

## Causes of Student Absenteeism: A Qualitative Investigation of Students' Perception

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### Abstract

*This article explores the underlying causes of university students' absenteeism, utilizing a qualitative approach to examine absentees' perceptions. Absenteeism, defined as the intentional absence from classes, stems from various personal, financial, and institutional factors. The study identifies key contributors such as financial difficulties, transportation issues, disengaging curriculum, and ineffective teaching methods. Additionally, psychological challenges and logistical barriers like transportation and health issues are significant factors. The impact of absenteeism is far-reaching, affecting students' academic performance, critical thinking skills, and social integration, potentially leading to higher dropout rates. By examining student perspectives, the study aims to uncover root causes and offer targeted recommendations to improve attendance. These include financial support, engaging curricula, improved teaching strategies, and institutional support services to address emotional and logistical barriers. This holistic approach seeks to create a more supportive academic environment, promoting student success and reducing absenteeism.*

### Introduction

In an ideal academic environment, classrooms at college would thrum with the energy of engaged students. Yet, a persistent challenge mars this picture: empty seats. While occasional absences are inevitable, a significant portion of students habitually skip classes. This raises a critical question: why do students at colleges choose to forgo class attendance,

Absenteeism is defined as the deliberate absence from physical university classrooms, often influenced by factors that lead students to seek alternative uses of their time (Cattan et al., 2023). Student absenteeism can stem from a variety of factors, originating from the student themselves, the college environment, or the family situation. Additionally, internal and external concerns can also play a role. Bahadori et al. (2021) opined that the family and personal matters of the students' cause their absence. Financial difficulties experienced by college students can also contribute to absenteeism, as evidenced by (Aina et al., 2024). According to Mokhtari et al. (2021), student absenteeism can be attributed to various factors, including the evaluation system, curriculum, classroom audiovisual systems, class schedules, and generational differences among students. Similarly, Student disengagement can also stem from ineffective teaching methods, irrelevant curriculum content, or transportation challenges faced by distance learners (Ross-Holmes, 2022). In the study conducted by Keppens (2023), he writes that the identified health problems, early wake-up times, stress, depression, early class hours, family issues, transportation issues, faculty-related factors, long course hours, lack of engaging activities, irrelevant curriculum, and negative university environment/instructor experiences as significant contributors to student absenteeism.

Understanding student absenteeism is multifaceted. Chronic absenteeism can significantly hinder student academic progress and potentially lead to university dropout, particularly if

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grades fall below passing requirements (Emile Monono, 2023). Similarly, Hadjiril and Amilasan (2024) examined that the student absenteeism can have a cascading effect, leading to a decline in critical thinking skills and impacting academic performance in several areas which include poor classroom participation, low exam results, weak oral communication and recitation skills, stunted creativity, and a lack of self-confidence, and ultimately, chronic absenteeism can increase the risk of dropping out. According to Liu and Li (2023), psychological vulnerabilities can contribute to student absenteeism, as students may feel overwhelmed by everyday challenges.

Despite the ideal of engaged students, absenteeism is a persistent problem at colleges. Students skip class for a variety of reasons, ranging from personal challenges and family issues to financial difficulties and a disengaging college environment. Factors like the evaluation system, curriculum design, and even generational differences can contribute. Chronic absenteeism has severe consequences, potentially leading to declining academic performance and even dropping out. Understanding the reasons behind student absenteeism is crucial to fostering a more engaging learning environment and improving student success.

### **Objectives:**

The objectives of the study are as below:

1. To identify the reasons why students do not come regularly at college?
2. To explore the students' perceptions on their absenteeism.

### **Research Questions:**

To achieve the above objectives, the following research questions are prepared -

- What are the most common reasons why students miss classes?
- How do students perceive the impact of their irregular class attendance on their academic performance and overall learning experience?

### **Significance of the Study**

This research project is significant for fulfilling academic loss. The most important is that it has shifted the focus on negative consequences of missing classes by college students. This study takes a different approach by examining the issue from the students' perspective. By identifying their reasons and perceptions of absenteeism, we can develop more effective strategies to address the root causes. Studying the root causes of absenteeism within this specific context allows for targeted solutions that address the specific needs and challenges faced by students. Moreover, existing research suggests various potential causes but this project goes beyond existing literature by directly exploring student perceptions of these factors. By finding how students view these issues and their impact on attendance, we can prioritize interventions that resonate with them. This project also explores not only the reasons for absenteeism but also how students perceive its impact on their academic performance and learning experience. This information can be used to develop strategies that not only improve attendance but also enhance student outcomes.

### **Statement of the Problem**

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Universities depend on consistent student attendance to maintain effective teaching and learning environments. However, colleges in Makawanpur district face a persistent challenge, as a significant portion of students habitually miss classes. This project aims to address the issue of student absenteeism.

While missing classes disrupts the learning environment and likely hinders academic performance, previous research projects have primarily focused on the consequences, not the root causes. This project highlights the prevalence of absenteeism at colleges in Makawanpur district, its potential negative impact on student learning, and the critical gap in understanding student motivations for skipping class. By exploring student perspectives, the research seeks to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the problem, paving the way for solutions that promote student presence in classrooms and enhance academic achievement.

### **Literature Review**

Student absenteeism, characterized by missing scheduled classes, has emerged as a critical concern in educational institutions. Its detrimental impact on academic achievement, social integration, and ultimately, graduation rates necessitates a deeper understanding of the underlying factors. This review investigates into existing research, exploring the multifaceted nature of student absenteeism and its contributing elements.

### **Categorizing the Causes: Barriers, Aversion, and Disengagement**

(Pattillo, 2021) provides a foundational framework by outlining three key categories of factors contributing to student absenteeism: barriers to attendance, aversion to college, and disengagement from learning. This categorization offers a comprehensive lens through which to examine the diverse reasons behind missed classes.

### **Barriers to Attendance: The Physical Obstacles**

Barriers to attendance encompass a range of obstacles that physically prevent students from reaching their classrooms. (Kearney et al., 2022) highlight health issues, lack of reliable transportation, and housing instability as significant deterrents to regular attendance. Students experiencing chronic illnesses or frequent medical appointments may find it challenging to maintain a consistent presence in class. Similarly, inadequate or unreliable public transportation, coupled with limited personal vehicle ownership, can pose logistical difficulties in reaching campus. Furthermore, housing insecurity, characterized by frequent moves or unstable living arrangements, can disrupt routines and create additional barriers to consistent attendance.

The financial burden faced by many students further exacerbates these difficulties. (Howe et al., 2021) emphasize how affordability concerns, complex housing situations, and limited financial resources often force students to prioritize basic needs like food and shelter over attending classes. This highlights the need for a nuanced understanding of the challenges faced by underprivileged students and a shared responsibility between institutions and students to address these barriers.

### **Mental Health: An Invisible Hurdle**

(Li et al., 2022) extend the discussion of barriers by emphasizing the significant role of mental health concerns. They argue that conditions like depression and anxiety can significantly hinder college attendance. Mental health issues can manifest in difficulty concentrating, low motivation, and social withdrawal, all of which can make attending classes and actively participating in coursework overwhelming. The stigma surrounding mental health may further discourage students from seeking help, perpetuating the cycle of absenteeism and negatively impacting academic performance.

### **Beyond Barriers: Aversion and Disengagement**

While barriers present physical obstacles, the categories of aversion to college and disengagement from learning delve into students' psychological state in relation to education. Aversion to college can be fuelled by factors like negative prior educational experiences, lack of a clear academic direction, or a mismatch between student expectations and the realities of college life.

Disengagement from learning, as explored by (Pattillo, 2021) arises when students feel a disconnect between the coursework and their personal goals. Uninteresting or irrelevant content, coupled with ineffective teaching methods, can lead to a lack of motivation and a sense of futility associated with attending classes.

### **Understanding the Intertwined Nature of Causes**

It's important to acknowledge that the factors contributing to student absenteeism are often interconnected. For instance, financial strain can create housing instability, impacting both physical barriers and mental well-being. Similarly, mental health issues can lead to disengagement from learning, further perpetuating absenteeism. A holistic approach that considers the interplay of these factors is crucial for developing effective interventions.

### **The Gender Gap and Minority Student Experiences**

Research indicates variations in absenteeism patterns based on student demographics. For example, some studies suggest higher absenteeism rates among male students compared to females (Singh et al., 2018). Additionally, minority students often grapple with unique challenges, such as racial prejudice and micro-aggressions on campus, which can contribute to feelings of isolation and disengagement, ultimately leading to absenteeism (Museus & Yi, 2023).

### **The Consequences of Absenteeism: A Downward Spiral**

The impact of student absenteeism extends beyond missed classes. Studies consistently link absenteeism with lower academic performance, decreased retention rates, and a higher likelihood of dropping out (Museus & Yi, 2023). Absenteeism can disrupt the learning process, making it challenging to keep pace with the curriculum and grasp complex concepts. Additionally, missing classes can hinder the development of relationships with teachers and peers, leading to feelings of isolation and a decreased sense of belonging in the academic community.

### **Interventions and Solutions: A Multipronged Approach**

Addressing student absenteeism requires a multipronged approach that tackles the various contributing factors. Addressing logistical barriers might involve implementing flexible attendance policies, providing transportation assistance, or offering childcare services. Additionally, mental health resources and support services can equip students with coping mechanisms and encourage them to seek help.

Student absenteeism is a complex issue with various causes. It can be due to physical barriers like health problems or transportation issues, aversion to college due to negative experiences or lack of direction, and disengagement from learning caused by uninteresting content or poor teaching methods. These factors can be interconnected, and some groups like minority students may face additional challenges. Absenteeism can lead to lower grades, higher dropout rates, and social isolation. To address this, schools need to consider flexible attendance policies, mental health resources, engaging teaching methods, and financial aid to create a more supportive learning environment.

### **Material and Method of Study**

This study has utilized a qualitative approach to investigate student absenteeism at colleges of Hetauda Sub-Metropolitan City, Makwanpur who are studying at Bachelor's and Master's levels. In-depth interviews and focus groups will be conducted with a purposive sample of 10 students from the colleges at Hetauda Sub-Metropolitan City to gain rich insights into their lived experiences and perspectives on attendance (Hennink et al., 2020). Thematic analysis will be employed to identify recurring themes within the data, ensuring the credibility of findings through triangulation and member checking. By prioritizing informed consent and participant confidentiality, this research will provide valuable student-centered insights into the causes of absenteeism, ultimately informing the development of targeted interventions to improve attendance and student success.

### **Discussion and Analysis**

The study explored into the multifaceted issue of student absenteeism at colleges of Makawanpur District, exploring the underlying reasons, perceptions, and impacts on students' academic experiences. A sample of 10 students, predominantly aged 21-25, from diverse academic backgrounds participated in the study.

The findings reveal a complex chemistry of factors contributing to absenteeism. Work commitments emerged as the most significant barrier, with all participants reporting its impact. This underscores the economic challenges faced by students who often need to balance education with employment. Lack of motivation, influenced by curriculum relevance and teaching methods, was another key factor, highlighting the need for more engaging pedagogical approaches. Transportation issues, particularly for those in rural areas, posed additional challenges to regular attendance.

The emotional toll of absenteeism was evident, with frustration and anxiety being prevalent among participants. This emphasizes the psychological impact of missing classes and the need for institutional support systems to address these emotional challenges.

Participants' perceptions of absenteeism's impact on academic performance were unanimous; all agreed it negatively affected their learning. This reinforces the importance of regular attendance for academic success.

### **Findings and Results**

The study identified several key findings:

- i. **Economic Factors:** Work commitments and financial constraints are primary drivers of absenteeism.
- ii. **Motivational Factors:** Lack of motivation, often linked to curriculum relevance and teaching methods, is a significant contributor.
- iii. **Logistical Factors:** Transportation issues, especially in rural areas, impact attendance.
- iv. **Emotional Impact:** Absenteeism leads to frustration and anxiety among students.
- v. **Academic Performance:** Missing classes negatively impacts academic performance.

### **Conclusion**

The data underscores the complex nature of student absenteeism, influenced by a combination of economic, motivational, and logistical factors. Addressing this issue requires a multifaceted approach that considers the unique circumstances of students. Institutions must implement strategies to support students facing financial hardships, enhance curriculum relevance and teaching methodologies, improve transportation accessibility, and provide emotional support. By creating a more supportive and engaging learning environment, educational institutions can significantly reduce absenteeism and improve overall student outcomes.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the study's findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

- i. **Economic Support:** Implement financial aid programs and part-time job opportunities for students to alleviate financial burdens and reduce the need to prioritize work over studies.
- ii. **Curriculum Reform:** Align curriculum with students' interests and career aspirations, making learning more relevant and engaging.
- iii. **Enhanced Teaching Methods:** Employ innovative teaching strategies, such as interactive learning, project-based learning, and technology integration, to increase student engagement and motivation.
- iv. **Improved Infrastructure:** Enhance transportation facilities, especially in rural areas, to facilitate easier access to campus.
- v. **Student Support Services:** Establish comprehensive support services, including counseling and academic advising, to address students' emotional well-being and academic challenges.

- vi. **Flexible Attendance Policies:** Consider implementing more flexible attendance policies, such as online learning options or alternative assessment methods, to accommodate students facing unforeseen circumstances.
- vii. **Data-Driven Approach:** Continuously monitor attendance rates and conduct regular assessments to evaluate the effectiveness of interventions and identify emerging trends.

By implementing these recommendations, educational institutions can create a more supportive and inclusive environment that fosters student success and reduces absenteeism.

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