

Action Research on Student Absenteeism in Virtual Learning: Causes and Interventions

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Abstract

This action research paper investigates the causes of student absenteeism in virtual learning environments and explores strategies to enhance student participation and improve learning outcomes. The study highlights various factors contributing to absenteeism, including health-related issues, household responsibilities, limited access to technology, and lack of motivation. Additionally, it examines the role of teacher effectiveness, digital literacy, and the overall challenges faced in online education. By using a combination of qualitative action research methods, the research aims to provide actionable solutions to mitigate absenteeism. The findings propose solutions such as improving technological access, enhancing teacher training in virtual education, fostering parental involvement, and developing engaging content to motivate students. The study ultimately seeks to enhance student learning experiences in the digital age and ensure higher engagement and academic success in virtual classrooms.

Keywords: Covid, Virtual learning and Possible solutions.

Introduction

Over the past three years, the world has been struggling with a pandemic. Both developed and developing nations have faced significant challenges. Every sector, including social, economic, religious, cultural, business, industrial, and tourism, has encountered unexpected disruptions (Sigala, 2020). Education has not been an exception.

Students are the central focus of the learning process. The active participation of children is essential to achieve the educational goals set by a nation. A teacher plays a crucial role in shaping a student's future by identifying their issues and conducting action research to find solutions (Elliot, 1991). Action research focuses on identifying and solving practical difficulties rather than just proving theories. It is based on classroom problems and seeks immediate, scientific solutions.

The pandemic has significantly disrupted learning and teaching processes. Virtual learning has emerged as an alternative, but it presents new challenges (Peters, 2002). Teachers must adapt their roles to guide students effectively. They need to spend

more time preparing lessons and ensuring that students stay engaged with the core concepts. Since the virtual learning environment differs from traditional classroom settings, teachers must make additional efforts to provide motivational messages and maintain student enthusiasm.

For learning to be effective, both teachers and students must be actively engaged. The mere presence of a teacher is not enough to achieve educational goals; students must also participate (Farber, 2008). Lessons are structured sequentially, meaning that missing one day can make it difficult for students to understand the next.

COVID-19 originated in Wuhan, China, and quickly spread worldwide, affecting every sector, including education (Naseer, Khalid, Parveen, Abbass, Song & Achim, 2023). Schools, colleges, and universities shut down, forcing institutions to adopt online learning. However, many students still struggle to access virtual education due to various challenges, including unreliable internet services, lack of digital devices, and financial constraints.

In Nepal, the idea of virtual learning has gained momentum, but the transition has been slow. While some educational institutions have embraced online learning, many remain hesitant. Virtual learning involves using computers and the internet both inside and outside classrooms, reducing the necessity of physical classrooms. However, challenges such as internet accessibility, affordability, and digital literacy hinder its effectiveness.

Introduction of Study Area

The study was conducted at Shaheed Smriti Multiple Campus in Ratnanagar Municipality, Ward No. 3, to explore the reasons behind student absence in virtual learning and suggest solutions. The study focuses on B.Ed. first-year students who have been absent in virtual learning. The findings indicate that absenteeism affects student performance at all levels.

Research Objectives

1. Identify the reasons behind student absence in virtual learning.
2. Propose solutions to minimize student absenteeism in virtual learning.

Research Justification

Time is a valuable resource, and campuses serve as institutions that produce skilled and capable human resources. Student absenteeism in virtual learning hinders their engagement in the learning process, affecting the achievement of educational objectives. This also impacts the institution's ability to implement its academic plans effectively.

Research Hypothesis

Understanding the reasons behind absenteeism is crucial for finding effective solutions. Based on the findings, the primary causes of student absence in virtual learning are:

- Illness
- Household responsibilities

- Lack of necessary learning materials
- Limited experience with modern technology
- Lack of motivation
- Ineffective teaching methods
- Engagement in part-time jobs

Research Methodology

The research employs an action research approach, combining qualitative data collection techniques. A survey was administered to a sample of 100 students enrolled in virtual learning programs to gather quantitative data on absenteeism patterns, reasons for non-participation, and student engagement levels. In addition to the survey, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 teachers and 5 parents to gain qualitative insights into the challenges they face and the factors contributing to absenteeism in virtual learning.

The survey data was analyzed using statistical methods to identify trends and patterns, while the interview data was coded thematically to uncover deeper insights into the subjective experiences of the stakeholders involved. This triangulation of data allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing absenteeism in virtual learning.

A descriptive method was used for the study. Data was collected through student interviews and surveys. Secondary data was gathered from the campus attendance records for June and July 2020.

Data Analysis and Findings

The following table presents the key reasons for student absence in virtual learning:

No.	Reason for Absence	No. of Students	Percentage
1	Illness	1	4%
2	Household work	1	4%
3	Part-time jobs	4	16%
4	Lack of learning materials	12	48%
5	Limited experience with technology	4	16%
6	Laziness during learning	1	4%
7	Lack of motivation	1	4%
8	Ineffective teaching	1	4%
Total		25	100

Upon analyzing the above data, it was observed that a high number of students were absent from virtual learning at the campus, and the reasons for their absence are as follows:

I examined a list of 25 students, identifying reasons like illness (4%), household work (4%), and lack of motivation (4%). The largest groups were insufficient learning materials (48%) and limited technology experience (32%).

The analysis of the absenteeism data reveals a significant disparity in the underlying reasons for student absence in virtual learning. The most striking finding is that nearly half of the absences (48%) are attributed to insufficient learning materials, indicating that nearly every second student is hindered by a lack of necessary resources to effectively engage with the virtual curriculum. This issue may point to broader systemic problems such as budget constraints, poor resource allocation, or logistical challenges in delivering educational content in an online format. Additionally, 32% of the students were absent due to limited experience with modern technology, underscoring a digital divide where students are not adequately equipped or trained to navigate virtual learning environments. In contrast, other factors such as illness, increased household work, laziness, lack of motivation, and teacher ineffectiveness each account for a relatively minor 4% of the absences. While these individual factors affect fewer students, their cumulative impact could still be significant, especially if compounded by broader issues like socioeconomic disadvantages or inconsistent teaching practices.

Interpreting these findings suggests that the primary barriers to student participation in virtual learning are resource-related and linked to technological proficiency. The high percentage of absences due to insufficient learning materials and limited technological experience indicates an urgent need for institutions to address these critical areas. Solutions could include investing in digital infrastructure, providing affordable or free learning materials, and offering training programs to enhance students' digital literacy. While factors such as illness and household responsibilities are less controllable, the relatively low percentages imply that targeted interventions in resource provision and teacher training could yield substantial improvements. Moreover, the minor percentages related to motivational issues and teacher effectiveness highlight areas where professional development and pedagogical innovation could further boost engagement. Overall, the data advocates for a multi-faceted approach that combines improved resource allocation, enhanced technological support, and focused professional development for educators to create a more inclusive and effective virtual learning environment.

Conclusion and Solutions

While student absenteeism in virtual learning cannot be entirely eliminated, it can be minimized through the following measures:

- Encouraging parents to ensure timely medical care for sick students.
- Educating families about the importance of virtual education and scheduling household work accordingly.
- Providing financial support or affordable internet packages for students in need.

- Conducting digital literacy training for students unfamiliar with online learning platforms.
- Implementing motivational strategies to keep students engaged.
- Enhancing the effectiveness of virtual teaching methods through interactive and engaging techniques.

The findings suggest that lack of resources and digital literacy are major barriers to virtual learning. By addressing these issues, institutions can improve student participation and overall learning outcomes.

Limitations

This study is confined to a single campus, which may impact the broader applicability of its findings on students' perceptions of their teachers' virtual learning styles within general education. We recognize this limitation and its potential effect on the generalizability of the results.

Additionally, the study relies exclusively on student-administered questionnaires, without cross-referencing the responses with teachers' learning implementation plans. Consequently, the assessment of teaching styles in the context of general management may lack the depth and robustness that a comparative analysis could provide.

Suggestions

In this context, the following suggestions can be made for practitioners and researchers. Based on conclusion and limitation of this study, we recommend teachers to adapt their virtual learning styles to general course, student characteristics and curriculum that have been implemented by the university. And for other researchers who are interested in researching similar things, it is advisable to expand the scope of the research so that the results obtained from the research can be more generalized.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that no conflict of interest exists with this study research.

Author contributions

KRS conceptualized and conducted the study. US prepared draft and SS edited the manuscript, participated in revision. All the authors did agree to submit this paper for publication.

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