actually engaging in learning. Even though the presence of students within the classrooms cannot be ignored, tiredness can make students not pay full attention during the learning process. Research has proven that adolescents deprived of sufficient amounts of sleep cannot concentrate and perform at school successfully (Becker et al., 2021; Owens & Weiss, 2020). Learning cannot be efficient when students are not cognitively and psychologically ready. At the same time, the results showed that there were certain differences in how students adjusted to the early schedule of school lessons. In spite of the problems of a lot of students, some learners proved to be capable of managing their time and sleep efficiently. The role of the chronotype and self-regulated learning in early learning was emphasized, as well as the importance of time management skills. The study by Lourenço & Paiva, (2024) and the paper by Alblewi & Mirghani (2025) prove the impact of mentioned characteristics on the performance in early learning. Students that adhere to consistent sleep schedules tend to preserve their attention and engage in learning actively.



Overall, one should admit that 7:00 AM classes can be detrimental for the optimal learning processes because of decreased amounts of sleep, low levels of alertness, transportation issues, and excessive school load. All of those elements have an effect on learners' concentration, motivation, participation in class, and learning achievements. Numerous current studies state that later school start times provide more opportunities for long sleep duration, high academic outcomes, good attendance rate, and positive experiences of learning (Xu et al., 2025; American Psychological Association [APA], 2024).

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