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Socio-Economic Factors Responsible for Absenteeism Among University Students in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa-Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

Students' absenteeism is a persistent challenge in higher education that poses a serious threat to students' academic engagement and institutional effectiveness. In the developing world, absenteeism is strongly associated with socio-economic disparities that limit the students to participate in academic activities on a regular basis. The objective of this study was to investigate the relationship between students' absenteeism and socioeconomic factors in higher education institutions in District Charsadda, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Pakistan. The quantitative research design was applied in the study with structured Likert scale questionnaire. A total of 374 respondents were selected by stratified random sampling technique from Bacha Khan University Charsadda and Government Postgraduate College Charsadda. The collected data were analyzed using SPSS, whereas chi-square test was applied to determine the association between socioeconomic factors and student absenteeism. The results indicated a strong association between student's absenteeism and several socioeconomic factors, such as financial stress, transportation challenges, distance, morbidity, food insecurity, housing instability, family financial pressures, work roles, and decreased academic motivation because of economic pressure. The findings concluded that effective plans to reduce absenteeism must address students' socio-economic conditions. Higher education institutions should have implemented need-based financial support, transportation assistance, in-campus health and food programs, and comprehensive student welfare policies to promote regular attendance and educational equity.

Keywords: Student absenteeism, higher education, socioeconomic factors, financial hardships, educational inequality

Introduction

Education is the key of success to any nation. It gives the fundamental knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes to the people that are required for personal development and active involvement in society. It is widely recognized as a foundation of social, economic and national progress. Regular attendance of students is important in learning because education helps an individual to get information, knowledge and new ideas which may change the life.

Frequent classroom participation improves academic performance and learning results making student attendance a crucial measure of academic engagement and performance (Rivers, 2010).

Absenteeism is the state where student do not attained university with a reason; it is the negative behavior, which affects the student's performance. The propensity to be missing the university without the good reasons is an act of absenteeism (Ali, 2023). The term absenteeism discussions a situation where the learner is not present or available in the study area for whole day, due to verity of the reasons like deficiency of suitable resources, lack of the academic staff, or shortage of any equipment (Reid, 2013). Due to financial limitations, restricted access to educational resources, transportation issues, and competing household chores, students from low-income families are consistently shown by empirical data to be more prone to absenteeism (Latif, Choudhary & Hammayun, 2015).

Student absenteeism has become a major academic and institutional issue, especially in developing areas like Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan, where insufficient investments in education quality and student well-being have made the situation worse (Pamuk, Göktaş & Aslan, 2025; Komakech & Osuu, 2014). In the developing countries financial hardships is a big contributor in absenteeism, therefore, this research was conducted to identify the cases behind students' absenteeism. The study aimed to establish the understanding about perceived impact of absenteeism of students in their academic performance.

Literature review

Student absenteeism is a persistent educational challenge worldwide, deeply rooted in socioeconomic inequalities that shape students' access to and engagement with education. Absenteeism among students is a long-term challenge facing the education system in the global arena, which is highly rooted in socioeconomic inequalities that determine access and participation of students in the education sector. Absenteeism in wealthy nations like the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Europe is frequently linked to relative poverty rather than complete deprivation. Studies conducted in the United States have demonstrated that children of low-income families are more likely to be absent due to food insecurity, housing instability, health conditions and the need to work part time (Gottfried, 2014; Haq et al., 2025; Ready, 2010). Likewise, irregular attendance in Canada has as well been attributed to socioeconomic hardship, neighborhood deprivation, and parental education especially among immigrant and marginalized communities (Hancock et al., 2018). Similarly, United Kingdom and European countries highlight how unemployment among parents, welfare dependency and social exclusion can affect school attendance of children. Low-income households also have a higher chance of missing out on school due to financial burden, ill health (Reid, 2013). Although education systems are universal, inequality in socioeconomic status, still impacts absenteeism in Europe, proving that income inequality and unstable family structures still persist in hindering the attendance in even the welfare-oriented countries (Kearney and Graczyk, 2014).

In developing countries, absenteeism is more closely related to extreme poverty and the necessity

for survival. Because they cannot afford tuition, uniforms, transportation, and study materials, students in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia often skip class (Hunt, 2008). Similarly, students are sometimes compelled by financial pressures, particularly in rural locations, to work, do household chores, or provide care for others. Absenteeism is made worse by subpar infrastructure, lengthy commutes, and subpar health and nutrition. Especially in Pakistan absenteeism is particularly prevalent at the secondary and postsecondary education levels due

to socioeconomic reasons. Financial difficulties, transportation challenges, food insecurity, health problems, and family economic duties are all major contributors to decreased student attendance (Latif et al., 2015; Khalid, 2017).

Absenteeism is made worse by cultural norms, early marriages, and the prioritizing of household income over schooling, particularly for kids from rural and low-income families. Despite the presence of formal attendance policies at institutions, structural inequalities continue to restrict students' ability to meet institutional expectations. Despite the fact that a large body of research covers the socioeconomic factors that contribute to absenteeism, three major gaps persist. Firstly, the majority of research from wealthy nations focuses on absenteeism at school level and very few are made with the same in the higher education institution of the developing countries. Most of the studies that are being done in Pakistan are either qualitative or of descriptive nature and lack proper application of quantitative techniques to relate absenteeism to certain socioeconomic indicators. Third, few integrated frame work link material deprivation in terms of food, housing, and transportation with such aspects of psychological problems as shame, stress, and diminished academic motivation. It will be necessary to address the mentioned shortcomings and establish policies that can be viewed as context-sensitive and not limited to the enforcement of attendance but rather to socioeconomic support mechanisms.

Theoretical framework

This study was conducted under the framework of Social Reproduction Theory (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). This theory directly addresses how socioeconomic disparities absenteeism rather than seeing it as an individual failing. According to the theory, educational institutions tend to replicate existing class-based disparities by favoring students with enough economic and social capital. Considering this study, things like financial difficulties, food insecurity, housing instability, and lack of transportation, family economic burden, and the necessity to work restrict students' capacity to fulfill institutional requirements for consistent attendance. Furthermore, the discovery that absenteeism is increased by economic shame and decreased motivation shows symbolic disadvantage, in which students internalize poverty-related exclusion. As a result, absenteeism is a structural result of unequal socioeconomic circumstances, which is consistent with the empirical data of this study.

Material and methods

Nature of the Study

The current study was based on quantitative approach where cross-sectional design was adopted to conduct the study (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009).

Universe of the Study

The study was conducted in District Charsadda Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Pakistan, including Bacha Khan University Charsadda and Government Post Graduate Collage Charsadda. The area was selected because the people of District Charsadda mostly belong to rural areas and socioeconomically are instable where they face many financial challenges.

Scope of the Study

The study is important because it's identifying the issues related to students. The study was undertaken with the hope to find out various factors behind students.

Sampling procedure and sample size

The study employed stratified random sampling technique. Research was conducted in higher educational institutions of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Pakistan at Bacha Khan University and Government Post Graduate Collage Charsadda. Total population of students in both areas was 5871 from which sample size of 374 respondents were selected for this study. The sample size was measured through Slovin's formula (Solvin, 1960).

Based on Solvin's (1960) formula, the sample size was estimated as follows:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + Ne} \quad \text{Equation- (1)}$$

n= sample size

N= size of population (5871)

e= margin of error (0.05)

n= 374

Tools of Data Collection

A well-structured three Likert scale was used for the data collection in this study. The questionnaire was used because the respondents were highly educated.

Data Analysis

Data were entered and analyzed using SPSS software Version 26. In first stage the collected data were entered in SPSS, and then coded these data. In second stage, Chi-square test was applied on data to see the association between different statements and students' absenteeism.

Results

Association between Socio-economic factors and student's absenteeism

Table 4.1 presents the association between socioeconomic causes and its impacts on students' absenteeism. The result shows a strong association was found between students' absenteeism and difficulties in affording fees, uniforms, or books ($\chi^2=41.570$, $P= 0.000$). Majority of the respondents (66.4%) showed that they were facing financial issues that suffered their class presence, while (33.0%) stated that they did not face such sort of difficulties. This indicates that financial restrictions significantly increase the likelihood of missing classes, highlighting the role of economic barriers in limiting students' regular attendance.

Similarly, a highly significant association was found between long distance from home and students' absenteeism ($\chi^2=38.916$, $P= 0.000$). Respondents who supposed the university as far from their houses, reported higher absenteeism (69.3%) compared to their counterparts (30.9%). These finding highlights that traveling challenges and travel costs contributed to students' absence from academic activities.

Moreover, a highly significance association was noted between students' absenteeism due to their health issues ($\chi^2=26.704$, $P= (0.000)$). This shows that 67.1% of the respondents' class attendances were affected due to health problems as compared to 32.3%. This suggests that poor health, linked with insufficient access to healthcare and nutrition, plays an important role in students' attendance patterns.

Likewise, a significance association was found between transportation makes commuting difficult students' absenteeism ($\chi^2=37.403$, $P= 0.001$). 70.5% of the respondents experienced transportation difficulties which show higher absenteeism, compared to those without such challenges (29.2%). This result shows infrastructural and economic limitations as key causes of attendance, particularly for students from low-income households.

Similarly, a very strong association was shown between housing instability and students' absenteeism ($\chi^2=43.440$, $P= 0.000$). 69.9% of the respondents experienced housing instability

leading to remain absent from classes. This result underlines how unstable living conditions disturb students' academic practices and reduce their capability to attend university regularly. Moreover, a highly significant association shown by students' absenteeism and feeling embarrassed about having less money than friends ($\chi^2=49.891$, $P= .000$). Respondents who had economic-related shame and inferiority complex had a very high absenteeism rate (71.4%), saying that psychosocial effects of poverty such as shame and social rejection also dissatisfy classroom participation as compared to their counterparts.

Additionally, a significance association was established between financial priorities reduce attendance and students' absenteeism ($\chi^2=32.859$, $P= 0.000$). About (69.9%) of respondents who reported that family pressures of demanding money, experienced absenteeism, compared to (35.6%) who have no such family pressure. This representing that competing economic responsibilities reduce students' ability to prioritize their own education.

Moreover, highly significance association was found between students' absenteeism and lack of food reason of attendance ($\chi^2=36.245$, $P= 0.000$). Respondents who reported hunger as a reason for missing classes, (70.5%) were absent from their classes. This highlights that direct link between basic needs deficiency and reduced academic participation.

Further, a significance association was noted between students' absenteeism and provision of financial support to their families ($\chi^2=37.301$, $P= 0.000$). Respondents, who often provide financial responsibilities to their families, reported a high absenteeism rate (72.3%). The finding representing that economic survival frequently takes precedence over academic engagement for financially exposed students.

Finally, a highly significant association was found between students' absenteeism and unbalanced economic situation ($\chi^2=36.129$, $P= 0.000$). Students who felt disconnected due to economic stress stated the highest absenteeism (73.8%). This suggested that financial hardship not only affects attendance directly but also weakens students' long-term educational motivation.

Table 4.1 Relationship between Socio economic causes and student's absenteeism

Attributes	Responses	Students Absenteeism			Total	Chi-Square (P-Value)
		Yes	No	Don't Know		
I face difficulties in affording fees, uniforms, or books.	Yes	217 (66.4%)	108 (33.0%)	2 (0.6%)	327	$\chi^2=41.570$ $P=(0.000)$
	No	10 (47.6%)	11 (52.4%)	0 (0.0%)	21	
	Don't Know	5 (20.0%)	17 (68.0%)	3 (12.0%)	25	
The university is located at a long distance from my home.	Yes	131 (69.3%)	58 (30.7%)	0 (0.0%)	189	$\chi^2=38.916$ $P=(0.000)$
	No	96 (58.9%)	65 (39.9%)	2 (1.2%)	163	
	Don't Know	6 (27.3%)	13 (59.1%)	3 (13.6%)	22	

Illness or health issues prevent me from attending the classes.	Yes	212 (67.1%)	102 (32.3%)	2 (0.6%)	316	$\chi^2=26.704$ P=(0.000)
	No	12 (41.4%)	15 (51.7%)	2 (6.9%)	29	
	Don't Know	9 31.0%	19 65.5%	1 (3.4%)	29	
Lack of transportation makes commuting difficult.	Yes	198 (70.5%)	82 (29.2%)	1 (0.4%)	281	$\chi^2=37.403$ P=(0.001)
	No	25 (40.3%)	34 (54.8%)	3 (4.8%)	62	
	Don't Know	10 (32.3%)	20 (64.5%)	1 (3.2%)	31	
Housing instability or homelessness affects my attendance.	Yes	197 (69.9%)	83 (29.4%)	2 (0.7%)	282	$\chi^2=43.440$ P=(0.000)
	No	26 (52.0%)	24 (48.0%)	0 (0.0%)	50	
	Don't Know	10 (23.8%)	29 (69.0%)	3 (7.1%)	42	
I feel embarrassed about having less money than friends.	Yes	195 (71.4%)	76 (27.8%)	2 (0.7%)	273	$\chi^2=49.891$ P=(0.000)
	No	28 (47.5%)	31 (52.5%)	0 (0.0%)	59	
	Don't Know	10 (23.8%)	29 (69.0%)	3 (7.1%)	42	
My family's financial priorities (e.g., focusing on siblings' education or household needs) reduce my attendance.	Yes	157 (69.8%)	68 (30.2%)	0 (0.0%)	225	$\chi^2=32.859$ P=(0.000)
	No	62 (61.4%)	36 (35.6%)	3 (3.0%)	101	
	Don't Know	14 (29.2%)	32 (66.7%)	2 (4.2%)	48	
Lack of food or hunger is a reason of absenteeism.	Yes	194 (70.5%)	80 (29.1%)	1 (0.4%)	275	$\chi^2=36.245$ P=(0.000)
	No	26 (43.3%)	31 (51.7%)	3 (5.0%)	60	
	Don't Know	13 (33.3%)	25 (64.1%)	1 (2.6%)	39	
I often miss classes because I go to work to support my family financially.	Yes	136 (72.3%)	52 (27.7%)	0 (0.0%)	188	$\chi^2=37.301$ P=(0.000)
	No	84 (59.6%)	55 (39.0%)	2 (1.4%)	141	
	Don't Know	13 (28.9%)	29 (64.4%)	3 (6.7%)	45	

My economic situation makes me less concerned about earning a degree.	Yes	124 (73.8%)	44 (26.2%)	0 (0.0%)	168	$\chi^2=36.129$ P= (0.000)
	No	100 (59.2%)	65 (38.5%)	4 (2.4%)	169	
	Don't Know	9 (24.3%)	27 (73.0%)	1 (2.7%)	37	

Discussion

The findings indicate that the absenteeism of students is largely affected by the socioeconomic factors rather than individual indifferences or lack of motivation. Poverty emerged as the major socioeconomic factor, whereby the students who found it hard to afford tuition, textbooks, and basic necessities reported high absenteeism. Concurring evidence indicates that the presence of socioeconomic factors tends to limit the ability of students to engage actively within the higher education sector, including institutional, within the low and middle-income countries (Latif, Obesity & Ali, 2015; Khalid, 2017).

Absenteeism is also related to transportation difficulties and commute distances. Rural students and those belonging to lower socioeconomic families are often discouraged from attending classes regularly because of the lack of good transport networks and high costs associated with traveling. Students belonging to lower socioeconomic families are most affected by the problem of infrastructure inequality in both developing and developed countries due to similar patterns (Hunt, 2008; Haq et al., 2025; Kearney & Graczyk, 2014).

In consideration of more than just the importance of health-related issues, the absence of housing stability was also a factor that led to the absence of students from school. Based on Maslow's study, students are not capable of focusing on their school engagement if they have issues related to hunger, illnesses, and housing instability (Maslow, 1943). Based on the findings, a significant relationship exists between school absence and a bad living environment around the schools, particularly concerning the nutrition that students are subjected to (Gottfried, 2014).

Lastly, a significant determinant of absenteeism was the cost implications it placed on the family and the need to work in order to supplement the income of the family and increase it, and this shows that the duty to survive conflicts with the duty to school at times. Social Reproduction theory states that the education system indirectly promotes inequality in society by not accommodating children from poorer social classes (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). Other social factors such as the loss of dignity in poverty and the loss of focus on the need to earn a degree indicate the negative implications of financial need on the students' sense of belonging and educational vision (Reid, 2013).

Conclusion & recommendations

Student absenteeism remains a major problem higher education institution, particularly in communities with socioeconomic challenges. Students' absenteeism is mostly a result of socioeconomic factors, rather than individual difference or lack of motivation. Absenteeism can be related to financial problems, transportation, health, food security, housing, family financial problems, and the need to earn money. The study contributes to the existing literature by offering quantitative evidence that absenteeism can be seen as a problem related to structural socioeconomic problem, rather than individual behavior choice. These results are aligning with human capital theory and the theory of social reproduction, which posits how socioeconomic inequalities lead to educational inequality. The fact is that absenteeism is a complicated

socioeconomic problem with underlying inequalities that impact students' lives. To resolve the problem associated with absenteeism, shifting away from stick attendance regulation towards inclusive, equality-focused initiative. Improving attendance, long-term educational equity and academic achievement required investment in students' socioeconomic well-being.

Policy implications

These findings have greatly implication for which implies that institutions of higher education and policymakers should consider giving the top priority concern to support programs of students, which include need-based financial aid, free transport, health care services in campuses, food support programs, and ICT support.

Delimitations of the study

Although the study has contributed significantly to understand effects of absenteeism in schools or universities, the study has the following limitation. The study is cross-sectional and therefore, this might not be very helpful in understanding the level of absenteeism in schools since the study is specific to a given geographical area.

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