

Factors Influencing Student's Non-Attendance in Higher Education : A Behavioral Perspective

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Abstract : Student non-attendance is a multifaceted concern in higher education because it may limit learning opportunities, weaken academic engagement, and reduce students' sense of belonging. From a behavioral perspective, attendance is shaped not only by personal motivation but also by perceived value, habits, self-regulation, social influence, teaching practices, institutional conditions, and practical barriers. This paper develops a behavioral framework to examine factors associated with students' non-attendance in higher education. It proposes a cross-sectional, mixed-method study using a structured student questionnaire and a small number of semi-structured interviews. The proposed sample consists of approximately 300 undergraduate students selected through stratified sampling across year of study and programme, subject to institutional permission and feasibility. Descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, correlation, and multiple regression are proposed for quantitative analysis, while thematic analysis will be used for interview responses. As primary data have not yet been collected, no empirical findings are claimed. The expected outcome is that attendance will be associated with an interaction of individual, academic, social, and institutional factors rather than a single cause. The study is expected to inform supportive attendance strategies that strengthen engagement and address barriers without relying solely on punitive measures.

Keywords: Student attendance, non-attendance, higher education, student behavior, academic engagement, self-regulation, institutional support

1. Introduction

Regular attendance provides students with opportunities to participate in classroom discussion, receive immediate feedback, collaborate with peers, and connect course concepts with applied learning. However, students may miss classes for reasons that range from illness, caregiving and employment responsibilities to low perceived relevance, disengagement, timetable constraints, learning difficulties, and classroom climate. Treating all absences as equivalent can therefore obscure the different mechanisms that shape attendance behavior.

A behavioral perspective views attendance as a decision and a developing habit occurring within a particular learning environment. Students weigh the perceived benefits and costs of attending, respond to cues and routines, and are influenced by expectations, peers, and institutional practices. The same student may attend consistently in one course and irregularly in another, suggesting that attendance is partly context-dependent. This paper frames non-attendance as a behavior with multiple possible determinants and proposes a feasible

research design for examining those determinants among undergraduate students. The focus is explanatory and improvement-oriented: understanding patterns and barriers can help institutions design timely, proportionate, and student-centered responses.

2. Statement of the Problem

Despite institutional attendance policies, some higher education students demonstrate irregular attendance. A simple explanation based on lack of interest may overlook structural and situational barriers, including paid work, travel time, health, family duties, course scheduling, teaching approaches, and access to academic support.

Without distinguishing these influences, interventions may fail to address the reasons students miss classes. The research problem is therefore to identify and examine the behavioral, academic, social, and institutional factors associated with non-attendance.

3. Objectives of the Study

- To identify key personal, behavioral, academic, social, and institutional factors associated with student non-attendance.

- To examine the relationship between motivation, perceived usefulness of classes, self-regulation, and attendance behavior.
- To explore how teaching practices, peer influence, timetable design, and institutional support relate to attendance.
- To understand students' self-reported reasons for missing classes and the strategies they consider helpful.
- To suggest evidence-informed measures for improving engagement and reducing avoidable non-attendance.

4. Research Questions

- What are the most frequently reported reasons for non-attendance among undergraduate students?
- How are motivation, perceived value, learning habits, and self-regulation associated with attendance?
- How do classroom experience, peer norms, scheduling, and institutional support relate to attendance?
- What forms of institutional response do students perceive as supportive and practical?

5. Conceptual Background and Review of Literature

The theory of planned behavior proposes that behavior is related to intention, which is shaped by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 1991). Applied to attendance, students may be more inclined to attend when they value classroom learning, perceive attendance as socially expected, and believe that practical barriers are manageable. The framework does not imply that intention alone determines attendance; circumstances may prevent students from acting on their intentions.

Self-determination theory distinguishes more autonomous forms of motivation from behavior driven primarily by external pressure (Deci & Ryan, 2000). In a learning context, students may be more engaged when they experience competence, autonomy, and relatedness. Teaching that supports participation and makes learning meaningful may contribute to students' willingness to attend, although the strength and direction of such relationships must be tested in the specific institutional context.

Research on student engagement emphasizes the importance of students' participation in educationally purposeful activities and their interaction with the learning environment (Kahu, 2013). Attendance is one observable component of engagement, but it is not identical to learning, effort, or achievement. A student

may be physically present but disengaged; conversely, a student who misses a session may engage through other learning activities. Attendance should therefore be interpreted alongside students' reported experiences and contextual conditions.

The present study combines these perspectives into a practical framework. Individual-level variables include motivation, habit strength, self-regulation, wellbeing-related day-to-day constraints, and perceived course value.

Course-level variables include teaching methods, classroom climate, workload, and perceived relevance. Social and institutional variables include peer norms, faculty communication, attendance rules, academic advising, timetable fit, commute, and access to learning resources. These domains are treated as potentially related rather than mutually exclusive.

6. Proposed Conceptual Framework

Personal and behavioral factors (motivation, habit, self-regulation, perceived value) + **academic factors** (teaching practices, course relevance, workload, classroom climate) + **social factors** (peer norms, family/work responsibilities) + **institutional and practical factors** (timetable, commute, support, attendance policy) → **attendance behavior / non-attendance** → possible implications for engagement and perceived learning.

The framework is associative. The proposed cross-sectional design can identify relationships but cannot establish that a factor causes non-attendance. Reverse relationships are possible: for example, repeated absence may itself reduce belonging or perceived course value.

7. Research Hypotheses

- H1: Higher perceived usefulness and relevance of classroom learning will be positively associated with attendance.
- H2: Stronger academic self-regulation and attendance habits will be positively associated with attendance.
- H3: More supportive classroom experiences will be positively associated with attendance.
- H4: Greater perceived practical barriers (such as work commitments, commute, or timetable conflict) will be associated with lower attendance.
- H5: Perceived peer support for academic participation will be positively associated with attendance.

These are proposed hypotheses and should be refined after reviewing the institution's attendance definitions and piloting the questionnaire.

8. Research Methodology

8.1 Research Design

A cross-sectional mixed-method design is proposed. The quantitative component will use a structured questionnaire to measure attendance patterns and potential explanatory factors. The qualitative component will use semi-structured interviews to capture context and explanations that may not be represented adequately by fixed-response items. The design is suitable for an initial institutional study, while longitudinal or course-level research would be required to examine change over time.

8.2 Population and Study Setting

The target population will be undergraduate students enrolled in programmes offered by the Department of Management Studies at Christ Academy Institute for Advanced Studies, Bengaluru. If the researchers intend to generalize beyond this department or institution, the population and sampling frame must be expanded accordingly. The final paper should report the actual eligible student population and the period of data collection.

8.3 Sample Size and Sampling Technique

A target of approximately 300 completed student questionnaires is proposed, subject to the size of the accessible population, response rate, ethics approval, and available time. Stratified sampling by programme and year of study is recommended to ensure representation across relevant student groups. Within each stratum, students may be selected randomly from an authorized enrolment list. If random selection is not feasible, the authors should transparently describe the actual approach as convenience or voluntary-response sampling and acknowledge the resulting limits to generalizability. A pilot involving approximately 20–30 students, excluded from the final analysis where appropriate, is recommended to check clarity, timing, and item functioning.

8.4 Data Collection Instrument

The questionnaire may contain five sections: (A) non-identifying demographic and academic profile; (B) self-reported attendance frequency over a clearly specified recent period; (C) motivation and perceived course value; (D) self-regulation, classroom experience, peer influence, and institutional support; and (E) practical

barriers and open-ended suggestions. Attitudinal items may use a five-point Likert scale from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Attendance should preferably be validated against authorized institutional records in aggregated or consented form, where permitted. The survey should avoid collecting unnecessary sensitive information.

Illustrative questionnaire items: “I find the topics covered in class useful for my academic or career goals”; “I plan my schedule to attend classes regularly”; “The teaching methods encourage me to participate”; “Travel or timetable constraints sometimes prevent me from attending”; “I know where to seek help when I face academic difficulties.” These items are examples, not a validated scale, and require expert review and pilot testing.

8.5 Qualitative Component

Approximately 10–15 voluntary student interviews are proposed, or until the collected responses provide adequate thematic depth within the project’s practical limits. Interview prompts may explore typical reasons for absence, differences between courses, experiences of classroom participation, practical constraints, and institutional supports students would find useful. Participation must be voluntary, and interview notes or recordings should be handled confidentially.

8.6 Data Collection Procedure

After obtaining institutional permission and applicable ethics approval, the researchers will explain the study purpose, voluntary nature of participation, confidentiality safeguards, and the right to withdraw. Informed consent will be obtained before data collection. The survey may be administered online or in person without faculty pressure or any effect on grades, attendance eligibility, or access to services. Data collection dates, response rate, exclusions, and missing-data handling should be documented.

8.7 Variables and Operationalization

Construct	Possible operational measure
Outcome	Self-reported attendance percentage or ordered attendance-frequency category for a defined period; record-based measure if authorized.
Motivation / course value	Mean of reviewed Likert items on interest, usefulness, and relevance.
Self-regulation / habit	Items on planning, routine, time management, and follow-through.
Classroom experience	Items on teaching clarity, interaction, inclusion, and perceived learning value.
Peer norms / support	Items on peer encouragement, shared study routines, and perceived attendance norms.
Practical barriers	Frequency or perceived severity of commute, work, timetable, family, financial, or access constraints.
Institutional support	Awareness and perceived usefulness of advising, faculty communication, and learning support.

8.8 Techniques of Data Analysis

Data will be coded and analyzed using SPSS, R, or an equivalent statistical package. The proposed analysis includes: (1) data screening and descriptive statistics; (2) internal consistency assessment for multi-item constructs, with item review rather than reliance on a single threshold; (3) exploratory factor analysis if the sample and item structure are adequate; (4) bivariate correlations; and (5) multiple regression with attendance as the outcome. If attendance is measured in ordered categories, ordinal logistic regression may be more appropriate than ordinary least squares. Model choice should follow the distribution, measurement level, and assumptions of the observed data. Results should include effect estimates, confidence intervals, model diagnostics, and exact sample sizes. Interview responses will be coded thematically, with themes compared against the quantitative patterns.

8.9 Ethical Considerations

The study should receive institutional ethics approval or the applicable formal determination before recruitment. Participation must be informed and voluntary. Individual responses should not be shared with teaching staff for attendance enforcement, and reporting should use aggregated results to reduce re-identification risk. Students must be assured that declining or withdrawing will not affect academic standing. Any use of attendance records requires explicit institutional authorization and an appropriate privacy basis.

9. Expected Results

Because data have not been collected, the following are expectations to be examined, not actual findings:

- Students are likely to report a combination of motivational and practical reasons for absence; no single factor is expected to explain all non-attendance.
- Perceived course relevance, interactive teaching, and a supportive classroom climate are expected to show positive associations with attendance.
- Planning, time management, and stable attendance routines are expected to be associated with more regular participation.
- Work or family responsibilities, travel burden, timetable clashes, and health-related day-to-day constraints may be reported as barriers, with their importance varying across student groups.
- Peer norms and accessible academic support may be associated with attendance, though these relationships may differ by programme, year, and course.
- Qualitative responses are expected to identify context-specific explanations and practical suggestions that can help interpret statistical associations. The study may also find that some commonly assumed factors have weak or inconsistent associations after other variables are considered. Such a result would be useful because it would caution against one-size-fits-all interventions. Any final conclusion must be based only on the analyzed data and must report non-significant as well as significant results.

10. Discussion (Anticipated Contribution)

The proposed framework treats attendance as a behavior embedded in students' academic and everyday environments. If the expected associations are observed, the findings would support a layered institutional response: make learning outcomes and course relevance explicit; use participatory teaching where appropriate; help students develop planning routines; communicate support options clearly; and review avoidable scheduling or access barriers. These implications should be considered as possibilities to be assessed against the actual findings, not as predetermined conclusions. The study may contribute at the institutional level by distinguishing factors that students can influence from conditions that require course-level or institutional action. It may also help faculty interpret absence as a signal for inquiry and support rather than automatically as evidence of indifference. Attendance records alone cannot reveal the quality of engagement, so a balanced

interpretation should include students' experiences and learning context.

11. Limitations

A single-institution sample may limit generalizability. Self-reported attendance and reasons for absence may be affected by recall or social desirability bias. Cross-sectional data cannot establish causal direction. Voluntary participation and non-response may create selection bias. The proposed constructs and sample size require validation against the final questionnaire and accessible population. If attendance records are unavailable, the paper should clearly identify attendance as self-reported. These limitations should be revisited after data collection.

12. Conclusion

Student non-attendance in higher education is best examined as a multidimensional behavioral and contextual phenomenon. Motivation, perceived learning value, self-regulation, classroom experience, peer norms, institutional support, and practical constraints may interact in shaping attendance. This paper proposes a mixed-method study to investigate these relationships among undergraduate students. Its expected contribution is a context-sensitive understanding that can guide supportive, evidence-informed engagement practices. Since the study is proposed, empirical conclusions should be added only after data are collected and analyzed.

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Appendix A: Suggested Structure for the Final Empirical Paper

After completing the study, replace the proposed sample and expected results with the actual population, recruitment process, valid response count, instrument reliability/validity evidence, descriptive tables, statistical model outputs, qualitative themes, and data-supported discussion. Include the study period, ethics approval details where appropriate, and a transparent account of missing data and exclusions. Do not present anticipated results as observed findings.

Appendix B: Brief Interview Guide

- Can you describe situations in which you are more or less likely to attend a class?
- What are the main reasons that may prevent you from attending, even when you intend to?
- How do teaching style, course relevance, and classroom interaction affect your decision to attend?
- How do peers, work, family responsibilities, travel, and timetable arrangements affect attendance?
- What could the institution or faculty do to make regular attendance more achievable and meaningful?