

## The Effects of Class Attendance on Academic Achievement and the Views of Preservice Teachers about Attendance and Absenteeism

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**Abstract:** It is an important element that students should attend the class regularly to be successful in all educational institutions practicing formal education. The aim of the research is to study the relation between the academic achievement and class attendance rank of 46 preservice teachers attending the 4th grade of the department of science education in primary education in Pamukkale University. This research in which the mixed method was used adopted both quantitative and qualitative research techniques. In this research survey model is adopted from the point of quantitative method and case study model is adopted from the point of qualitative method. The paradigm of the research from the point of quantitative method is constituted by science preservice teachers taking astronomy lessons. Intentional sample selection is adopted in the research. The data of the research gathered adopting the technique semi-structured interview techniques from the point of qualitative method. The semi-structured interviews are recorded by tape recorder, then, the research data is observed as thematic turning the records into detailed written documentary and content is analysed.

*Keywords:* Absenteeism, Academic Achievement, Preservice Teacher's Views.

Either directly or indirectly, both intramurally and extramurally, education is a process of assisting individuals edify and acquire knowledge, skill and understanding essential for having a part in community life. School is an educational organisation in which students are made obtain terminal behaviours, knowledge and skill in accordance with fundamentals and general and special purposes of the education system through scientific methods (Demirtas and Gunes, 2003, s.109). Attendance of students must be implemented in order that the school can carry out its functions. Active participation principle is carried out through the implementation of students' attendance. Education oriented motivation level of students attending classes increases when active participation is used as a base.

Academic achievement is defined as students' achievement level of the intended behaviours in school life (Silah, 2003, s. 103). Academic achievement in higher education is used as a criterion in determining whether the students obtained the terminal behaviours or not. Besides, higher education is a significant criterion in job and academic career applications later on. In brief, ensuring the students' attendance increases the academic achievements and the increase in students' achievements can insure their getting a good job, having an academic career and leading a comfortable life.

It is observed in literature that limited study has been done related to attendance and absenteeism. These studies can be summarized like the followings;

Kadı(2000) searched the constant absenteeism reasons of secondary school students in Adana. In his research Pehlivan(2006) extracted three different results consisting of reasons arise from students; from students' pedagogical conditions and from students' private conditions. In a research named "the reasons for the absenteeism of students and the reflection of absenteeism in academic achievement" Altinkurt(2008) has reached 6 different results arising from personal reasons, academic

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anxiety, environmental reasons, familial reasons, teachers and school management. In a research named “the reasons of students’ absenteeism in secondary school Ozbas(2010) has analysed students’ absenteeism in three captions as being late for school, class absenteesim, and daily absenteesim. In his research, Yılmaz (2011) has searched the reasons for the 4th and 5th grade secondary school students’ absenteeism and the ways to resolve these. In their research Yıldız and Kula(2011), tried to reach the reasons for absenteesim through conducting a questionnaire to the 7th and the 8th grade students.

In literature survey it is observed that sufficient scientific research hasn’t been done on students’ attendance and absenteeism and that research done is centered upon the reasons for attendance and absenteeism. Unlike the surveys in the literature, this one has analysed the preservice teachers’ view on attendance and absenteeism and the reflection of attendance and absenteeism on academic achievement. In this regard this research work is believed to bring a new perspective to the subject matter and make up the deficiencies in literature. The aim of this survey is to study the views of pre-service teachers about the reflections of absenteeism on academic achievement and whether there is a relation between absenteeism and attendance and academic achievements of pre-service teachers studying at university.

### **Method**

In this research, which aims to determine the views of pre-service teachers on attendance and absenteeism and the reflections of attendance and absenteeism of pre-service teachers studying at the university on their academic achievements, mixed method is applied as analysis technique. Mixed method is a common form of research in which quantitative and qualitative datum are combined to be applied in a single study(Somekh and Levin, 2005; Balcı, 2010; Çepni, 2010). As an individual is a complex organism, it is a convenient way to use both qualitative and quantitative methods in company in surveys on individuals(Creswell, 2009). At first quantitative, after that qualitative datum have been collected in the research.

For the aim of increasing the effectiveness of the survey, along with adopting the quantitative evaluation for analysing the relation between pre-service teachers’ absenteeism and their academic achievements, qualitative evaluation is also adopted for data speciation by semi-structured interview and the interview form is offered to the expert opinion. And also, after the findings are interpreted, to prevent causing misinformation, interpretations are presented to the pre-service teachers, who attended to the interview, to receive their approval after reading the interpretations.

### ***Population and Sample***

The population of the research consists of pre-service teachers studying in Science and Education Department in Education Faculty at Pamukkale University in 2011-2012 academic year. There are 46 pre-service teachers included for the population of the research. And pre-service Science Teachers taking Astronomy lessons constitutes the sample of the survey. Intentional sampling is preferred in the research. Intentional sampling method is based on the principal of determining the small group which represents the characteristic that is required to obtain information from the universe(Yazıcıoğlu and Erdogan, 2004). One of the researchers conducts the Astronomy lessons of the chosen group in the research.

### ***The Quantitative Dimension of The Research***

Survey Model is applied for the quantitative dimension of this study. Survey Model is a research approach which aims to define a situation that exists now or existed in the past, in its existential form. This model tries to define an object, a group or an individual subjected to the research in their own

conditions ( Karasar, 2008; Cepni, 2010; Punch 2011). In this research pre-service Science teachers' attendance and absenteeism are observed to see whether there is a relation between the absenteeism and the academic achievement. According to the implementation fundamentals instruction of Pamukkale University undergraduate education and training regulation, students' absenteeism and attendance is left up to the instructor of the lesson(URL 1, 2012). In this regard, the compulsory attendance to the Astronomy classes is made free by the researcher, but the present and absent students are observed by another researcher. At the end of the term, students are divided into three categories regarding their attendance and absenteeism. Students attended %100 of the classes are named as Group 1, students attended %50 of the classes are named as Group 2, and students who didn't attend by any means are named as Group 3. Then, the academic achievements of the pre-service students in these groups are observed and a relation is analyzed between their academic achievement and their absenteeism.

### *The Qualitative Dimension of the Research*

Case study model is applied in the qualitative dimension of this research. Case study is a research method applied in circumstances in which more than one proof or data source are available and in which the divisions between the phenomenon and the content the phenomenon exists in, are not distinct in certain lines(Yin, 1984, p.23).

Semi-Structured interview form is applied in this research. In this form of interview, questions and the way they are to be inquired and which datum are to be collected are determined previously. Yet, some flexibilities may be implemented on questions considering the individuals and the conditions. The chance for getting more profound information and comprehensive explanations for questions are enabled in this way(Balçı, 2010; Yıldırım and Simsek, 2011; Punch, 2011).

One pre-service teacher is chosen from each category, designated according to their attendance and absenteeism, and is interviewed in the study. Stating that it is not a problem to use a tape recorder, pre-service teachers attended the semi-structured interview permitted recording the interview datum. Semi-structured interviews are recorded via tape recorder and note-taking method is applied for non-verbal expressions. Then, recordings are transformed into written documents. Content analysis is done and research datum are analyzed thematically.

## **Findings and Interpretations**

Obtained findings related to this research are analyzed under two titles as qualitative findings and quantitative findings.

### *Findings Obtained from Quantitative Data*

Pre-service teachers' academic achievement in Astronomy lesson and their attendance and absenteeism in Astronomy classes are discussed in obtaining the quantitative data. In this regard students' attendance and absenteeism are detected and compared to the end of term final grades of the Astronomy lesson. One-Way ANOVA is applied to determine whether there is a meaningful difference among the final grades of the groups.

**Table I**  
*Descriptive Analyze and Result of ANOVA*

Groups	N	$\bar{X}$	S	F	p	Meaningful Dif.
Group 1	8	85.25	4.49	15.20	.000	1-2, 1-3
Group 2	26	65.04	11.38			
Group 3	12	58.25	12.88			

The analysis results proved a meaningful difference among the final grades of the pre-service teachers categorized with regard to their attendance and absenteeism,  $F(2, 43) = 15,2, p < .01$ . In other words, the final grades of pre-service teachers indicated a variance considering their attendance. According to the results of Scheffe test done with the aim of finding among which groups are there differences among final grades, Group 1 ( $X=85.25$ ) is proved to be more successful than Group 2 ( $X=65.04$ ) and Group 3 ( $X=58.25$ ).

### *The Obtained Findings from Qualitative Data*

Face to face interviews are done with 3 pre-service teachers in the research. During the interview, obtained findings from the pre-service teachers' answers to the questions directed to them under the themes are presented by taking exact quotations from their answers. Nicknames are given to the pre-service teachers considering the fact that it is not ethical to include their names in the research, pre-service teacher who attended the %100 of all the classes during the term is named as A, the one attended %50 of the classes is named as B and the other one who didn't attend in any means is named as C.

**Course Grade Theme.** In the interviews done with the Science and Technology teachers, A and B who attended the classes laid emphasis on taking notes during the lesson. They stated that they could study in a more comfortable way through reviewing their own notes. While one of the pre-service teachers, A said "I only count on my notes" B expressed his opinion saying "In this situation I cannot... well.. I cannot count on my friends notes(...) and it is not useful to study from someone's notes in the first place. It is more useful for me to take notes at that moment right there." And C who is not attending to the classes by any means stated he/she could study from the notes he/she took from his/her friends and said "Well, I am sure I can find the notes(...) and when I could pass the exams with these notes, I wouldn't attend the classes." And it is detected through the observations that the pre-service teachers are attending to the classes to take notes and the absenteeisms of the pre-service teachers who take notes regularly are low.

**Responsibility Theme.** In the interviews done with the pre-service teachers, they all stated they had a responsibility on the point of attendance. Pre-service teachers attending to the classes stated they had got to attend the classes otherwise they felt guilty and full of remorse. While A said " I don't know how to call it, a weird syndrome of remorse? I neither sleep nor do anything If I don't attend to the class, I have to attend to the class in any case" and added "Once, I made that kind of mistake in Science and Technology lesson. I, now, attend all the classes for certain. I did it only for one time. After all I deadly regreted it. Now I definitely attend the classes. B expressed himself/herself saying " You know, when one attends to the class, he feels something like responsible you know. mostly I have a clear conscience about it when I attend to the class. I want the classes to be fun, mostly.. and my conscience ,partly, don't let me..." But to the question "Think of a lesson you don't have an attendance problem with, you think that the next subject is important to you, but just then you take an enticing offer from your friends (going out for seeing your favorite football team's match/for shopping) or you remember you didn't do your homework for the following lesson. What would you do in this situation?" directed to C, he/she replied "(...) and I wouldn't attend if I didn't have an absenteeism problem"

**Interest Theme.** The question "If you were in charge would you change the roll taking applications in classes" for the matter whether the pre-service teachers are interested in the lessons or not is replied by A as "I would, some are attending due to the obligation and are not listening to the teacher, and he/she stated his/her classmates attending just because they were afraid of failing because of the absenteeism were not interested in the lesson and were engaged in different kind of things during the

lesson. B, on the point of interest, said he/she was more interested in the lessons he/she was attending and said " I mainly study the lessons I follow, I attend , with more aspiration.

B, about the interest, says he/she is interested in the lessons he/she attends and also said "I mainly study the lessons I attend with more aspiration. You know, in this way I think, I can get higher marks. And C stated he/she wasn't that interested in the lessons, he wouldn't attend the classes unless he had an absenteeism problem and would prefer sleeping to attending the classes and said " It is also important whether the classes are early in the morning or not. Getting up early would be a problem".

Through the observations it is realized that the pre-service teachers attending the classes are far more interested in the lessons and they endeavor to have an active part in the lesson. It is also realized that the pre-service teachers of few attendance are attending because of the compulsion and are dealing with things out of the content of the lesson during the lesson.

**Importance Theme.** In terms of the importance subject, in the interview done with the pre-service teachers, the ones attending the classes stated that it was important to attend the classes. A said " Undoubtedly, there are some course subjects I don't know anything about..and missing the class...it is crucial to learn the subject in the lesson in perpetuity. I,certainly,advocate this. It is our primary task to attend the classes,and saying "I,you know, woke up for the lesson, you know... I listen to the teacher, I make the best of it(...) One learns better during the lesson", B stated that the classes were important and they could learn better in the lesson.

**Knowledge Theme.** Concerning the knowledge theme, saying "Last year the roll for History classes was not taken at first, and thinking I already know enough about history, I attended few classes, and (...) because,the teacher was following the textbook word for word, then I thought I could read at home on my own", A stated he/she could skip the lessons, he thought, he already knew about. "Actually there are subjects I know beforehand, with this way I have a chance to recall them. Of course there are things I don't know,you know.. but I recall the things I know. I think, they make a contribution to me" said B, and also stated with the purpose of review he/she could attend the classes even if he/she thought he knew about. And C suggested "prudential knowledge and knowledge for science that will be thought in the future is essential, you know, rather than conventional knowledge and it must be brief."

**Content Theme.** The question concerning the content theme, "Do you think the lessons' being numeral, verbal, theoretical or practical would have an influence on your attendance and absenteeism for classes?"is directed to the pre-service teachers in the interviews done with pre-service teachers and it is checked out whether the content influences the pre-service teachers' attendance and absenteeism on this point. While A says " We already have numerical intelligent, and, for instance, the non-math courses are perceived as untaxing. Students don't care at all,they say "well, we just read it and then let it go", C says "I don't attend the theoretical ones for instance, but in practical ones you learn by doing and living and also you need some practice as you are a teacher. Lecturers always rehearse the theory. The same thing is already written in the textbook. There are lecturers on the internet as well, you know"

It is realised there is a belief among the pre-service teachers that the math courses are more difficult to learn and non-math courses can be learned through reading at home without class attendance. Moreover, practical lessons are thought among pre-service teachers to be more significant.

**Achievement Theme.** In the interviews concerning the achievement theme, A emphasized his attendance increased his success by saying "Well, why I have become successful... because I attended the classes. Because I think the more I attend the classes the more I become successful. In the same

way, B said “ I hadn’t attended a class for once, you see. And I guess there were questions in the exam from the last lesson I hadn’t attended, you see... It was such a pain in the neck... I deeply regretted it” and noted that the lessons taught in classes have a direct influence on his/her achievement in the exams. And C, although he/she puts forward his/her absenteeism to give a reason for his/her failure, he/she expresses his/her persisting in absenteeism saying “well, speaking of what I am experiencing now, for example, I , truly, don’t attend the classes, for instance. It is still the same. I fail, I fail because I don’t attend the classes, I still don’t attend the classes, for instance.”

**Instructor Factor Theme.** In the interviews pre-service teachers stated application of methods and techniques of contemporary education by the instructor giving the lecture would make the lesson more productive and fun, pointing out the significance of the instructor factor for their attendance and absenteeism. The answers pre-service teachers gave to the question “ How a lesson should be taught to make you want to attend it?” were, for the most part, in a way of asserting a number of complaints related to the education they are having and suggestions for solutions for it. While A says “ To begin with, ,instructor’s got to be efficient in class,in every sense. That is to say, he/she must maintain the silence and give the knowledge in high level, answer my questions, must encourage me, must teach me the things I don’t know in any case, must do something exciting that it can be worth my coming to the school from home.”, B says (...) the lessons were in the form of presentations, you know, that is why I didn’t want to attend.” C,giving an example,said “For instance Assesment and Evaluation ... the instructor of this lesson teaches in brief and also goes for the details. You know, I really try to attend his classes but as I said, the lessons it the form of slide shows, you know... I can read at home, too. The waste of time with tihs come and go (for classes) is an extra loss for me.

### Results and Suggestions

When pre-service teachers’ success grades and attendance and absenteeism are analyzed, the ones with no absenteeism are observed to be more successful than the ones with partial and full absenteeism. It can be said, as a cause for this, that success rests on the active participation in the classes and the pre-service teachers are to attend the classes to make the active participation doable. Moreover, this situation shows little difference between the achievements of pre-service teachers who attend nearly the half or none of the classes. And as a result of this, nearly full attendance to the classes is found to have a positive influence on the achievement.

In the interviews done with the pre-service teachers, their taking notes during the lesson is found to be an important factor for their attendance. While two of the pre-service teachers who attended the interview stated that they could only rely on their notes, one of them stated that he/she could study from his/her friends’ notes but that caused an increase in the duration of the time studying and added that if he/she studied from his/her own notes the time he saved for studying would be much less. Consequently, the instructors’ in charge of the lesson, giving a chance for students’ effective note-taking during the lesson will be an adjuvant factor for pre-service teachers’ interests and commitments for the lesson.

With accepting the fact that the application of the roll taking increases the attendance to the classes, all of the pre-service teachers attended to the classes also stated that they were badly influenced by the negative behaviors of their friends who were attending the classes just because they were afraid of failing due to the absenteeism and non-execution of roll taking would make them feel more unrestricted. As a result, active participation of the pre-service teachers who are attending the classes must be encouraged to increase their interest for the lesson. Once participants whose interest for the lesson is increased consider themselves as components of the learning environment, this will

increase their intentness for the attendance to the classes and this will implicitly be reflected on their academic achievements.

The significance of learning a lesson during the lesson is pointed out by the pre-service teachers who took part in the research. Giving examples from their own experiences, every single pre-service teacher who compared his/her academic achievement between the lessons they attended and missed stated that he/she thought the attendance to the classes is related to the academic achievement. Although they all accept this, in company with some complaints and suggestions they stated their aspiration for attendance is not the same for every lesson. The applications of the instructor who is giving the lecture make up the most of these complaints. Pre-service teachers stated the teaching methods of most of the lecturers in charge of the lesson are not in a level to encourage their attendance to the classes. It is pointed out that it bores the pre-service teachers when the lesson is taught only by following the written documents but with the instructor's additions the learning environment can be turned into a more functional one.

According to the obtained information from the pre-service teachers who attended the research, the absenteeism tendency is appeared to be less in the lessons in which mathematical elements are predominant. The pre-service teacher are found to have a belief that they can –pretty- learn the verbal subjects on their own but they need an instructor's help in acquiring the lessons in which mathematical elements are predominant. It is clear that the differences in the contents of the lessons influence the behaviours of pre-service teachers in their attendance and absenteeism. The aspirations of pre-service Science and Technology teachers for attendance to the lessons they categorized as verbal and by removing their prejudices on this issue the belief that the classes are the ideal learning environment for all kind of lessons must be reinforced.

In Education Faculties as in all degrees, reducing the students' absenteeism will have a positive influence on teacher training programs. As is known, the contextual structures of the lessons being conducted at Education Faculties are designated substantially by the Higher Education Council. The instructors have no chance to change this content descriptions which are determined as instructional goals. Yet, by keeping to the content, an instructor can lead his/her own regulations in skills and behaviours which are to be obtained by the students. He/She can include course activities which make the information change into an experience by going beyond the lessons' being theoretical. In addition to this he/she can evaluate this behaviours which are planned to be acquired by students in training process with performance or product assessment approach and can count in academic achievement. Lesson activities and exam approaches which rely on this and tihs kind of regulations may cause the activities which are being practised in classrooms to go beyond the textbook and lesson materials. By this way, students, as long as they attend the classes may begin thinking that their learning achievements will be influenced positively. Behaviours which are to be upskilled in a particular lesson and which make the class discussions and practises essential beyond the textbook are thought to be effective in changing the students' belief regarding the importance of attendance in achievement.

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