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Conceptualization, literature review, methodology, implementation, data analysis, translation, and writing

Abstract

Attendance is thought to be an important issue for academic success in schools. With the long school closure due to Covid-19, students were kept away from schools and when the schools were opened and face to face education began, the absenteeism rate increased a lot. A phenological study to determine the reasons for absenteeism of university students was conducted with the participation of 56 students from different faculties of a university at the Black Sea Region of Turkey during the spring term of 2022. According to the findings obtained from the study, the most important reason for absenteeism was health problems. Secondly, waking up early was another striking reason for absenteeism. Stress and depression, early class hours, family and transportation problems, academic staff were stated as important reasons for absenteeism. The long course hours, the lack of sufficient activities in the school environment, not finding the lessons meaningful and informative also found to be affective in the attendance rate of student. It was also found out that university environment and instructors were also responsible from students' absenteeism. Therefore, the courses should not be planned in the early hours and the course instructors should be able to take student attention to the courses. Moreover, the campuses should increase social, cultural and sportive activities. To attract the attention of students to school with extracurricular activities; social, cultural and sportive activities should be planned. University campus should turn into a life center where students would like to be.

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A Study on Absenteeism of University Students[*]

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Abstract

Attendance is thought to be an important issue for academic success in schools. With the long school closure due to Covid-19, students were kept away from schools and when the schools were opened and face to face education began, the absenteeism rate increased a lot. A phenological study to determine the reasons for absenteeism of university students was conducted with the participation of 56 students from different faculties of a university at the Black Sea Region of Turkey during the spring term of 2022. According to the findings obtained from the study, the most important reason for absenteeism was health problems. Secondly, waking up early was another striking reason for absenteeism. Stress and depression, early class hours, family and transportation problems, academic staff were stated as important reasons for absenteeism. The long course hours, the lack of sufficient activities in the school environment, not finding the lessons meaningful and informative also found to be affective in the attendance rate of students. It was also found out that university environment and instructors were also responsible from students' absenteeism. Therefore, the courses should not be planned in the early hours and the course instructors should be able to take students' attention to the courses. Moreover, the campuses should increase social, cultural and sportive activities. To attract the attention of students to school with extracurricular activities; social, cultural and sportive activities should be planned. University campus should turn into a life center where students would like to be.

Keywords: Absenteeism, course attendance, school attendance, compulsory attendance

1. INTRODUCTION

Education, with its most common definition, is defined as the process of making a desired behavioral change in individuals. Therefore, education and training activities occur within a certain process. Ensuring the regular attendance to these activities, which have been planned for the individual in advance, and whose place and time have been determined, will increase the rate of making changes in the individual's life. In other words, the students who attend the courses are more likely to achieve the goals related to the content and purpose of the courses compared to those who are absent. For this reason, ensuring students' attendance can only be achieved by enabling an environment they desire (Şahin, 2022). In this context, schools are environments where students change their behavior in accordance with the determined programs.

Schools are defined as a sub-system created for the regular conduct of teaching activities (Gümüş et al., 2011, p. 428). However, in order for this subsystem to become functional, many factors must work together and be in harmony. There are many variables that affect the quality of educational activities. It is very important that these variables are compatible, that they can be replanned according to the individual development of the students, that they are pedagogical and ergonomic (Şahin, 2017, 2019). There are studies showing that even the place where students sit in the classroom is associated

with absenteeism. It has been revealed that the absenteeism and academic failure rates of students sitting. in the back rows are higher than those sitting in the front rows (Şahin, 2019). Many factors such as the physical characteristics of the school and the classroom, the acoustics in the classroom, heat, lighting, daylight, the colors chosen, the sitting arrangement of the students can affect the academic success and attendance of students (Şahin, 2019; Wasnock, 2010).

An important problem in education is absenteeism, which varies according to the type of school, school levels, and region. Kearney and Silverman (1990) defined absenteeism as refusal from school and not following classes regularly. On the other hand, Öztekin (2013) defined it as the situation where individuals are not present in places where they should be, such as school, workplace, and meeting. In another definition, it is expressed as the student's absence from school during the school term without a legitimate reason. School absenteeism is also defined as students' absences from school with or without an excuse (Conry & Richards, 2018).

In addition to the researches on the solution to the absenteeism problem (Wasnock, 2010), the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) published the "Progressive Absenteeism Management Practice Guide for Primary Schools" in 2011 and started working to prevent absenteeism. Progressive Absenteeism Management is to ensure that all students receive a diploma by ensuring that students attend to school (MoNE, 2011, p. 10). This guide for primary and other school levels points that attendance is important and the problem should be managed properly. As the Progressive Absenteeism Management of MoNE, Higher Education Institutions should also seek ways to keep students' attendance rate higher.

School absenteeism as Kim and Gentle-Genitty (2020, p. 1) cited, "has become a prevalent problem that affects student development and future societies across the world." Studies (Clifford, 2005; Crew, 2000) show that school absenteeism is an important factor that negatively affects students' futures. Students who do not attend school can negatively affect their school, family and society. School absenteeism causes lower academic success, higher school drops, lower physical and mental health, so school absenteeism affects students over all well-being outcomes (Kearney, 2008). School absenteeism also affects the future of a society as it prevents students becoming competent citizens who in some way contributes to the economy, well-being and development of the society (Ekstrand, 2015). For these reasons, all kinds of education systems encourage students to attend school. School attendance is also considered necessary for students to be able to study well in the future, have a regular job, and be a good citizen (Pehlivan, 2011). "Student's constant interaction with the school can affect the quality of school life and contribute to student success" (Uğurlu et al., 2015, p. 1013).

As the reasons for absenteeism various, some reasons are more common. Those with low self-esteem, lack of self-confidence, inadequate social skills, having problems in establishing social relations with others, those with weak academic skills, and those with health problems tend to be more absent (Morgan, 2004). The family factor is very important as one of the effective factors in students' attendance. Studies have revealed that the family factor affects students' absenteeism at a rate of 5%. Students may be absent to attract the attention of their families, due to family pressure, and insufficient care in preparing the student for school. Home environment, poor family control, indecisiveness in education, bad parenting, economic conditions, lack of respect in the society, drug addiction of family members such as alcohol and drugs, children having to work, absence of a mother or father, death, marriage and birth reasons such as rapid changes in family members, the necessity of working to make a living, and the fact that the family has to move many times in a short period are expressed as social and family-based reasons (Morgan, 2004).

Students are afraid of their teachers or school administrators when they are late to school. When there are not enough activities for students at the school for students, the lack of appropriate clothing for school, the excessive discipline, the student's feeling of inadequacy towards the lesson

(Altınkurt, 2008), the attitude of the teachers or instructors to student may result in absenteeism. Students may not like the school due to school climate, administrator attitudes, learning styles, cultural differences, relations with teachers, other classmates, school and curriculum (Kindler et al., 1996).

Especially academic failure (Aucejo & Romano, 2016), damage to social and emotional development (Gottfried, 2014), substance use (Henry & Huizinga, 2007), poverty, school failure to meet students' needs, irresponsible families (Zhang, 2003), low socio-economic status (Gottfried & Gee, 2017) can increase school dropouts and absenteeism. 10% of students choose not to go to school on a daily basis and are absent from school (Eaton, Brener, & Kann, 2008).

Altınkurt (2008), who examines students' absenteeism under six dimensions, states that students may prefer absenteeism due to administrators, family, teachers, environment, academic anxiety and individual reasons. School facilitates young people's transition to adulthood by enabling them to have a job economically (Fredricks et al., 2019), school environment provides social, mental and physical development of young people (Bonnel et al., 2019), while young people are at school get opportunities for academic, practical and emotional learning. School attendance ensures the sharing of social experiences and the transfer of the values and cultural elements of the country (Zaf et al., 2017).

Stayin far from school, health problems, psychological problems, sense of failure, group psychology, family problems, inadequacy of social activities at school, working at a work to meet the needs, not having the necessary tools for school, disliking teachers, not waking up early for school, bullying at school, teachers' failure to use methods that will increase interest to courses, illiterate family members, and insufficient communication between school and family are stated as important reasons for absenteeism (Sakıç, 2013, p. 5).

The reasons for absenteeism may also differ according to the type and level of school. In a study in Turkey, it was found that absenteeism from school and school administrators came to the fore as the primary reason, but socio-economic level did not make a significant difference on absenteeism (Uzun & Kemerli, 2019). Sanders (2022), who investigated the reasons for absenteeism of secondary school students, pointed out that absenteeism should be seen as the first sign that the student has taken a wrong path and the beginning of the problems to be experienced later. Sakınç (2013), on the other hand, stated that the reasons for student absenteeism in vocational and technical secondary educational institutions are administrators, teachers, family, environment, economic, social, individual and legislative reasons.

Pehlivan (2011) revealed that school administrators and teachers believe that the reasons for absenteeism are the students and their families, while the students pointed the educational activities at school as the main reason for absenteeism. In another study (Yılmaz et al., 2020), it is stated that school-related reasons, personal reasons, and family-related reasons play an important role in high school students' absenteeism.

School attendance is an important factor for students' academic success. Students who are absent cannot catch enough change. For this reason, schools and educational environments should be a place where students want to be (Altınkurt, 2008; Şahin, 2021; Şimşek et al., 2016). When it comes to universities, it is even more important for students to attend classes because university students gain important knowledge and do applications about their possible future professions at the courses. A medical school student, a chemist or a teacher who does not attend classes may also lack the knowledge and practical experience necessary for his profession. As Uğurlu et al. (2015) stated, absenteeism is an important problem among instructors. The arrangement and quality of the teaching environment can be only possible with the attendance of the students to the courses.

A scale to determine the absenteeism tendencies of university students developed by Şimşek et al. (2016). The scale, with a Cronbach Alpha value of .94 for reliability, consists of 28 items. When the components of the scale are examined, the most important reason for absenteeism is the attitude and behavior of the lecturer, and the second is the "course content". Other reasons emerged as "social

activities, unexpected situations, instructors' attitude to absenteeism, transportation problems and course success", respectively.

Uğurlu et al. (2015) took the views of academic staff and university students. In the study, university faculty members defined absenteeism as a reason for failure, while students described it as a choice and a situation that should be removed. Sarıdere and Arslan (2017), determined that students did not attend classes due to reasons arising from themselves, the school environment, instructors and course content. Usta et al. (2014) revealed that the secondary education students exhibited more absentee behavior, and the tendency to absenteeism changed depending on factors such as the attitudes of the instructor, the course content, and the transportation problem.

Absenteeism is an important factor that negatively affects both students' academic success and society's well-being. It is one of the natural duties of the school to take measures for students who have disciplinary problems, fail, and do school absenteeism (Ereş, 2009). Many studies (Conry & Richards, 2018; Sarıdere & Arslan, 2017; Şahin, 2021) accept that school absenteeism is a complex issue as it can be influenced by many multidimensional factors at individual, family, school, instructor, and community levels.

After the closure due to Covid-19 the rate of university students' absenteeism increased a lot. Knowing the new reasons and dimensional changes about absenteeism will make a significant contribution to developing solutions to the problem. It is expected to make an important contribution to the literature as well. The aim of the study is to determine the reasons of university students' absenteeism from students' perspective and develop solutions to ensure attendance. Therefore, answers to the following questions were sought.

- What are the reasons for absenteeism of university students?
- Should the attendance be compulsory? Why/Why not?
- What can be done to ensure attendance to classes?

2. METHOD

2.1. Research Design

Qualitative research method is used to meet the objectives of the research and phenomenological research design is used to get the opinions of participants in depth about the concept of "absenteeism". Phenomenology aims to focus on cases that are related but not understood in detail (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2005).

2.2. Study Group

The participants of the research composed of 56 students from 8 faculties of a university situated at the Black Sea Region of Turkey. Participants were determined by the criterion sampling method based on maximum diversity, one of the purposive sampling types. With purposive sampling, it is aimed to work on a sample that is representative of a universe suitable for the purpose of the study and where the most appropriate observation can be made regarding the problem being studied (Sencer, 1989, p. 386). Students who have absenteeism over the limit of 4-week were chosen for the study. With the participant identification method, the diversity of data providers has been tried to be ensured (Silverman, 2006; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2005). In determining the students to be selected for the study group, diversity was provided in the context of faculty, class, department and gender. It is a rule agreed upon by researchers that when the data reach the saturation point and data starts to repeat each other, researcher stops interviewing and collecting data (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2011). Participants were coded as S1, S2…. Demographic information of the participants participating in the research is given in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of study group

	Departments	Class	Age	Gender F/M	Code
Faculty of Health Sciences	Nursing	2	19	F	S1
	Nursing	4	19	M	S2
	Nursing	1	18	M	S3
	Nursing	3	20	M	S4
	Nursing	1	19	M	S5
	Nursing	2	23	M	S6
	Midwifery	1	19	F	S7
	Midwifery	2	21	F	S8
	Midwifery	3	22	M	S9
	Midwifery	3	21	F	S10
Faculty of Erbaa Social and Human Sciences	Communication and Design	1	20	F	S11
	Communication and Design	3	21	F	S12
	Turkish Language and Literature	3	20	M	S13
	Turkish Language and Literature	3	21	M	S14
Faculty of Education	English Language Teaching	3	22	M	S15
	Turkish Language Teaching	2	20	M	S16
	Turkish Language Teaching	4	22	F	S17
	Turkish Language Teaching	2	21	F	S18
	Primary School Teaching	4	24	M	S19
	Primary School Teaching	2	21	F	S20
	Social Studies Teaching	3	23	F	S21
	Social Studies Teaching	2	22	M	S22
	Psychological Consultation	1	19	F	S23
	Psychological Consultation	2	21	M	S24
Faculty of Islamic Sciences	Islamic Sciences	1	20	F	S25
	Islamic Sciences	3	22	F	S26
	Islamic Sciences	1	21	F	S27
	Islamic Sciences	2	21	M	S28
	Islamic History and Arts	2	23	M	S29
	Islamic History and Arts	1	20	F	S30
	Islamic History and Arts	1	20	F	S31
Faculty of Agriculture	Department of Plant Protection	1	20	F	S32
	Department of Plant Protection	4	23	F	S33
	Department of Horticulture	3	22	M	S34
	Department of Horticulture	2	21	F	S35
Faculty of Arts and Sciences	Department of History	3	20	F	S36
	Department of History	2	22	F	S37
	Department of Geography	4	23	M	S38
	Department of Geography	2	25	M	S39
	Mathematics	4	23	F	S40
	Mathematics	1	19	F	S41
Faculty of Architecture and Engineering	Mapping	2	19	M	S42
	Mapping	2	20	F	S43
	Food Engineering	3	24	F	S44
	Food Engineering	3	23	M	S45
	Mechanical Engineering	2	21	F	S46
	Mechanical Engineering	1	20	M	S47
Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences	Public Administration	3	22	M	S48
	Public Administration	2	21	M	S49
	Public Administration	1	20	F	S50
	Public Administration	3	23	M	S51
	Public Administration	2	20	F	S52
	Finance	1	20	F	S53
	Finance	2	19	F	S54
	Finance	3	21	F	S55
	Finance	2	22	M	S56

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As seen in Table 1, students from different faculties and departments participated to the study.

2.3. Data Collection and Data Collection Tool

A semi-structured interview form developed by the researcher was used to collect qualitative data. For the validity and reliability of the interview form, the opinions of two experts were taken and corrections were made in line with the suggestions. The forms also include demographic information about the participants. In the individual interviews, consent was obtained from the participants, and the answers of the participants were recorded on the interview forms by the researcher using paper and pencil. The researcher tried not to be directive and he intervened to prevent the participants from going

out of the subject and to remind them of the subject. An average interview took 15 minutes with three questions.

2.4. Data Analysis

The collected data has been combined into a text file and analyzed using the content analysis method. Assistance was taken from an expert for coding, creating themes, obtaining findings and coding reliability. The reliability of the study was done according to the formula suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994). According to the formula the number of agreed ideas (75) is divided to the total number of coding (83) and multiplied with 100 to find out the percentage of correlation. According to Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 64), if the consensus correlation is above 70% or more, the research is considered reliable. In this study, the correlation between the encoders was 90%. For the coding where there is disagreement, the researcher and the expert instructor decided together which coding to be used. The themes and codes that emerged as a result of the content analysis were converted into tables and given in the findings together with the frequency numbers. The encodings in the tables were interpreted by the researcher and supported by direct citations with the views of the participants.

3. FINDINGS

In this section, the collected data were analyzed and answers to the problem questions were sought in the light of the data.

3.1. Reasons For University Students' Absenteeism

In the individual interviews the students participating in the study were first asked to answer following questions: "What are your reasons for not attending classes? In what situations would you prefer not to attend classes?" The answers of the participants were noted by using pen and pencil, and categorized into themes and codes as given in Table 2. While coding, expressions with similar meanings were gathered under a single expression, and this expression was given by choosing the sentences that best expressed the situation from the participants in order to be meaningful. All other coding were done in this way

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Table 2. Reasons for Absenteeism of University Students

Themes	Participant Codes	*f*
Health problems,	S1, S2, S4, S5, S6, S11, S13, S15, S16, S17, S18, S19, S21, S22, S23, S24, S25, S26, S28, S30, S32, S38, S40, S41, S42, S43, S45, S47, S49, S50, S53, S54, S55, S56	34
Difficulty in waking up early,	S3, S5, S6, S7, S8, S9, S10, S15, S20, S21, S22, S34, S35, S39, S44, S45, S48, S49, S50	19
Psychological-stress-depression	S7, S9, S10, S16, S17, S18, S21, S23, S24, S30, S44, S48, S49, S53, S54	15
Boring/monotonic lesson,	S1, S3, S5, S6, S9, S30, S36, S38, S40, S44, S46, S48, S50, S52, S53	15
Early course hours,	S3, S12, S13, S19, S20, S24, S32, S43, S45, S46, S47	11
When bored,	S2, S3, S9, S10, S21, S22, S40, S44, S48, S49, S53	11
Family reasons,	S11, S14, S16, S17, S19, S23, S24, S4, S48, S50, S56	11
Transportation,	S8, S9, S17, S22, S23, S32, S35, S47	8
Instructors,	S9, S31, S36, S38, S45, S56	6
Weather conditions	S37, S38, S50, S56	4
Long course hours,	S8, S9, S44	3
Bad environment,	S6, S8, S44	3
To study KPSS	S27, S29, S51	3
Uninformative courses	S12, S21	2
At exam times,	S2, S4,	2
When absenteeism is not a problem,	S37, S38	2
For sightseeing	S7	1
For hospital appointment	S15	1
Prolongation of work	S16	1

Short lesson breaks,	S3	1
End of term,	S34,	1
The distance from the dormitory,	S9	1
When the courses are at the upstairs	S6	1
Pennilessness	S50	1
Conflict of lessons	S51	1
Friends	S53	1

When Table 2, which summaries the reasons for absenteeism is examined, "health problems" are stated as the most important reason by the majority of the participants (f=34). The second important reason is the "difficulty in waking up early" (f=19). Students' absenteeism due to psychological factors is in the third place (f=15). There are other important reasons such as early class hours, boredom, family problems, transportation problems, and reasons originating from the instructor. The students have sleeping problems, especially when they are sick due to the early hours of the lessons, and they are absent when the instructors do not make the lessons interesting enough. The statements of some students regarding the reasons for absenteeism are as follows:

I do not prefer going to school because of illness. I am afraid of catching Covid-19 as some of my friends were Covid-19 and they had to stay in hospital for days. Also, I prefer to be absent because some classes are boring. I don't want to attend the lesson when I feel asleep, when I don't want to interrupt my sleep, I stay at home and do not go school (S5).

When there is a health problem, when I cannot wake up, when the lessons do not interest me, when the school environment is not good, I do not go to school. If I don't like the lectures of some instructors, I do not attend. Also, when the classes are on the upper floors, I do not attend because the elevators are not open to students (S6).

I don't attend when the lesson doesn't interest me. My flat is far from school and transportation increase absenteeism. If I do not like the teacher, if the course hours are long and the teacher reads and passes the PDF, I prefer not to attend the lesson (S9).

Health status, inability to wake up, depressed mood, stress. When parents have a health problem. Being far from home, not being able to catch public transport are my reasons of absenteeism, I am also absent from psychological factors. Or a job may arise for family reasons. Desire to see my family before the holiday break (S17).

Sometimes I find it difficult to attend the lessons because the hours are at 08:00 in the morning. Another reason is that I have to be absent because the buses are very full at 08:00 and students are victimized (S32).

I am absent when I have health problems. I prefer not to attend class when I am not feeling very well psychologically. Because in those situations, even if I go to school, I cannot be productive (S38).

I do not continue when I do not feel well both psychologically and physically. I don't want to go to that class when I don't enjoy it. The same is true for the courses I had difficulty with. The friend environment also affects attendance (S53).

When I don't feel well, I am absent because I can't be productive. I don't want to go to class because of the teachers' attitude towards students. Sometimes the reason why I don't go is because of the weather conditions. Sometimes I do not go away from the problems in my private life (S56).

The above statements seem to support the Table 2. Students do not attend lessons when they feel ill or fear to catch illness. Moreover, they stated that some lessons are boring and if the instructors make the lessons more interesting, the attendance rate may increase. In addition, transportation-related problems need to be solved. Students state that due to the lessons that start at the same time in many departments, there is an excessive intensity at the bus stops, they cannot wake up early for the lessons that are put in the early hours, and they generally have sleeping problems.

3.2 Should Attendance be Compulsory?

"What do you think about the necessity of attending university courses? Should attendance be compulsory? Shouldn't it be? Why do you think so? These questions were asked to get data about compulsory attendance. The answers of the participants were analyzed and the results were given in Table 3.

Table 3. Opinions on compulsory attendance

Themes	Participant Codes	*f*
Attendance shouldn't be compulsory	S1,S3,S5,S6,S7,S8,S9,S10,S14,S16,S17,S18,S19,S21,S24, 29,S30,S32,S33,S34,S35,S36,S38,S41,S42,S43,S44,S46, S47,S48,S49, S50, S51, S52, S55	35
We are at a certain age,	S7, S9, S33, S34, S41, S43, S47, S49	8
May not attend due to private reasons,	S1, S10, S14, S16, S24, S46, S50	7
Must participate voluntarily,	S7, S8, S18, S41, S44, S49, S52	7
Student must decide attendance,	S2, S9, S33, S36, S44, S52	6
You should be eager to take the course,	S29, S35, S36, S41, S49	5
The one who is responsible attends,	S2, S41, S43, S47	4
One may have health problems,	S1, S17, S21	3
Student may get bored,	S5, S8, S21	3
University education is not compulsory,	S6, S44	2
Attendance should change according to the course,	S30, S42	2
No friends	S5	1
Not to have crowded classes,	S50	
Makes you a social	S5	1
Some courses are irrelevant to department,	S18	1
There is no point in sleeping in the class,	S19	1
One may know the course content,	S21	1
We sleep late,	S24	1
Attending courses nonstop may destroy your psychology.	S5	1
Attendance should be compulsory	S4, S11, S12, S13, S15, S20, S22 S23, S25, S26, S27, S28, S31, S37, S39, S40, S45, S53, S54, S55, S56	21
Necessary for education	S4, S25, S37, S39, S40, S45, S53, S55, S56	9
Most do not attend courses,	S22, S25, S28, S31, S40, S45	6
Necessary for success and productivity,	S11, S25, S31, S39, S45, S53, S56	7
There should be more absenteeism right,	S13 S20, S23, S26, S54	5
There would be no missing information in business life,	S3, S4, S37, S40	4
Studying makes no sense otherwise	S12, S37, S39, S56	4
Required for a regular life,	S11, S15, S37	3
We lose every day we do not attend	S4, S25	2
No discipline is achieved,	S15.	1
Must be dependent on free will	S51	1
No learning without the instructor,	S27	1
We need practice.	S27	1

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When Table 3 is examined, the views of the participants are grouped under two important themes. 30 different coding were made under the themes of "compulsory attendance". Most participants (f=35) have the opinion that attendance mustn't be compulsory, and the others (f=21) think the opposite. The participants show their age as a reason (f=8) in the first place under the theme of not being compulsory. Participants who see themselves as adults state that they are old enough to make their own decisions about attending the courses. Participants who think that there should be no obligation because they cannot attend school for some special reasons (f=7) are in the second place.

The first most voted reason under the theme of attendance should be compulsory in the table (f=9) is "Necessity of attendance for education". According to the students who think that attendance must be compulsory cited that if the courses were not compulsory, most students would not attend the courses (f=7), and success and productivity would decrease. There were students (f=5) who think that attendance to classes must be compulsory but the legally allowed duration for absenteeism should be longer. Statements of some of the participants are given below:

> I'm in favor of compulsory attendance as it is necessary for our education. I think we lose something for every day that we are absent. This situation may force us in the future in terms of being lack of necessary knowledge, experience and practice for our jobs (S4).
>
> Attendance should not be compulsory. It's absurd to have an absenteeism limit. Anyone who does not want to attend, shouldn't attend. We are 20 years old. Let those who want to come, do people who do not come harm the school? How many of us will have jobs when school is over anyway? They do not tell us how to find a job, they teach us what to do if we find a job (S7).
>
> I don't think it should be compulsory. Because we are people who have come to a certain age. We are old enough to make our own decisions. In all our lives, from primary school to high school, we always attended to school as it was compulsory. I think that this decision should be left to us in our university life (S9).
>
> Attendance should not be compulsory. In case of health problems, rest is required (S17).
>
> Attendance should not be compulsory because students may experience difficulties due to their special circumstances. In other words, there could be private situations, we may go to bed late, we may have fun at night, or there can be other special reasons (S24).
>
> It should be compulsory in my opinion. We will be professionals, have jobs. We need to be educated. If we are absent, we will not understand anything from the department we are studying or from our university life (S37).
>
> Attendance should not be compulsory. Everyone is over the age of nineteen and is of legal age. Individuals who know their responsibilities already know which courses to take and care about. Imposition always provokes negative reactions. I think that people should not be forced in the early hours of the morning (S41).
>
> Attendance should be compulsory because when this situation is removed, the efficiency of lessons will decrease. There will be indiscipline. If absenteeism is eliminated, everyone will begin to act arbitrarily and not attend classes. Classes that no one goes will cease to be held. In such a case, school becomes meaningless. Continuation is required (S53).

Compulsory attendance to classes is not supported by most of the participants as seen above statements and Table 3. However, as some of the participants stated above, without attendance there won't be any meaning of schooling. Most are ready not to attend classes and they already have some reasons. Without compulsory attendance classes will not be productive without class environment provided by the instructors.

3.2. Ways to Ensure Attendance to Classes

Providing student attendance to classes is very important for academic development, learning and teaching activities. Without attendance it is not possible to diagnose student needs, and learning requirements. It would not be realistic to accept students developing necessary skills without the instructions at the school environment. However, a different point of view can be found by questioning those who do not attend courses regularly to get a striking response to question "What makes a student attend the classes?" So, the questions "What would make you attend the classes? What would you recommend to administrators and instructors?" were asked, and the answers were analyzed and the results are given in the table below.

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Table 4. Ways to ensure attendance to classes

	Themes	Participant Codes	*f*
class and instructor related issues to ensure attendance	No classes at early hour of the morning.	S5,S6,S12,S13,S17,S19,S21,S22,S23,S25, S28,S31,S32,S34,S35,S36,S39,S42,S43, S44, S45, S46, S48	23
	Classes should be a fun.	S1,S4,S8,S12,S20,S21,S26,S37,S38,S40,S41, S45, S47, S49, S51, S52, S55, S56	15
	Classes should attract attention.	S1,S2,S4,S15,S24,S26,S29,S29,S37,S41, S47, S49, S51, S52, S55, S56	12
	More practice.	S3, S5, S12, S15, S27, S30, S46, S48, S51, S55	8
	More visualized classes.	S15, S31, S37, S38, S40, S41, S49, S51	7
	Short class hours.	S2 S6, S7, S10, S18, S43,S45, S53	7
	Using effective teaching technics.	S9, S30, S37, S40, S41, S48, S51,S55	6
	Being more understanding.	S14, S16, S20, S35, S46, S52, S53	5
	Longer breaks.	S6, S7, S9, S44, S53, S54, S56	4
	Less classes.	S8, S23, S31,	3
	More meaningful classes.	S3, S12, S31, S55	3
	No rigid instructor.	S2, S26,S52	2
	Group assignments.	S8,	1
	More breaks.	S4,	1
	Difficult classes not in one day.	S4, S54	1
	Friendly Instructors	S5, S55, S56	1
School related issues to ensure attendance	More activities (academic, sports, social, cultural).	S2, S3, S5, S7, S8, S9, S10, S12, S16, S17, S18, S21, S23, S24, S41, S42, S46, S47, S50, S52	18
	Easier transportation	S22, S23, S32, S35, S46, S49	6
	Comfortable seats in the classes.	S12, S33,S46	2
	Solving students' problems.	S11, S14,	2
	A better curriculum.	S23, S56	1
	Fun competitions.	S17,	1
	Colorful cushions on the lawn.	S17,	1
	Cheaper coffee in the canteen.	S44,	1
	No class one day in week days.	S7,	1
	Electronic boards.	S12,	1

As seen in Table 4, the suggestions of the participants were gathered under two important themes. These themes are named as the duties for the classes and the instructors, and duties for the school. Nearly half of the participants (f=23) recommend no lessons in the early hours in the morning. In fact, some of the students whose statements were examined suggested that the lessons should be put in the afternoon. In addition, when Table 2, in which the reasons for students' absenteeism are given, is examined, it is seen that sleep distress emerges as the second most important reason for absenteeism after health problems. This shows that the students made their suggestions in parallel with the reasons for absenteeism. The second suggestions of the students regarding the courses and the instructors are that the lessons should be fun (f=15), and thirdly, that the lesson should attract attention (f=12). Some other important suggestions are that more practical classes, visual-based lectures should be given, course durations should be short, and teachers should not just read, they should add something to the content of the course.

When the duties regarding the school in Table 4 are examined, the first important duty is to increase the activities (f=18). The activities such as concerts and competitions held outside of classes will attract students to school. The second suggestion regarding the school in the table is the

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suggestion of easy transportation. Considering that students' waiting for the bus for a long time and not being able to find a place in the buses are among the reasons for their absenteeism, so their suggestion to have easier transportation is more meaningful. The following statements support the data in Table 4:

> *Lessons can be handled in a more fun way. It would be better if the slides were explained in a way that would attract the attention of the students without reading them (S1).*
>
> *I recommend shortening the duration of the lessons, reducing the number of lessons or not having a class on a weekday. I recommend increasing the activities in the school. There are more activities outside, so why should we come to school (S7).*
>
> *Since there are not many activities to attract our attention to the school, students are not depended to the school. Activities can be done at school. I think the most logical way would be to reduce the lesson times. Or I suggest that there should not be block lessons, this increases fatigue (S10).*
>
> *Instructors should teach more effectively, lessons should be interesting, and there should be a visual-based lecture. In addition, I recommend that there must be more practical classes than theoretical classes (S15).*
>
> *Setting the class hours to early hours prevents the student from attending the classes. That's why I suggest that classes be put at a late time, so I think there will be more participation (S25).*
>
> *I think the majority of classes should start in the afternoon. Students have difficulty in waking up during the day. If the classes start in the afternoon, it will not be so difficult for the students to wake up (S28).*
>
> *First of all, classes should be fun for me, which is related with the instructor. Classes should involve the student in the lesson, the type of narration made through the presentation bores the students since it is generally a straight information loading. If this method, which is generally used by our instructors is changed, the classes will be more fluent, entertaining and based on visual elements, and students' attendance will increase (S40).*

As the statements above analyzed, it is apparent that instructors must improve their teaching methodology, have a friendly atmosphere in the classroom. The university campuses must have extracurricular activities to make students come to campuses most of which are generally localized outside the city centers in Turkey.

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

It is seen that students' absenteeism due to health problems is not directly related to the epidemic. As in similar studies in the literature (Sarıdere & Arslan, 2017) health problems as a reason for absenteeism was also found as an important reason. However, fear of being ill and catching Covid-19 could be a specific finding for the study. The analysis showed that to increase the attendance to the courses, instructors, schools and students have tasks to do. The schools for example should not plan lessons in the early hours. However, in similar studies (Altınkurt, 2008; Pehlivan, 2011; Şimşek et al., 2016; Uğurlu et al., 2015; Usta et al., 2014) there is not any similar recommendation. This situation can be explained by the long school closure due to Covid-19 which would change students sleeping habit. The course attendance habits of the students have changed in a period of about 2-year school closure, when the courses were not held face-to-face, and the course evaluations were made online with homework and project studies. The duties regarding the course and the teaching staff are related to the way the courses are taught. It has been observed that suggestions such as entertaining lessons, interesting lessons, more practice rather than theoretical explanations, and teaching lessons with visual materials are similar in the literature (Altınkurt, 2008; Uğurlu et al. 2015; Usta et al., 2014).

In this study, the reasons for absenteeism of university students were tried to be examined. In addition, whether attendance should be compulsory or not and the ways to ensure students' attendance to the courses were examined. In the study, qualitative methodology was used, and the content analysis method was used in the analysis of the data collected in accordance with the phenomenology.

According to the findings, the most important reason for absenteeism is health problems. It is seen that the second important reason for students' absenteeism is waking up early. Stress and depression, classes being at early hours of the morning, family and transportation problems, and attitudes of academic staff were mentioned as important reasons for absenteeism. It is seen that the long course hours, lack of sufficient activities in the school environment, not finding the lessons meaningful and informative enough also affect the students' attendance. It was revealed that there should be no obligation to attend classes according to the university students as they desire to be conducted as adults due to their ages. Furthermore, students would listen to the lesson more efficiently if they attend with their own will. University students also claim that those who are responsible would attend without any forcing power.

The analysis of the opinions showed that to increase the attendance there are duties for teaching staff, school and students. Lessons should not be planned in the early hours. Schools must increase the number of the social, cultural and sportive activities and solve the transportation problem. Instructors must use more interesting teaching technics and improve their teaching skills.

In accordance with the results of the study, the following suggestions have been developed to increase attendance rate at universities:

1) Course hours can be set to later hours during the day, or methods for students to go to bed early and wake up early can be developed as waking up early is one of the main problems.

2) Preventing the lessons from being boring and monotonous, making them more fun, increasing the interest of the students in the lessons and providing sufficient motivation would increase the attendance to the lessons. In this direction, instructors should develop their own teaching methods and techniques and make the lessons more interesting.

3) Transportation problem is seen as a reason for students' absenteeism in many studies. The municipality should increase the number of vehicles on the university route for the transportation of university students, and take into account the start and end times of the lesson hours, and add additional vehicles according to the student density. Alternatively, when the municipalities cannot find a solution to transportation problem, university administrations should follow a different timetable policy by changing the course hours on the basis of faculty or program, preventing thousands of students from starting or finishing the course at the same time, in order to prevent student cluttering.

4) Reducing the theoretical knowledge load, omitting the courses that are not related to the student's field from the curriculum, simplifying the course content and reducing the number of lessons, and not making block lessons can increase student attendance to the courses.

5) Schools should not be designed as spaces consisting of only four walls. The school is also the living space of the students. Among the students' suggestions for the school, the most important issue was the organization of social, cultural and sportive activities and the organization of fun competitions. Considering this suggestion, social activity programs should be organized, and university campuses should have the appearance of abandoned building blocks outside the classroom.

Similar studies can be done for specific faculties and departments to find out specific reasons and locally changeable reasons for absenteeism. Moreover, this is a qualitative study and the data collected were limited to the participants at a university. More participants and different study methods can be used with multiple university environments to better diagnose and examine the reasons of absenteeism. Administrators and policy makers are suggested to take into consideration the results of scientific researches and develop policies to minimize student absenteeism.

Ethics Committee Decision

Ethics Committee Report of this research; It was taken from the Social and Human Sciences Research Ethics Committee of Tokat Gaziosmanpaşa University, with the decision dated 27.04.2022, Session No.07 and numbered 07.54.

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