

**FACTORS INFLUENCING STUDENT'S ABSENTEEISM IN UNIVERSITY
LEVEL (UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SARAWAK)**

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ABSTRAK

FAKTOR- FAKTOR YANG MEMPENGARUHI KETIDAKHADIRAN PELAJAR DI PERINGKAT UNIVERSITI (UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SARAWAK)

SYARIFAH SUHAILA TAHIR

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengenalpasti faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi ketidakhadiran pelajar di peringkat universiti. Kajian ini dijalankan di Universiti Malaysia Sarawak. Pembolehubah bersandar dalam kajian ini adalah ketidakhadiran pelajar manakala pembolehubah tidak bersandar pula adalah ciri-ciri demografi, minat terhadap subjek, kebolehan pensyarah, sikap pelajar, dan masalah kesihatan. Kajian ini menggunakan metodologi soal selidik iaitu menggunakan borang soal selidik yang berbentuk Skala Likert untuk mendapatkan maklumat daripada 120 sample responden dari empat buah fakulti yang terpilih iaitu Fakulti Seni Gunaan dan Kreatif (FSGK), Fakulti Sains Kognitif dan Pembangunan Manusia (FSKPM), Fakulti Sains dan Teknologi Sumber (FSTS), dan Fakulti Sains Sosial (FSS). Data yang dikumpul dianalisis dengan menggunakan statistik deskriptif dan statistik inferensi. Peratusan dan frekuensi digunakan dalam pengiraan taburan ciri-ciri demografi. Ujian T-test digunakan untuk menguji perbezaan diantara pelajar lelaki dan perempuan dari segi persepsi mereka terhadap ketidakhadiran ($t = -1.280$, $df = 118$, $p = 0.203$) menunjukkan nilai p lebih besar daripada 0.05. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa tiada perbezaan antara pelajar lelaki dan perempuan dari segi persepsi mereka terhadap ketidakhadiran. Ujian kolerasi Pearson digunakan untuk menguji perkaitan hubungan antara ketidakhadiran dengan faktor minat terhadap subjek ($r = 0.421$, $p = 0.000$), kebolehan pensyarah ($r = 0.549$, $p = 0.000$), sikap pelajar ($r = 0.426$, $p = 0.000$), dan masalah kesihatan ($r = 0.221$, $p = 0.015$). Melalui hasil kajian ini mendapati faktor minat terhadap subjek, kebolehan pensyarah, sikap pelajar, dan masalah kesihatan mempunyai hubungan terhadap ketidakhadiran. Berdasarkan hasil kajian, kebolehan pensyarah merupakan faktor yang paling dominan dalam mempengaruhi ketidakhadiran pelajar. Kajian ini dapat memberi sumbangan kepada pihak universiti dalam memahami ketidakhadiran pelajar.

ABSTRACT

FACTORS INFLUENCING STUDENT'S ABSENTEEISM IN UNIVERSITY LEVEL (UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SARAWAK)

SYARIFAH SUHAILA TAHIR

This study aimed to determine the factors that influencing student's absenteeism in university level. The study was conducted in Universiti Malaysia Sarawak. The dependent variable in this study was student's absenteeism and while the independent variables were demographic characteristics, subject interest, lecturer's skills, student's attitude, and health problems. A survey questionnaires in the form of Likert Scale were used to obtain data from a sample of 120 respondents from four selected faculty, i.e. Faculty of Applied and Creative Arts (FACA), Faculty of Cognitive Science and Human Development (FCSHD), Faculty of Resource Science and Technology (FRST), and Faculty of Social Sciences (FSS). The data collected was analyzed using descriptive statistic and inferential statistic. Percentages and frequencies were used to determine the distribution of the demographic characteristics. T-test was used to determine the significant difference between male and female students in term of their perceived absenteeism ($t = -1.280$, $df = 118$, $p = 0.203$) showed that p value was bigger than 0.05. The result indicated that there is no significant difference between male and female students in terms of students' absenteeism. Pearson Correlation test was used to determine the significant relationship between factors of subject interest ($r = 0.421$, $p = 0.000$), lecturer's skills ($r = 0.549$, $p = 0.000$), student's attitude ($r = 0.426$, $p = 0.000$), and health problems ($r = 0.221$, $p = 0.015$) toward absenteeism. The finding of this study showed that there was a significant relationship between factors of subject interest, lecturer's skills, student's attitude, and health problems towards absenteeism. Based on the study, lecturer's skills was the most dominant factor that influenced student's absenteeism. This study would contribute to enhance the knowledge and understanding of absenteeism in the university.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

In this era, knowledge is very important to mankind who wants to succeed and gets a good job in the future. For those who want to survive in this competitive world, holding a good qualification in education is the main key. As the numbers of university applicants have increased, the students need to face a high level of competitive results to enter to the university. However, there are many university students who do not use the chance that they have in the right way. Presently, university attendance and students absenteeism had turn into one of the major problems faced by the universities. Student's attendance is very important because not all institution provides on- line or e- learning methods in learning. In this kind of scenario, it is imperative that students must attend classes regularly to benefit

maximally information that they get from their lectures. It is necessary to understand the factors that contributing to student's absenteeism and also to define a strategies to prevent the problem of absenteeism.

1.1 Background of the Study

Absenteeism among university student has been an ongoing phenomenon which has not been given much attention today. It is still withdrawal behavior which is difficult to control. The absenteeism among university student can lead to much negative effect such as the student pointer can drop and many social problems will happen. The university also will not be able to produce quality graduates. University has their own responsibility to produce a knowledgeable, skill and discipline graduate student so that after graduation, the students can easily get a job and be a good citizen so that this can help economy in our country develop.

The meaning of absence from work depends upon the motivation attributed to this behavior, its timing, the frequency of its occurrence, and the social setting in which it occurs (Johns & Nicholson, 1990, p. 134; Rosse & Miller, 1984, p. 194). Nicholson even describes absence as a potential "flight from the workplace" (Nicholson, 1977, p. 241), and draws on the adverse and probably harmful influence of work on employees' health. Absenteeism also has been described as a multi causal and complex phenomenon (Johns & Nicholson, 1990; Nicholson, 1993). The finding that there is a weak relationship between job satisfaction and numerous forms of absenteeism sparked the development of new theories on absenteeism (Farrell & Stamm, 1988; Hackett & Guion, 1985; Nicholson, Brown, & Chadwick-Jones, 1976; Scott & Taylor, 1985). Johns congruously describes absenteeism as a "hard" criterion variable (Gary Johns, 1978, p. 431). First, it is always shown that it is high of frequency that related to employees health problems like accidents and illness (illness seemed to be the "most usual objective reason for absence" (also see Herzberg, Mausner, Peterson, & Capwell, 1957, p. 107). There is called the sickness absences.

Voluntary and involuntary absences are usually differentiated, so that when employees do not intentionally create the conditions which produce the absence (e.g. illness) then these are typically considered as involuntary absenteeism (Mueller *et al.*, 1987). This differentiation into non-voluntary and voluntary forms of sickness absenteeism is particularly justified since the latter has been implicated as being part of counterproductive workplace behavior (Martinko *et al.*, 2002, p. 37). Such behavior extends beyond absenteeism and may imply violence, stealing, dishonesty, drug and alcohol abuse, and aggression which may all result in harming the organization or its members. Voluntary absenteeism has also been discussed as a precursor of later personnel turnover (Dalton & Todor, 1993; Herzberg *et al.*, 1957; Mitra *et al.*, 1992; Muchinski, 1977; Rosse & Miller, 1984). It should be noted that often aspects of both voluntary and involuntary absence may simultaneously be present (Steel, 2003).

Student's attendance is very important to ensure that they will be able to understand what they are learn and it is also can lead to better results for students. Besides, university itself must provides a rules that can reduce the percentage of absenteeism among students and also must study the factors that contributing to student's attendance.

Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS) have done their best to produce good graduates. UNIMAS is one of university that has produced many qualified students. UNIMAS vision is to become an exemplary university of internationally acknowledged stature and a scholarly institution of choice for both students and academics through the pursuit of excellence in teaching, research and scholarship. UNIMAS mission is to generate, disseminate and apply knowledge strategically and innovatively to enhance the quality of the nation's culture and prosperity of its people. UNIMAS cannot achieve its vision and mission if the absenteeism among UNIMAS student is still on the increase. Without good students, the university will not able to

achieve its goal. Therefore, before expecting the students to achieve a good pointer, it is crucial for the university to find the strategies to counter absenteeism problem among its student.

In this study, there are some factors that have been noticed which can contribute to student's attendance such as subject interest, lecture's skill, student's attitude and health problems. All this factors can lead students to attend or not attend the class. Here, it is also interesting to study the relationship between personal characteristic of gender with absence. Demographic variables are included in absenteeism research because they can be measured validly and reliably (Harrison and Martocchio, 1998).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

In this new era, more and more universities are being required to deal with the problem in producing qualified fresh graduate. It is because the demand of stable and constant workforce for various industries in Malaysia is increasing. Thus, the problematic issue such as students' absence from the lecture has to be fully addressed to meet the demands of rapid changing workforce.

Student absenteeism is an acknowledged problem in many universities. It is said that a high level of absence will have a big impact on student's study performance in the long run. Thus, in order to cope with this problem, possible variables that contribute to absenteeism among students have to be figured out. Apart from that, there is a need to generate possible solution and then try to resolve the existing problems.

A major problem facing schools is how to effectively deal with student absenteeism and truancy (DeSocio et al., 2007). When a student has not attended school for a long period of time or frequently misses school, they are classified as truant. These students miss opportunities to learn. When a student does not come to

school for a lengthy period of time, one may assume these students are learning elsewhere, but unfortunately in most circumstances this is not the case (RI Kids Count, 2007). Students start truanting in primary school, and often continue through secondary school and so on (Reid, 2005). Student absenteeism and truancy have become a large problem with students today and receives little attention due to the abundance of other issues and priorities that social workers and other service agencies are faced with (Teasley, 2004).

Absenteeism is a period of time when a student does not attend school (Teasley, 2004). Students who do not attend school will generally fall behind their classmates in their academic success (Ford & Sutphen, 1996). They have fewer opportunities to learn the materials that will help them to succeed (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). The focus of student absenteeism ranges from early schooling until adolescent years (Ford & Sutphen, 1996). Reasons students do not attend school can be influenced by a number of factors ranging from a lack of community support and an unsupportive school environment or family to bad weather, transportation problems and poor health (Teasley, 2004).

Rodgers (2001) reported findings from the follow up study on Australian university students in statistic class found that a students with the average attendance level of 74 percent would have scored about 1.3-3.4 percentage points lower than an identical students with perfect attendance. Marburger (2001) reported a carefully designed study of attendance and test performance among university students. Students were significantly more likely to answer incorrectly those test questions covering material taught during day on which the students were absent. This was true even though most students reported reading the class notes of others after absences. This is clearly shown that absenteeism among student will give the negative impact of their learning process.

In the case of University Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS), its average absence rate for year 2006 – year 2010 was about 15% - 20%. The figure is obtained from a senior lecturer through a verbal conversation. This figure indicates that there are a number of students who intent to absent from the lecture in year 2006 – 2010. This is a serious problem that UNIMAS have to face because this will influence the quality of fresh graduate that UNIMAS produced to the workforce later.

The problem of absenteeism among students should be taken seriously because it can directly affect students' performance which will cause the progression of economic to be retarded. It is because university's students are country's assets. The country's progress is dependent on these future human capitals.

In this study, the researchers intend to explore what are the main factors that caused absenteeism among students in UNIMAS. At the end of the research, possible solution can be generated based on the finding that is obtained from this study

1.3 Objectives of the Study

Objective of the study summarize the planned results or scope of the study that the researchers intend to have on the related issue that explained in the background. These objectives can be the result to the problem. All the relevant progress and results that obtained in the study will be reported in achievement report. Objective can be divided into general objective and specific objective. General objective is the overall summary of the purposes in the study. Specific objective must be specific, concrete and achievable.

1.3.1 General Objective

In general, this study is to find out the factors that contribute to the problem of absenteeism among students in UNIMAS. Apart from that it suggests the suitable ways regarding ways of solving the problem.

1.3.2 Specific Objective

- To determine the differences between gender and student's absenteeism.
- To determine the relationship between subject interest and student's absenteeism frequency.
- To determine the relationship between lecturer's skill and student's absenteeism frequency.
- To determine the relationship between student's attitude and student's absenteeism frequency.
- To determine the relationship between health problems and student's absenteeism frequency

1.4 Conceptual Framework

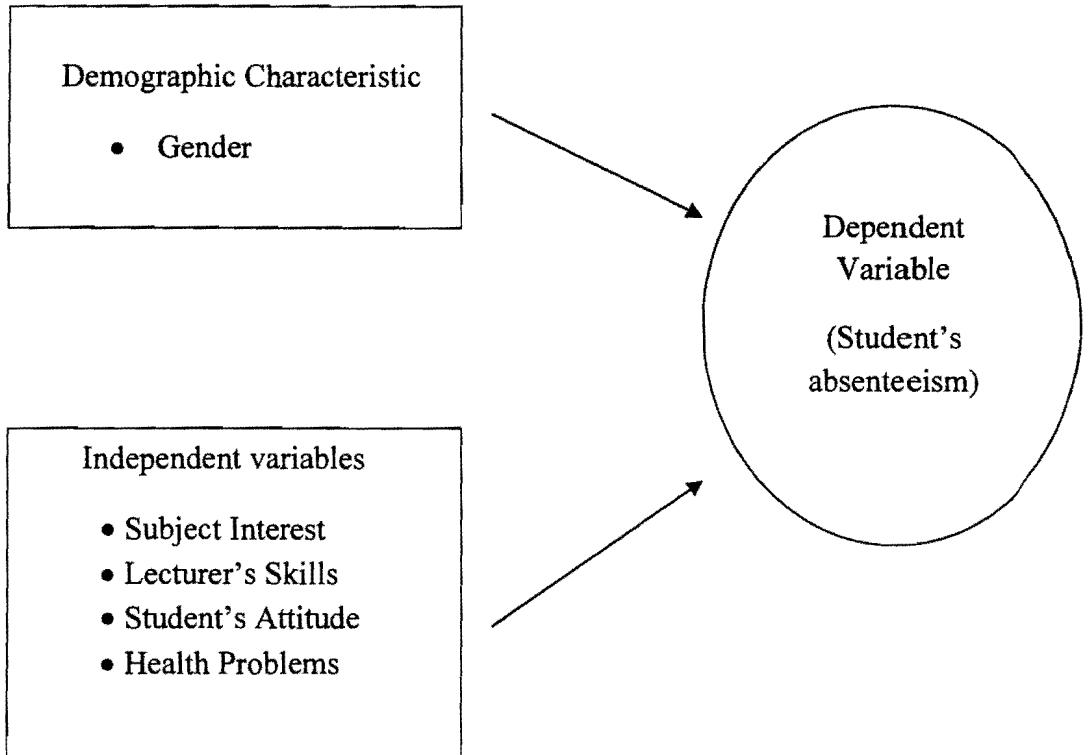


Figure 1: Demographic characteristic, independent and dependent variables

Figure 1 show the conceptual framework developed based on the research objectives in this study. The variables shown in the upper left box are the independent variables which are hypothesized to influence the dependent variable which is student's absenteeism. Relationship between these variables is assumed as independent variables will influence the dependent variables either positively or negatively. The relationship between two selected demographic characteristics and the dependent variable was also studied. This framework will be used to formulate the hypotheses of this study.

1.5 Hypothesis

Based on the objective and the conceptual framework of this study, null hypothesis are developed as follows:

- **Ho1:** There is no significant difference between male and female students towards student's absenteeism.
- **Ho2:** There is no relationship between subject interest and student's absenteeism.
- **Ho3:** There is no relationship between lecturer's skills and student's absenteeism.
- **Ho4:** There is no relationship between student's attitude and student's absenteeism.
- **Ho5:** There is no relationship between health problems and student's absenteeism.

1.6 Significance/ Importance of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to examine the factors that affect absenteeism among student in UNIMAS. There are several factors that are chosen such as interest of subject, skills of lecture, and attitude of the student. The finding of the study will benefit both the students and the university. The study can use to perceive the student commitment as a student. The higher levels of commitment are related to attendance.

The findings will help the institution to minimize the absenteeism among student when the main factors can be reduced. Apart from that, the findings will influence the perception of absenteeism. Absenteeism has been defined as "non-attendance when an employee is scheduled to work" (Price and Mueller, 1986, p. 17).

In an attempt to control attendance (Berenson, Carter, and Norwoods, 1992) put in place a 'compulsory attendance policy' that combined reward and punishment protocols in which college students in America were allowed three unexcused absences, with additional unexcused absences possibly resulting in dismissal from the course. Eventually, students with no more than one absence between exam dates were awarded five points for that exam score. Consequently, there was improvement in attendance rates, and the study showed that increased attendance rates correlates with increased achievement. With this results in mind, Berenson, Carter, and Norwood (1992) therefore concluded that *'it is highly likely that group policies such as enforced attendance, will have an impact on students grades'*.

UNIMAS also have the responsibility towards student absenteeism and provide sanctions against those who are chronic abusers of attendance policies. In order to reduce the absenteeism, the policy must be changed to stricter policies. In UNIMAS, attendance is not compulsory. In future, this policy must be renewed by changing it to be compulsory. University should form a committee to restructure its attendance policy. Consistent enforcement of student attendance policies does make a difference in reducing the rates of absenteeism.

Furthermore, it can be used by another researcher to make another research that was related to this field of study or the researcher can use it to study about each factor in a more detailed way.

1.7 Limitation and scope of the study

During the research, there are some limitations regarding our study on absenteeism. There are several factors that may cause absenteeism. The researchers have chosen four of the factors which are interest toward the subject, lecturers' teaching skills, students' attitude and health problem. The four factors that the researchers have focused on are not significant enough to find out the reason of

student's absence. There are other factors that also contribute to absenteeism among students in UNIMAS.

In this research, the researchers only use questionnaire and verbal communication with one of UNIMAS's senior lecturer as the survey method. Besides, the questionnaire is only distributed to the students in four randomly chosen faculties. There are only 160 participants randomly chosen as this survey's sample. Therefore, it might not represent the whole population in UNIMAS.

Another limitation is that the period of doing this research is limited. This forces the researchers to rush their time to finish this research.

1.8 Definitions of terms

In this study, the researchers will give a brief explanation about the terms that are discussed in the conceptual framework through online-dictionary and operational definition. This will further increase the reader's understanding regarding the terms which have been used.

1.8.1 Absenteeism

Conceptual Definition

Absenteeism has been defined as "non-attendance when an employee is scheduled to work" (Price and Mueller, 1986, p. 17). Therefore, non-attendances due to annual and other approved leave are not generally viewed as absenteeism (Mueller *et al.*, 1987). Voluntary and involuntary absences are usually differentiated, so that when employees do not intentionally create the conditions which produce the absence (e.g. illness) then these are typically considered as involuntary absenteeism (Mueller *et al.*, 1987).

Operational Definition

In this study, absenteeism acts as a dependent variable which is affected by few factors. Absenteeism in this research is about the universities students' failure to attend to the lecture.

1.8.2 Gender

Conceptual Definition

It is important to understand gender as different from sexuality. Sexuality concerns physical and biological differences that distinguish males from females. Cultures construct differences in gender. These social constructions attach themselves to behaviors, expectations, roles, representations, and sometimes to values and beliefs that are specific to either men or women (Answer.com 2010).

Operational Definition

In this study, gender is referred to as circumstance of being male or female. It is also referred to as their sexuality identity especially in relation to culture and society. Male and female may differ in how they define themselves in references to their social world.

1.8.3 Subject Interest

Conceptual Definition

According to Your Legacy (2010), subject interest is referred to a label that uses to relate the individuals with their interests, activities, hobbies and so on.

Operational Definition

Subject interest is referred to a form of a basic matter of thought, discussion, and investigation within a branch of knowledge as a course of study. Interest referred to things that concerns, involves, draws the attention of, or arouses the curiosity of a person. In this study, we are using the subject interest as the factor that lead to absenteeism. We are measuring how the students perceive their interest towards subjects that they choose.

1.8.4 Lecturer's skills

Conceptual Definition

According to Answer.com (2010), lecturer is someone who works in the faculty of a university or college and delivers lectures professionally. Skill refers to a technique, a developed talent or ability to perform a job (Answer.com, 2010). Thus, a lecturer skill means someone who works in the faculty of a university and use outstanding technique of teaching to attract attention of the students.

Operational Definition

Lecturer is a person that gives lecture in order to inculcate the knowledge to students. Skills mean the ability, practices, aptitude and one's knowledge that he or she has. In this study, lecturer skills refer to the lecturer ability to inculcate the knowledge to the students and attract their attention.

1.8.5 Student's attitude

Conceptual Definition

Attitude is referred to behavior, temper, feeling, and pose that demonstrate a person characteristic and mind (Dictionary.com, 2010).

Operational Definition

In this study, attitude is referred to an independent variable that shapes the rate of absenteeism. Students are given questionnaires to rank their feeling towards absenteeism perception.

1.8.6 Health problems

Conceptual Definition

The root cause of sick absence is the fact that an employee is unwell, and where the employee is incapacitated there exist a stage of being unfit for work (Pilbeam and Carbridge, 2002). It is because of either serious or minor illness that makes them unfit to work.

Operational Definition

In this study, health problems refer to student's which absence from lecture due to their illness. It is also to find whether health problems are the factors that can lead to students' absenteeism.

1.9 Summary

Overall in chapter 1 are include introduction, background of the study, statement of the problem, objective of the study, research hypothesis, conceptual framework, research schedule, significance of the study, limitation and scope of the study, and definition of terms.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

The review of related literature will be discussed in this chapter. The main purpose of this chapter is to look into related topics and issue of past literature and studies written by researchers of related field. It provides a better view on related topics to expand our knowledge and understanding on the research being done. Particularly, it reviews the literatures on theories and factors contributed to absenteeism among university student. This literature review was generally obtained from both primary and secondary sources such as journals, report, articles, thesis and other related materials.