Reasons Which Drive Undergraduate Medical Students to attend Classes Regularly

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ABSTRACT

Background: In spite of implementation of numerous innovations in medical education globally, the teaching methodologies employed in medical colleges and other institutes of higher education in Pakistan mostly remains large classroom teaching. The outcome of these classroom activities is perhaps gauged by regularity in class-attendance which probably is the key expression of perception of students about the value and usefulness of the contents delivered to them.

The objective of the study was to explore the reasons which drive medical students to attend classes regularly and find any probable gap in the current relevant knowledge to undertake further research which may help to improve the teaching learning process in the undergraduate medical institutions.

Methods: This qualitative study was conducted from November 2015 to December 2016 using Grounded theory in constructivist paradigm. Purposive sampling technique was used to collect data by focus group discussion using audio-recording from 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th year MBBS students enrolled at Lahore Medical & Dental College, Lahore. The raw data was transliterated, translated and transcribed with analysis carried out through manual and computer aided methods using Qualitative Research Software NVIVO 11 pro version.

Results: The storyline generated the theory which proposed a conceptual model which identified three contextual factors mainly extrinsic: learner, institutional and societal which drive students to attend classes regularly.

Conclusion: Key findings of this study revealed that medical students demonstrated a pragmatic attitude towards regular class attendance the main influence factors being extrinsic as learner, institutional and societal with few intrinsic reasons. Failure is attributed to institutional environment by students rather than being personally responsible and major societal factor is parental role in local context.

Keywords: Students, Medical student, Regular class attendance, Attending classes

INTRODUCTION

Students' personal trait, active involvement in learning activities, participation in extracurricular activities and possessing a positive behavior for classroom attendance are four major components which are crucial for a successful teaching learning process, whereas, amongst these vital factors, students' class attendance which is an observable, measureable and accurately analyzable quantity, has recently gained considerable attention in the educational circles recently[3]. Regular class attendance is an act which the student himself is capable of controlling[1].

Although the factors which link regular class attendance and achievement of higher test scores are debatable, but attending classes on regular basis has a powerful correlation with being successful in examinations[2,3,4,5,6]. The students who attained high class attendance percentage achieved higher grades while those with low attendance percentage did not only show poor results in class tests, they performed poorly in the certification examinations as well[7]. Students' class attendance impacts medical teaching institutions immensely[8].

Medical institutes are expected to produce competent graduates, the objective which can only be achieved when the medical students practice a positive attitude towards regular class attendance which does not provide an official proof of graduates' competence only, it may also be strongly related with their annual examination results signifying its perceptions amongst medical students[9,10]

The words of advice mentioned in the articles published by senior college students for their junior fellows were "Success in college is about getting your butt up and going to class and getting your work done,"[11] "class attendance is crucial,"[12] and "you may find it tempting to sleep-in and skip class, however, you will quickly find that success in the class- room is linked to class attendance"[13]. These words of advice are not only applicable to the college students but for the learners studying in professional institutions, like medical college as well.

The dilemma of teaching larger number of students in lecture classes and simultaneously trying to uphold the excellence of medical education has become problematic for medical teachers and institutions[14].

The teaching learning academic environment of medical institutions have immense impact on student's class attendance. The rationale for exploring reasons driving students to attend regular classes was to throw light on issues through student's perspectives by Grounded theory methodology.

The objective of the study was to explore the reasons which drive medical students to attend classes regularly and find any probable gap in the current relevant knowledge to undertake further research which may help to improve the teaching learning process in the undergraduate medical institutions.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Lahore Medical and Dental College from November 2015 to December 2016. It was a qualitative study by using an explanatory strategy

employing Grounded theory method in constructivist paradigm. Study population were all LMDC, Lahore enrolled students with sampling frame taken of all MBBS students enrolled in MBBS.

All students studying in 2nd, 3rd, 4th and final year MBBS classes of LMDC were included in the study. All students who had migrated from other medical colleges within one year were excluded from the study. Purposeful maximum variation sampling technique was adopted with initial sample of 48 undergraduate medical students with 12 from each MBBS class. Twelve participants of each class with equal gender representation were divided into two focus groups A&B (FG) with six in each group. Group A of FG were students with less than 60% class attendance and of group B with more than 60% class attendance as per official record.

Initial sample was comprised of eight FG and subsequently 24 more medical students were similarly selected divided into eight FGDs, forward by selected divided into four (FG) thus, reaching a total of 12FGDs

An iterative study approach was adopted in data collection as basic construct of Grounded theory, all the process of data collection, coding of the data and analysis took place simultaneously. Data was collected through audio recording from November 2015 to December 2016, using focus group discussion (FGD) as data collection tool.

Initial data collection was from eight FGDs, followed by four more in the study, reaching the state of theoretical saturation at 11th FGD. A check list was used to trouble shoot all the procedures and a verbal and written consent was obtained from selected participant for the FGD.

The raw data obtained through FGD was transliterated, transcribed and translated in textual form by the researcher. The raw data was the mixture of Urdu, Punjabi and English languages, was thus first translated to English before further analysis.

Empirical textual data was analyzed by three steps coding process including open coding for categories, axial to identify relatedness, category linkages and selective for finding core category. Data analysis was by manual as well as compare using Qualitative Research Software NVIVO 11pro version. Nodes were created by selecting and coding a line or a segment in the textual data.

The purpose of research was to explore factors related with reasons driving medical students to attend classes regularly, which was indicated by evidence as presence of various contextual factors represented by "Node" developed using NVIVO.

RESULTS

Data selected on basis of similarities and linkages were given different categories as first step in open coding. The 36 initial categories resulted in evolvement of ten broad categories shown in figure 1.

The study found board category "Staying Obliged" had highest coding intensity with maximum reference from textual data linking to more factors contextual to the under-investigation phenomena compared to "Receiving Institutional Support" which carried the least references.

The coding intensities of initial categories linked with board categories are shown in figure 2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9.10.11.

Larger boxes indicate higher and smaller lower coding intensity.

Axial coding was done by conducting four FGDs during later phase of study, the categories developed were visited again and again till theoretical saturation reached at 11th FGDs with null possibility of evoking any new category. The links between initial and broad categories were established as illustrated in Figure 12. The board categories with alike and common inferences were clustered into specified themes asa axial codes shown in Figure 13.

Fig. 1: Initial and Broad categories emerged during Open Coding

Initial categories	Broad categories
Manifestation personal responsibility	Staying obliged
Fulfilling university attendance criteria	
Pursuing safe future professional practice	
Apprehending financial implications seeking incentives	
Avoiding personalities	
Feeling guilty	
Acquiring knowledge and skill aiming for pass grades	Achieving objectives
Attaining high grades	
Requiring teachers to possess higher level of skill and ability	Valuing teachers
Being impressed by teacher's personality	
Appraising teaching methodology	Valuing course dynamics
Being effected by class schedule	
Admiring teaching material	
Looking for assessment linked information	
Interacting with teachers	Reacting to institutional culture
Referring poor administrative practices	
Being tempted by external attractions	
Interacting with teachers	Approving classroom climate
Building rapport with faculty	
Appreciating class group size	
Interacting with peers	
Gratifying the parents	Responding to social factors
Responding to parents probe	
Facing inevitable circumstances	
Competing peers	Being motivated
Meeting teacher's expectations	
Socializing with friends in classroom	
Being maiden doctor of the family	
Concording peer pressure	Yielding to peer effect
Being inspired by peers	
Wanting co-curricular activities	Receiving institutional support
Appreciating parent teacher collaboration	

Figure 2: Coding Intensity of initial categories in broad category **"Staying Obliged"**

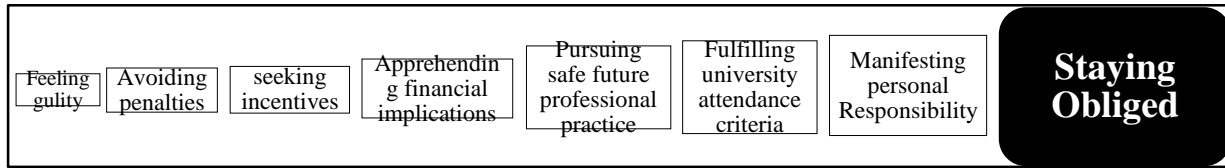| Feeling gulity | Avoiding penalties | seeking incentives | Apprehending financial implications | Pursuing safe future professional practice | Fulfilling university attendance criteria | Manifesting personal Responsibility | **Staying Obliged** |

Figure 3: Coding intensity of initial categories in broad category **"Achieving objectives"**

| Attaining high grades | Aiming for pass grade | Acquiring knowledge & skill | **Achieving Objectives** |

Figure 4: Coding intensity of initial categories in broad category **"Valuing teachers"**

| Reflecting on teacher's personality | Requiring teacher to possess high level of skill & ability | **Valuing teachers** |

Figure 5: Coding Intensity of initial categories in broad category **"Valuing Course Dynamics"**

| Seeking assessment - linked information | Admiring teaching material | Being effected by class schedule | Appraising teaching methodology | **Valuing course dynamics** |

Figure 6: Coding Intensity of initial categories in broad category **"Reacting to Institutional Culture"**

| Being tempted by external attractions | Referring to disiplinary practices | Expecting better infrastructure | **Reacting to Institutional Culture** |

Figure 7: Coding Intensity of initial categories in broad category **"Approving Classroom Climate"**

| Interacting with peers | Appreciating class group size | Building rapport with faculty | Interacting with teachers | **Approving Classroom climate** |

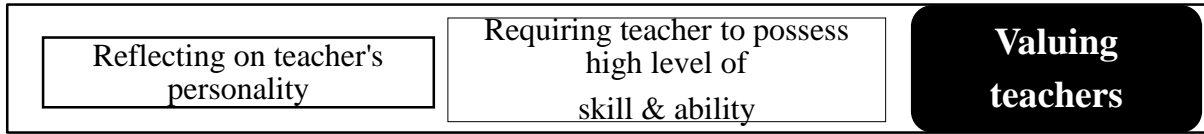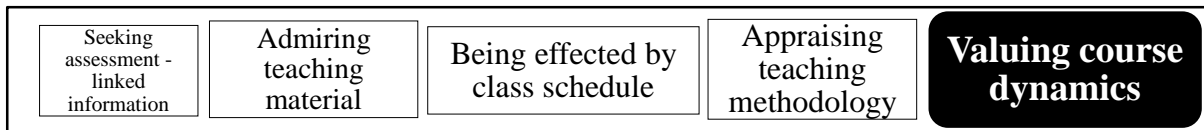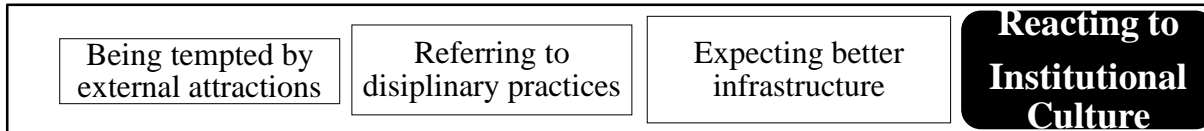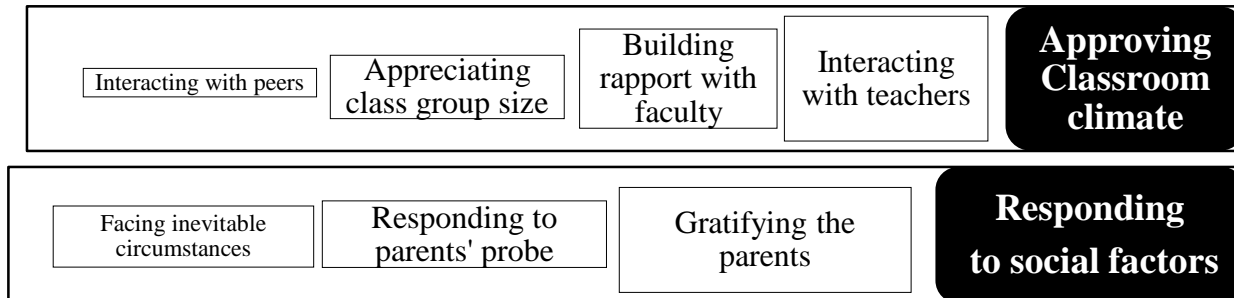| Facing inevitable circumstances | Responding to parents' probe | Gratifying the parents | **Responding to social factors** |

Figure 8: Coding Intensity of initial categories in broad category **"Responding to Social Factors"**

Figure 9: Coding Intensity of initial categories in broad category **"Being motivated"**

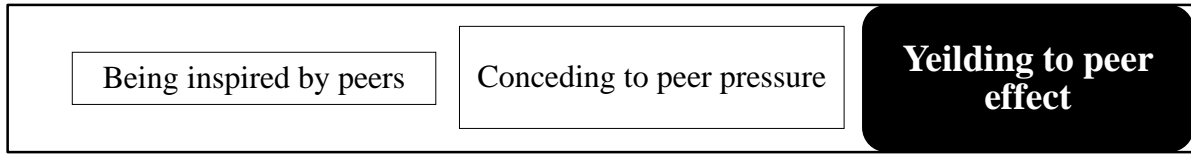| Being inspired by peers | Conceding to peer pressure | **Yeilding to peer effect** |

Figure 10: Coding Intensity of initial categories in broad category**"Yielding to Peer Effect"**

Figure 11: Coding Intensity of initial categories in broad category" **Getting instituional Support"**
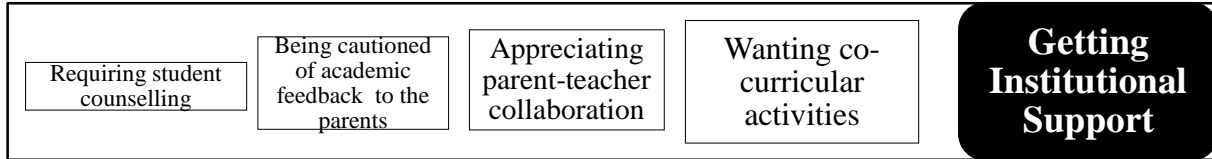
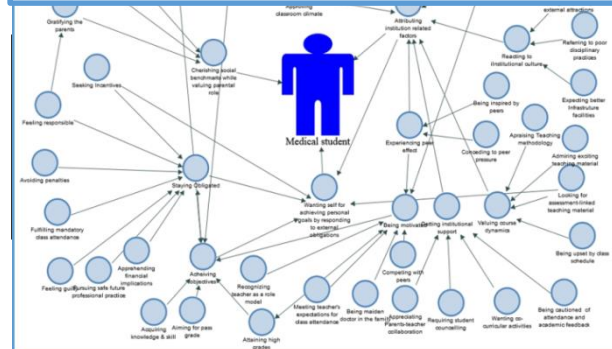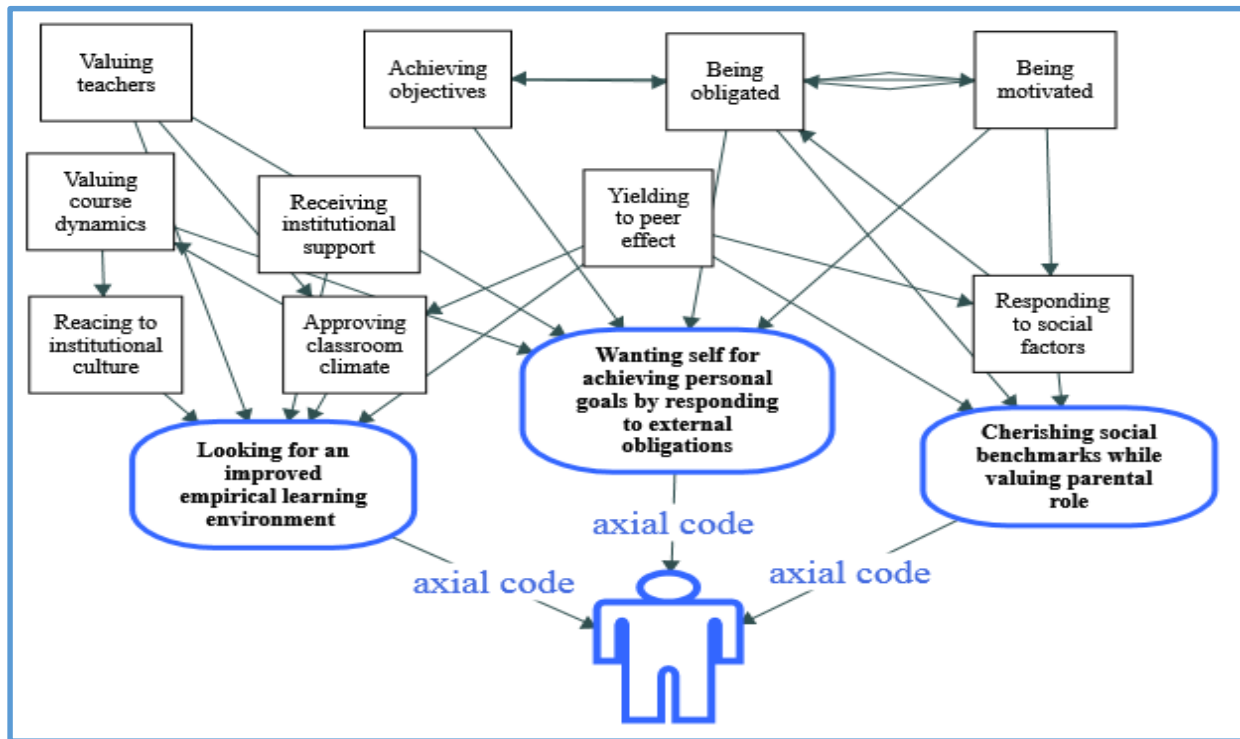| Requiring student counselling | Being cautioned of academic feedback to the parents | Appreciating parent-teacher collaboration | Wanting co-curricular activities | **Getting Institutional Support** |

Figure 12: Linkages established between initial and broad categories

Fig. 13: Axial Codes

Selective coding linkages between axial and broad categories led to selection of a core category immersed in

the empirical textural data which made a storyline related to

| Meeting teachers' expectations | Competing with peers | **Being motivated** |

all categories. The storyline proposed the generated theory leading to the conceptual model (proposed) for medical

students driving them to attend regular classes shown in Figure 14.

Hypotheses were developed founded on review of empirical research literature and the qualitative data collected through Focus Group discussions (FGDs).

H1: Undergraduate medical students are driven mainly by extrinsic reasons to attend classes regularly

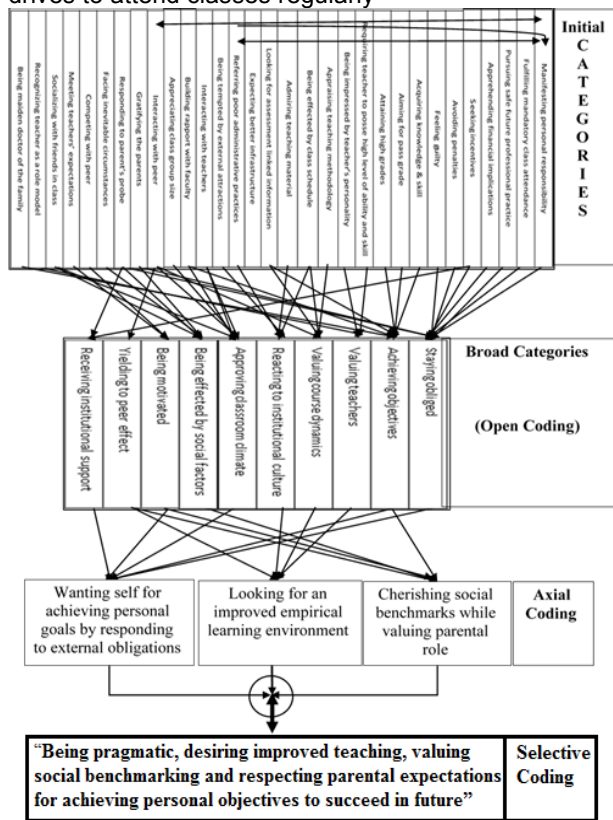H2: Parental influence drives medical students to attend classes regularly.

H3: Undergraduate medical students are driven to attend classes regularly simply for achieving examination success rather than personal development

H4: Social interaction in the classroom drives students to attend classes regularly.

H5: Teachers' attitude towards students influence students' regular class attendance

H6: Extrinsic factors influence medical students more than intrinsic motivations for attending classes regularly.

Fig. 14: Conceptual Model (Proposed) for "Medical Students' drives to attend classes regularly"

DISCUSSION

The study aimed to generate theory about reasons driving undergraduate students to attend regular classes. The results propose contextual factors which urge student for regular class attendance to be related to three main domains, mainly extrinsic factor as learner, institutional and societal.

Learner Related Factors: Study findings show students feel personally responsible, remaining under obligation, as incentives for regular attendance which avoid penalties.

Forbus et al (2011) expressed that personal responsibility is vital for students'academic success as expressed by a participant "Seeing medical field as a noble profession creates an internal interest which drives us to attend classes regularly".

Gump (2004) found implementing university mandatory class attendance policy had a positive influence on attendance as seen in half the participants of study "feel obliged" to attend classes.

Van Shalkwyk, Menkveld & Ruiters (2010) found students feeling guilty by missing classes, not wanting to upset parents by not getting value for money spend. Study participants expressed guilt by absenteeism; others expected awards as in better exam grades in conformity with study of Van Blerkoms (2001). A participant was of the opinion "I attend classes to meet the expectations of the teachers who are personally known to me", related to study conducted by Friedmann, Rodriguz and McComb (2001) illustrating teachers concern and expectations for a student was a driving force influencing attendance.

Institutional Related Factors: The finding of the study indicating that attendance depends on teaching style, subject matter interest, mutual respect amongst teacher and student are illustrated by following narratives "The intention of a student for attending the classroom teaching depends upon teaching style of a teacher.

"It matters least whether the teacher is good or not, rather it is the topic which matters most.

"As we recognize teachers as role models and pay them respect, we expect them to respect us as well"

This is supported by studies conducted by Fernando and Mellalieu (2011), Weinstein (2010) and Moore, Armstrong and Pears (2008) with latter classifying such as "low motivational students".

Societal Factors: Peer motivation, student teachers' societal interaction, in-class peer socialization and parental role were social factors mostly influencing students' regular attendance conforming with research by Lammers & Smith (2008).

CONCLUSION

Medical students demonstrated pragmatic attitude towards regular class attendance the main influence factors being extrinsic as learner, institutional and societal with few intrinsic reasons.

Failure is attributed to institutional environment by students rather than being personally responsible and major societal factor is parental role in local context.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As the problem does not rest with students' class attendance only, it is the teachers, teaching and learning environment which are required to be improved and so, the problem of students' class attendance is seen as a responsibility of educators and hence, it necessitates a need for a logical description of of educators and educational institution for bringing an improvement in students' class attendbce.

The educators are required to inspire students to attend lecture classes regularly by adopting pedagogical practices such as fostering students' class participation,

rescheduling the class timings, showing an improved personal classroom manners and improving assessment.

It is recommended that institutional administrators must ensure an appropriately comfortable infrastructural facilities in the college campus in general and in the classroom in particular class rooms.

It is suggested that parental involvement in the form of parent teacher meetings, founding parent association in the institution and introducing an infallible information system to keep the parents continuously informed about the professional and academic progress of their child.

This research work has not only provided some insight for understanding the reasons which drive undergraduate medical students for regular class attendance, it has also presented some questions to be answered by doing further research in the future. Further research work can help find measures for developing intrinsic motivation amongst medical students and expected to make proposals to evaluate the level of intrinsic motivation in medical students which will add to the existing knowledge about the problem under investigation. Further investigation is mandatory to identify measures to improve institution related extrinsic factors which can drive students for regular class attendance.

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