

Low Attendance of Lectures among Medical Students

Yossra Khalaf Hanoon, Zeena Mohammed Fahmi Hadi¹, Waleed Arif Al-Ani

Department of Family and Community Medicine, College of Medicine, Al-Mustansiriya University, ¹ Department of Family Medicine, Ministry of Health, Al Karkh Health Directorate, Baghdad, Iraq

Abstract

Background: Absenteeism is defined as the frequent nonattendance from classes with no reasonable cause. Nonattendance affects the teaching–learning practice and affects the well-being of the class. Causes given by students for absenteeism were lack of time, illness boring, or unexciting lecture topics. **Aim of the Study:** The aim of this study was to determine the absenteeism behavior among students of the medical college of Al-Mustansiriya University, Iraq, to find out the causes behind lectures' nonattendance, and to demonstrate the rate of the most common causes. **Materials and Methods:** A cross-sectional study, descriptive study, was conducted at Al-Mustansiriya University, College of Medicine, with a convenient sample from the third, fourth, and fifth classes, in March 2019 for 3 weeks, using a special questionnaire was made especially for the purpose of the study, and data analysis was performed using Excel trial version software and the use of descriptive statistical techniques. **Results:** About two-thirds of the students missed approximately 0–5 lectures per week. The qualities of lecturers, their training, and the relationship they have with the students appear to play a role in attending lectures. The results show that about one-third of students consider the difficult subject and their desire to benefit from the lecture influenced their decision to attend. The most common cause chosen for nonattendance was having an examination on the next day, about 66%, and lecturer expression was 63%. The most common cause for missing morning lectures was traffic problems, 53%. **Conclusion:** The lecture attendance rate was low, and the main reasons for absenteeism from lectures were the presence of the examination, poor lecturer teaching style, and boring lecture topics.

Keywords: Absenteeism, lecture attendance, medical students

INTRODUCTION

Student absenteeism, particularly in medical education, is a global concern as it disrupts the learning process and affects future health-care provision.^[1] Despite advancements in educational methodologies, lectures remain a cornerstone in medical colleges due to their effectiveness in disseminating knowledge to large groups of students.^[2] These sessions, alongside clinical experiences, offer invaluable insights and practical understanding crucial for aspiring doctors.^[3]

The significance of regular attendance lies in its multifaceted benefits, including fostering critical thinking, improving performance, enhancing teamwork, and boosting academic scores.^[4,5] Conversely, absenteeism leads to wasted resources, both in terms of time and potential, impacting the overall learning environment.^[6]

Research identifies various factors contributing to nonattendance, such as social influences, poor relationships with instructors, disinterest in subjects, and health or family

issues.^[7] In addition, modern challenges like balancing work and study, along with stress, further exacerbate absenteeism.^[8,9]

Moreover, student perceptions play a role, with many finding lectures incompatible with their learning styles, preferring more active forms of engagement.^[10,11] Consequently, absenteeism results in missed opportunities for participation, hindered comprehension, and strained relationships with peers and educators.^[12]

The consequences of absenteeism extend to academic performance, with frequent nonattendance correlating

Address for correspondence: Dr. Yossra Khalaf Hanoon, Department of Family and Community Medicine, College of Medicine, Al-Mustansiriya University, Baghdad, Iraq. E-mail: yossraalrobaiaay@gmail.com

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with reduced achievement in examinations.^[13] Numerous studies highlight the negative impact of absenteeism on examination scores, emphasizing the importance of regular class attendance.^[14-16]

Motivation emerges as a crucial factor, with intrinsic motivation – learning for its own sake – being deemed more effective than extrinsic motivators such as grades.^[17-19] Lack of motivation contributes significantly to absenteeism, underscoring the need to cultivate a desire for learning among students.^[11]

In summary, student absenteeism poses significant challenges to medical education, necessitating a holistic approach to address its underlying causes and mitigate its adverse effects. By promoting active engagement, fostering supportive learning environments, and addressing individual motivations, institutions can enhance attendance rates and optimize student learning outcomes.

Objectives of the study

1. To determine the absenteeism behavior among medical students of Al Mustansiriyah University, Iraq
2. To find out the causes behind lectures' nonattendance
3. To demonstrate the rate of the most common causes.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study design

The design of the study was a cross-sectional descriptive study.

Study setting

Considering the availability of medical students, focus subject to be conducted on March 2019 last for 3 weeks.

Study sample

Convenient sample includes batches of students who have been pursuing the third, fourth, and fifth stages.

Tools

The survey questionnaire tool utilized in this study is performed by the researcher with closed-ended questions and is composed of three parts.

- 1st part: The first part was about demographic characteristics which include age, gender, grade, living place, and residence
- 2nd part: The second part was about what are the numbers of missed lectures? What are the causes of missing the first-morning lecture? If it is because of traffic problem, late sleep, or taking late breakfast? what are the causes of low lecture attendance? If it is because of illness, daily job, boring lectures, lack of rest, presence of an examination, inappropriate lecture time, mode of lecturer, no scientific value of lecture, friend encouragement, prefer to study alone, and online lecture, not affect examination marks?
- 3rd part: The third part was about what are the causes that encourage lecture attendance? If it is because of improving examination marks, difficult subject, interactive lecturer, presence of the quiz, avoid absence warning, interesting

lectures, scientific benefit, from the lecture, lecturer style, and the difficulty in studying alone?

We were given a sufficient amount of time to fill the questionnaire by students, and the class representative collected the format.

Ethical consideration

- All participants were briefed about the confidentiality of their answers and information during the data collection. The participant of the study was told not to mention their names in the given performance so as to avoid an identity crisis. They were also told that this research was only to get their ideas and future overview of educational research
- Informed and verbal consent was also taken from them about their agreement to participate in the study
- The Ethical Committee of the institute has been given verbal permission to conduct this study.

Exclusion criteria

Those students who were not given consent and did not agree to participate were not included in the study.

Data analysis

The data from the questionnaire have been entered and analyzed using Excel trial version software. Analysis was carried out in 2019; descriptive statistical techniques were used to analyze the various variables, and also bar chart and pie chart were used to observe the association between absenteeism and different causes and sociodemographic factors.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows that the greatest percentage of age group among

Table 1: Distribution of the study participants according to their sociodemographic characteristics

Character (n=400)	n (%)
Age (years)	
<20 or 20	71 (17.75)
21	121 (30.25)
22	91 (22.75)
23	96 (24)
24	17 (4.25)
25	1 (0.25)
>25	3 (0.75)
Gender	
Male	161 (40.25)
Female	239 (59.75)
Grade	
Third grade	139 (34.75)
Fourth grade	128 (32)
Fifth grade	133 (33.25)
Living place	
Baghdad	322 (80.50)
Other governorates	78 (19.50)
Residence	
Dorm	68 (17)
With relatives	88 (22)

the study participants was 21 years old, while the lowest was 25 years old, and 30.25% and 0.25%, respectively. Moreover, 60% of the study sample were female, and also shows that the three grades included in the study have approximately equal percentages. Moreover, 80% of the study sample were living in the Baghdad Governorate.

Figure 1 shows that about 60% of the study sample missed about 1–5 lectures weekly. Others missed more lectures; 6–10 lectures; and > 10 lectures, and were 21% and 19%, respectively.

Figure 2 shows that the most chosen cause for the missing first-morning lecture is due to traffic problems.

The most chosen causes that lead to low lectures and attendance are due to the presence of an examination at the same or the next day (66%) in addition to the lecturer's expression way of the lectures (63%), while the less chosen cause that leads to low lecture attendance was the presence of daily job (11%), while other causes were distributed between (26% and 48%) according to the study, as shown in Figure 3.

The two most common causes that lead to good lectures and attendance that were chosen by the poll participants are the presence of quiz (72%) in addition to avoid absence warning (72.25%), while the lowest chosen two causes were interactive lecturer and interesting lecture both had about (18%), the remaining causes that encourage lecture attendance were distributed from (22%) to (47%) in the study, as shown in Figure 4. We should note that each participant in the study sample can choose more than one cause for each absenteeism and other more than cause that lead to good lecture attendance.

DISCUSSION

This subject lacks evidence about university class attendance due to very few research in our country, despite it being a popular matter for researchers around the world for over 20 years.^[20] Low levels of class attendance have been

expressed repeatedly by this international research; however, there remains a limited number of literature focused on how to deal with this trouble.^[21]

Low attendance of lectures has been trending for the last decades; value perceptions are associated largely with teaching practice and the lecture's proficiency. This is in accordance with our results which show that the perceived information and skills of the lecture were the most common causes for attendance.^[22]

The study found that about two-thirds of students missed 0–5 lectures per week, mainly due to crowded lectures and limited rest time. The remaining third missed more than five lectures, with some missing over 10, indicating neglect of responsibilities. Traffic was the primary reason for missing morning lectures for half of the students in Baghdad, a city known for its congestion. Other reasons included late sleep and breakfast. Low lecture attendance was attributed to examinations, lecturer expression, and lack of rest. Boring lectures were also cited as a factor, suggesting a need for improvement in teaching methods and topic selection. Motivators for attending lectures included quizzes, avoidance of absence warnings, interactive lecturers, and interesting topics, with over 70% of participants favoring quizzes. Overall, the study highlights the importance of addressing factors such as traffic congestion, lecturer engagement, and student motivation to improve lecture attendance.

The qualities of teachers, their practices, and the relationship they have with their students appear to play a role in attendance at lectures.^[23,24] Interestingly, our survey results show that 47% of students consider the lecturer's style to affect their decision to attend classes.

Therefore, it is imperative that lecturers recognize their role in encouraging attendance. Those who intercommunicate well with students and give well-structured lectures are more likely to see larger numbers of students attending their lectures.^[25]

More specifically, disorganized lecturers who do not engage with students and are perceived as boring will see lower numbers of attendance.^[8]

When we asked our student cohort if they attended lectures because of difficulty in studying alone, 29% agreed with this. In fact, good lecture content is a frequently cited factor

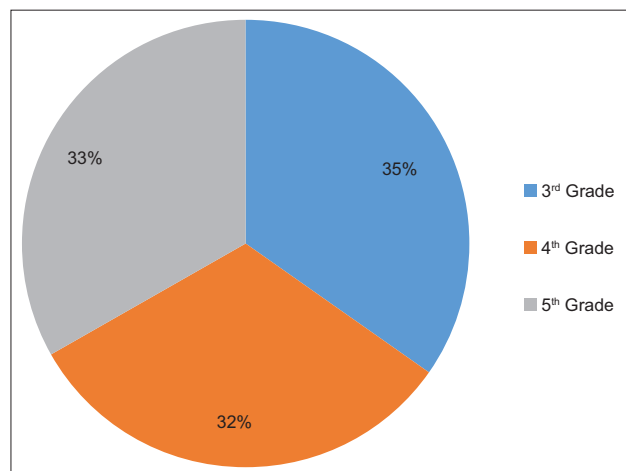


Figure 1: Distribution of the study participants according to their grade

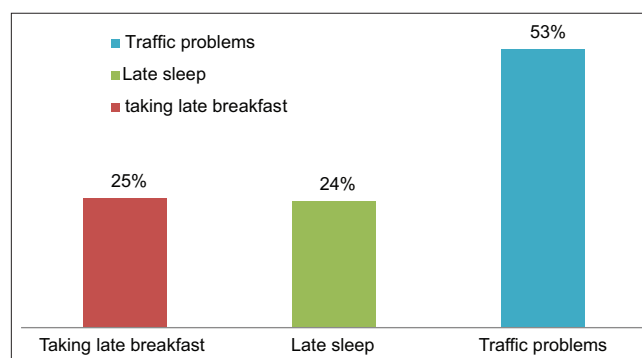


Figure 2: Causes of missing first-morning lecture

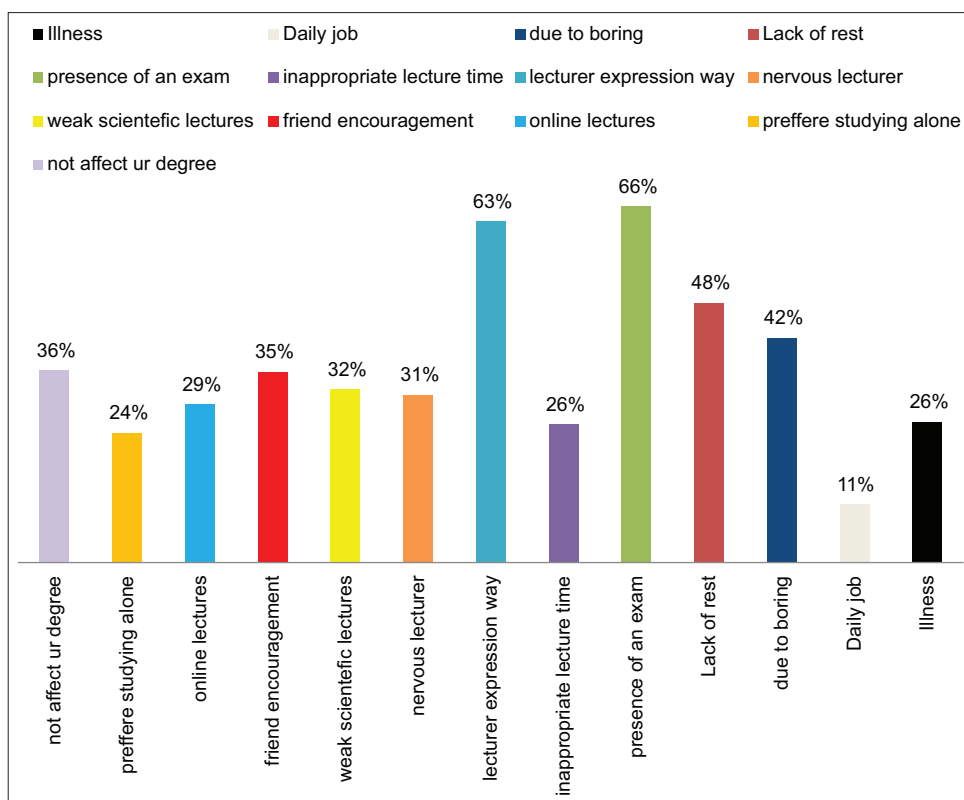


Figure 3: Causes of low lecture attendance

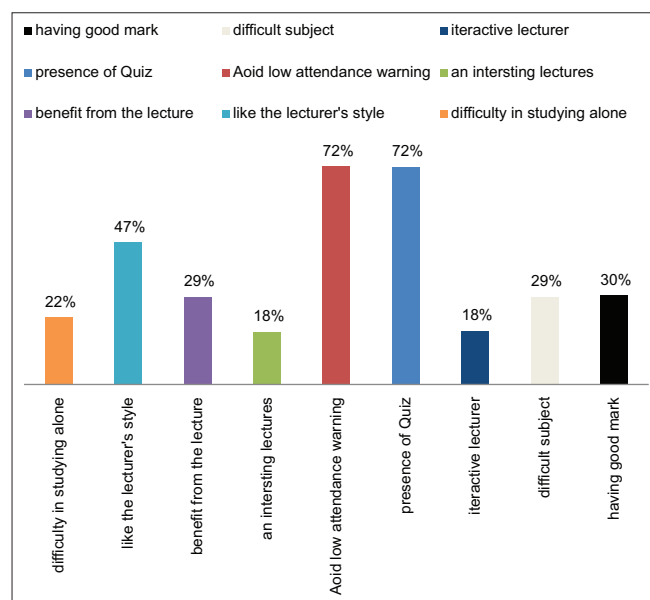


Figure 4: Causes that encourage lecture attendance

for attendance with one study reporting that 50% of their participants agreed with this concept.^[8,25]

The current survey results show that a third of the students consider the difficult subject and their desire to benefit from the lecture influenced their decision to attend.

The lecture attendance is low, primarily due to examinations the same day or the next day. Quizzes during lectures encourage

attendance. Raising awareness about the impact of absenteeism on academic performance could help. Using multimedia in classes may enhance interest. Offering incentives like grade boosts for attendance could be effective. Many students cite a lack of rest. Department heads should advise professors to give a 10-min break at the end of lectures to refresh students for the next session.

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Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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