Original Paper

Determinants of Student Absenteeism/Presenteeism in Qatar: A Path Analysis

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Abstract

The current study sought to investigate the perceptions of school teachers regarding student absenteeism and presenteeism in the State of Qatar. Drawing on the existing relevant literature in the field and based on a survey research method, the study was carried out during the first term (Fall semester) in 2015. The study involved preparatory (middle) and secondary (high) school teachers at both public (Independent) and private (International) schools in Qatar. To attain this goal, a causal model was used to examine the causes that shape teachers' perceptions of absenteeism and presenteeism. The data required for the present research was collected from a sample of 495 teachers at Independent and International schools. Based on factor analysis, the findings concluded from the study indicated that seven valid dimensions were extracted. In addition, three determinant factors that influence the perceptions of preparatory and secondary school teachers with regard to students' absentee and presentee behaviours were identified. These factors are: (a) reviewing curriculum content, (b) the teaching load, and (c) the expected rate of student graduations. The study concludes by offering some important recommendations for education practitioners and policy makers as well as some useful suggestions for future research and practice.

Keywords

Causal path analysis, teachers' perceptions, student absenteeism, student presenteeism, Qatar

1. Introduction

In today's dynamic and highly competitive world, student engagement and motivation are key to success. Many educational institutions are plagued with student idleness, non-attentiveness, unrest, and indiscipline that undermine the quality of education. International research shows that with many students turning into unmotivated and apathetic individuals, increased student absenteeism, lethargy, and boredom are a concern for schools and families alikeas more and more students fail to perform well at school. Other research, however, confirms that student disengagement leads to absenteeism (Archambault, Janosz, Fallu, & Pagani, 2009).

Because attendance constitutes the first step toward students' educational success, students, families, school practitioners, and the larger community all need to gain a better understanding and more appropriately address the challenges associated with absenteeism and presenteeism within schools in our communities. No two would disagree that attendance is a key indicator of successful school results, as well as productive life outcomes. Students who frequently miss school classes are at a much greater risk of poor self-concept, poor school performance, retention, and dropping out (Picklo & Christenson, 2005).

Interest in the reasons that drive students to miss classes has prompted researchers to investigate their motivation and commitment at school. Examining and understanding the factors influencing students' desire to attend school and actively engage in their learning can be an arduous undertaking and a daunting task but will certainly aid in shedding important light on student absenteeism/presenteeism.

2. Background

Realising major social and economic changes are required to transform their societies from reliance on hydrocarbon resources to knowledge-based economies, the six Gulf Cooperation Council countries (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the UAE) introduced a wave of long-term strategic "national vision" initiatives often drafted by foreign firms and consultants (Al-Kuwārī, 2012). In Qatar, for example, the Qatar National Vision 2030 (QNV), which the leaders articulated in 2008, rests on four pillars: (a) human, (b) social, (c) economic, and (d) environmental development (Abduljawad, 2015).

Central to QNV 2030 is the need to modernise the country's education system. To achieve this goal, Qatar commissioned the RAND Corporation, to overhaul its entire education system from elementary school to higher education (Powell, 2012; Rubin, 2012). The education reform, referred to as Education for a New Era, was initiated in 2002 to decentralise education and introduce the principles of autonomy, accountability, variety, and choice within the system (Al-Maadheed, 2017). This resulted in the creation of independent schools, which replaced government schools, and the establishment of new curriculum standards and teacher and leadership professional development (Nasser, 2017). A visible consequence of these changes is increased pressure on teachers struggling to juggle many responsibilities, especially managing heavy workloads.

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At the heart of the education reform in Qatar is the call for enhancing student motivation and positive engagement in class and other academic environments (Nasser, 2017; QGSDP, 2011). Low student attendance rates and lack of student motivation were identified as real challenges in Qatar (Lee, 2016). Both issues are persistent chronic problems characterising Qatar's school system (Alfadala, 2015; Badri & Khaili, 2014). There is therefore a pressing need to develop students' positive attitudes towards learning, and to deepen their appreciation of the importance of class attendance (Clump, Bauer, & Whiteleather, 2003).

3. Absenteeism/Presenteeism Defined

Defined as the failure to show up for work as required (Johns, 2009), absenteeism entails missing ten per cent or more of total days missed in a school year (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). Current research indicates consensus amongst scholars that absenteeism is an area for concern (Hocking, 2008). With reference to the school environment, there is ample evidence of work done on the reasons and consequences of student absenteeism in particular, including studies proposing a myriad of factors that distract students from school and hence non-attendance. Discussion of these causes and effects is beyond the scope of this paper. Suffice it to say here that personal (Bridgeland, DiIulio, & Morison, 2006), contextual (Hartnett, 2007) and health (Kearney & Bensaheb, 2006) influences are prime reasons why students skip school. Student underperformance remains a major consequence of absenteeism (Gottfried, 2010).

A concept related to absenteeism is presenteeism, a problem many researchers have investigated in organisational behaviour and human resources management fields. Presenteeism is defined as the condition of being physically present at work but not fully functional, productive or engaged, due to health problems (Gerich, 2016). According to Johns (2009, p. 8), "On a continuum, presenteeism stands between full work engagement and absenteeism". In this study, presenteeism refers to the behaviour or condition whereby students are physically present in class during scheduled class time but do not operate to their full potential, thus resulting in loss of productivity.

4. Review of Literature

While research has documented absenteeism in academic settings (Arulampalam, Naylor, & Smith, 2012; Chen & Lin, 2008; Credé, Roch, & Kieszczynka, 2010; Schmulian & Coetzee, 2011), very little is known about presenteeism in educational contexts (Macfarlane, 2012). Admittedly, research on this subject is needed, especially regarding the factors that are likely to cause K–12 student presenteeism behaviour and its effect in hindering academic performance (Law, 2007; Macfarlane, 2015; Schalge & Soga, 2008).

4.1 Presenteeism in the School Context

Although the subject of presenteeism in the workplace is well-researched, only a handful of isolated research efforts have investigated presenteeism in educational settings. Consequently, not enough work has been done to study this phenomenon in academic contexts, especially at K-12 levels. Limited as it is, the recent expansion of presenteeism from its widely acknowledged use in the workplace to the realm of education has brought about a fresh perspective on this topic. Viewing student presenteeism as a loss of academic performance due to illness, Ferritto (2016) measured the concept based on five behavioural facets that normally support student academic achievement: (a) paying attention in class; (b) class participation; (c) class attendance; (d) arriving on time for classes; and (e) note-taking.

Pioneering work explicitly addressing the problem of presenteeism and academic performance loss among students—albeit very limited—has only recently begun to emerge (Ferritto, 2016; Ja úregui et al., 2009; Macfarlane, 2012). Scanty as they are, these studies on student presenteeism have concentrated exclusively on post-secondary (university) settings, including research undertaken in the US (Hysenbegasi, Hass, & Rowland, 2005), Hong Kong (Macfarlane, 2015, 2016, 2017) and Japan (Mikami et al., 2013). Although these studies provide insights into presenteeism in academic environments, other aspects of presenteeism have received limited attention, including its impact on learners' achievement and measures required to curb the problem.

In a study involving university students in Japan, Matsushita et al. (2011) developed a Presenteeism Scale to assess the existence of presenteeism among participants. First-year students in four universities were given a survey on presenteeism and a questionnaire on mental health and eating behavior. The study revealed students with emotional problems had higher levels of presenteeism compared to those with other health problems and that student presenteeism was associated with health problems (allergy, back or neck pain, menstruation, chronic headaches, depression, and anxiety, etc.). In another study, Ferritto (2016) designed the Presenteeism and Perceived Academic Performance Scale to measure student presenteeism by employing a series of student behavioral traits shown to be supportive of academic performance, including paying attention and participation in class, class attendance, tardiness, and note taking.

What prompted this study is lack of information on student absenteeism/presenteeism in Qatar and the Arab region. In trying to decipher teachers' perceptions of student absenteeism/presenteeism in preparatory and secondary school levels in Qatar, this study aims to bridge this gap and contribute to scholarly knowledge regarding absences and disengagement in pre-college education. Additionally, whereas previous work has looked at students' perspectives (Lee, 2016; Massingham & Herrington, 2006), teachers' viewpoints on the topic have been neglected. The present study explores how the latter perceive student absenteeism and presenteeism.

4.2 Research Questions

This study sought to examine the factors influencing preparatory (8th and 9th grades) and secondary (11th and 12th grades) school teachers' perceptions of absenteeism/presenteeism in Qatar. In so doing, we studied the relationship of three constructs to teachers' perceptions: (a) reviewing curriculum content, (b) teaching load, and (c) student graduation rates. The purpose was to see if there are any significant relationships between reported teachers' perceptions and those three variables.

The overarching question this study addressed is: What factors shape teachers' perceptions of student absenteeism/presenteeism in Qatar? In particular specifically, answers were solicited to the following questions:

– How do teachers perceive students' absenteeism/presenteeism?

– What are the factors that influence teachers' perceptions of student absenteeism/presenteeism?

– How are teachers' perceptions associated with students' absenteeism/presenteeism?

5. Research Method

5.1 Research Deign

This research used a survey research method based on an instrument designed by the Social and Economic Survey Research Institute (SESRI), Qatar University. The instrument consists of 98 statements measuring different dimensions related to teachers' perception of student absenteeism/presenteeism and uses a five-point Likert type scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Agree) to 5 (Strongly Disagree).

5.2 Research Sample

This study involved teachers who teach in preparatory (middle) and secondary (high) school teachers at both government-funded (Independent) and private (International) schools in Qatar.1200 teachers from the selected schools were surveyed by SESRI fieldworkers using Computer-Assisted Personal Interviewing. The data was collected by SESRI during the fall of 2015, with a response rate of 41%.

The study involved teachers (n=495) at preparatory (grades 8=31.1% and 9=20.6%) and secondary (grades 11=27.5% and 12=20.8%) Independent and International schools (see Table 1). Overall, the age of participants was distributed with an average of approximately 42 years. Of the 495 questionnaires that were returned, 410 were complete and valid for multivariate analysis. Moreover, only 54 of the 495 teachers who responded are Qatari (10.9%) and 279 are female teachers (56.4%).

Table 1. Teachers' Distribution by Nationality, Gender and Grade Level

Subgroup	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	216	43.6%
Female	279	56.4%
Gradelevel		
Grade 8	154	31.1%
Grade 9	102	20.6
Grade 11	136	27.5
Grade 12	103	20.8
Total	495	100%

5.3 Research Procedure

After data collection was completed, responses were entered manually into Blaise, a computer-assisted interviewing system and survey processing tool. The dataset was then cleaned, coded and saved in SPSS format. After weighting the final responses, the data were analysed using SPSS. The survey involved a two-stage probability school sample of teachers. The sampling frame was based on a comprehensive list of public and private schools provided by Qatar's Ministry of Education.

The first stage sample was a proportionate sample of schools according to school size, school type (i.e., Independent, International), gender (male, female or co-ed) and grade (8th, 9th, 11th, or 12th). Schools were randomly selected within each of these subgroups (type, gender, and grade) so that the school size selected from each strata was relative to its incidence in the entire sampling frame. In stage two, one class from each school grade was randomly selected and teachers of the classes selected were included in the survey.

After getting relevant approvals from the Ministry of Education and Qatar University's Internal Review Board, official letters requesting permission to implement the study were sent to the schools. Teachers were informed in advance about the purpose of the research project and were told participation in the survey was voluntary and that their responses would be kept strictly confidential.

43 schools were sampled, with four refusing to participate, resulting in a 90.7% response rate at the school level. Classrooms were randomly selected in 39 schools and teachers in selected classrooms participated in the survey. However, we do not have information on the actual class sizes to calculate a response rate at the classroom level. This design resulted in 495 teachers. Teachers' response rate was 82.8% and the maximum sampling error was calculated at +/−2 percentage points, showing this study's instrument has internal reliability and construct validity.

5.4 Measures

Dependent variable

Teachers' perception of student absenteeism presenteeism in Qatar. In the teacher questionnaire, teachers were asked: "To what extent is each of the following a problem in your classes?" and were instructed to check all that were applicable: (a) Student tardiness is a problem in your classes; (b) Student absenteeism is a problem in your class; (c) Student apathy is a problem in your classes; and (d) Student unpreparedness to learn is a problem in year class.

In this study, absenteeism includes "Student absenteeism is a problem in your class" and presenteeism comprises "Student tardiness is a problem in your classes", "Student apathy is a problem in your classes", and "Student unpreparedness to learn is a problem in year class" as will be seen in the results section below.

Independent variables

Teaching load:

Teachers were also asked: "Currently, how many hours do you teach per week?" followed by the following options: "I don't know" and "refused".

Reviewing curriculum content:

Teachers were also asked: "In a typical term (semester), how often do you review curriculum content with (a) Fellow teachers in your school and (b) Subject coordinator in your school? Would you say once a term (semester), twice a term (semester), three times a term (semester), more than three times a term (semester) or never?"

Graduation rate:

Teachers were asked: "About what percentage of the students in your class do you expect to graduate?"

Construct validity and reliability

Factor analysis was conducted as a data reduction technique and a test of validity of the 98 statements in the questionnaire. Two statistical tests were performed to determine the suitability of factor analysis. First, the Kaisers-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy score of 0.679 was well above the recommended level of 0.50. Second, the Bartless test of sphericity was significant (Chi Square=2689.22, P<0.00), indicating there were adequate inter-correlations between the items which allow the use of factor analysis. Moreover, principal axis factoring was utilised as an extraction method and oblique rotation was used as a rotation method.

6. Results

6.1 Factor Analysis

Factor analysis resulted in deleting eighty statements with Factor Loadings below 0.70. Accordingly, eighteen valid five-point Likert type scale statements yielded seven factors with Eigen value greater than 1.0 and factor loadings higher than 0.7 (see Table 2). The seven-factor solution accounted for 74.816 per cent of the total variance.

Table 2. Structure Matrix

	Component						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Q95. Student absenteeism is a problem in your classes	.855	.008	.127	-.022	-.199	-.022	.039
Q96. Student apathy is a problem in your classes	.842	-.014	.189	.144	-.167	.264	.063
Q94. Student tardiness is a problem in your classes	.806	.065	.053	.006	-.148	-.039	.044
Q97. Student unprepared to learn is a problem in your classes	.797	.043	.150	.140	-.132	.289	.049
Q44. Discuss using multimedia in class with fellow teachers	.106	.903	-.144	.022	.203	.120	-.128
Q46. Discuss using multimedia in class with subject coordinator	.037	.899	-.146	.021	.196	.051	-.093
Q45. Discuss using multimedia in class with school management	-.032	.856	-.157	-.016	.076	-.001	-.054
Q55. This school management respects teachers	.163	-.163	.877	-.003	-.064	-.103	-.012
Q52. Teachers are treated well in this school	.125	-.102	.853	.024	-.046	-.123	.012
Q54. Teachers and administration work as a team in this school	.070	-.171	.833	.054	-.068	-.144	.083
Q13. In a typical semester, how often do you consult or seek advice on teaching matt	.013	-.012	.024	.866	.014	-.052	.109
Q14. In a typical semester, how often do you consult or seek advice on teaching matt	.087	.022	.029	.854	-.035	-.088	.154
Q4. In a typical semester, how often do you review curriculum content with Fellow teachers in your school	-.147	.116	-.015	-.022	.894	-.075	-.068
Q6. In a typical semester, how often do you review curriculum content with Subject coordinator in your school	-.195	.196	-.118	-.001	.881	-.028	-.097
Q1. How satisfied are you with curriculum standards?	-.161	-.097	.159	-.004	.062	-.870	.091
Q3. How satisfied are you with the curriculum content for the subject you teach?	-.035	-.026	.138	.153	.040	-.834	-.070
Q19. How often do you use teaching materials prepared by yourself	.067	-.114	.045	.066	-.085	.020	.846
Q20. How often do you use teaching materials prepared by yourself with your fellow teachers in your school	.035	-.050	.014	.188	-.073	-.022	.835

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Oblimin with Kaiser Normalization.

The range of the *Cronbach's alpha* reliability coefficients for the factors was between 0.714 and 0.829 and these factors were labelled according to their factor loadings as follows:

– Factor 1: Teachers' perception of student absenteeism and presenteeism in Qatar

– Factor 2: Discussing how to use multimedia in class

– Factor 3: Treating teachers as professionals

– Factor 4: School teacher-teacher consultation

– Factor 5: Teachers' satisfaction with the curriculum

– Factor 6: Preparing teaching materials

– Factor 7: Reviewing curriculum content

Based on factor analysis, it is clear that absenteeism/presenteeism were loaded under Factor 1 and will be treated as one variable in the discussion of the results.

Testing the relative importance of the independent variables to the dependent variable

In regressing factor one (teachers' perception of student absenteeism/presenteeism in Qatar) on the other six factors, alongside two other questions, namely (1) teaching load (i.e., Currently, how many hours do you teach per week?) and (2) expected graduation rate (i.e., About what percentage of the students in your class do you expect to graduate?), only three are significant in explaining the variation (teaching load: 0.000; expected graduation rate: 0.023; reviewing curriculum content: 0.045) and hence in predicting teachers' reported perception of student absenteeism/presenteeism in Qatar (Table 3). These variables were used in path analysis.

Table 3. Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	-1.153	.207		-5.566	.000
Discuss How to Use Multimedia in Class	.032	.047	.032	.679	.498
Treating teachers as professionals	.074	.048	.074	1.551	.122
School Teacher–Teacher Consultation	.055	.046	.055	1.208	.228
Reviewing Curriculum Content	-.095	.047	-.095	-2.008	.045
Teachers' Job satisfaction	.061	.046	.061	1.306	.192
Preparation of Teaching Materials	.016	.046	.016	.343	.732
Expected Graduation Rate (Student Success)	.005	.002	.105	2.280	.023
Teaching Load	.048	.008	.312	6.307	.000

Note. a. Dependent Variable: Teachers' perceptions of student absenteeism and presenteeism in Qatar.

Conceptual framework

Regressing the dependent variable (teachers' perception of student absenteeism/presenteeism) on the explanatory variables "reviewing curriculum content", "teaching load", and the "expected graduation rate" and using a stepwise multiple regression equation produced a highly significant F value. Path analysis results showed that the teaching load has the highest direct effect. Reviewing curriculum content and the expected graduation rate received the second and third highest direct effects, respectively. Figure 1 shows the conceptual causal framework for the selected factors that interact to influence teachers' perception of student absenteeism/presenteeism in Qatar. The true direct effect is shown between parentheses while the other numbers represent zero-order relations.
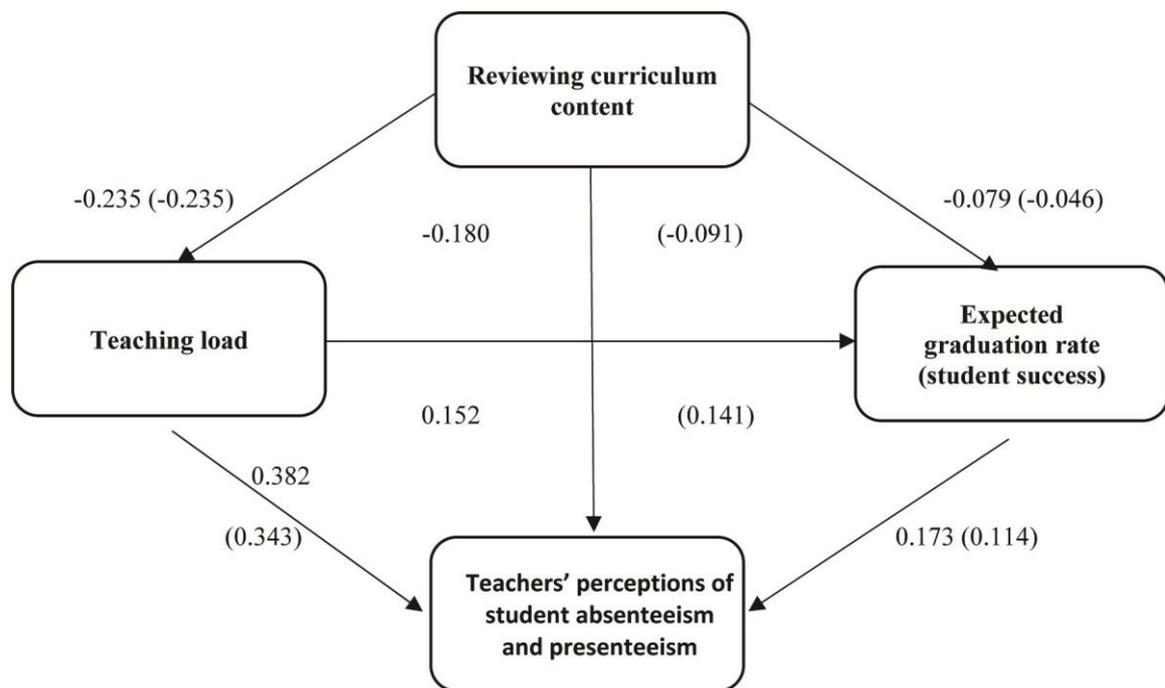

Figure 1. Predictors of Student Absenteeism and Presenteeism in Qatar: A Pathway Analysis Chart

7. Discussion

This study draws on previous research to identify contextual (school-related) variables likely to influence teachers' perceptions regarding students' absentee/presentee behavior. Looked at from the perspectives of teachers, three variables were found to influence student absenteeism/presenteeism: teaching load, reviewing the content of the curriculum, and the expected rate of student graduation. The data analysis points to a positive causal relationship between teachers' reported perceptions of student absenteeism/presenteeism and their teaching load. Against our expectations, a path analysis revealed the heavier the teachers' workload is, the more likely they are to report student

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absenteeism/presenteeim in school. This may be taken to mean that heavy or excessive teaching load affects student attendance, interest and engagement. These findings are in line with previous studies indicating that school-related factors influence the likelihood a student will skip or attend school regularly. More specifically, instructional and classroom factors are strong predictors of student attendance or absence (Marks, 2000). For instance, workload is shown to affect students' school engagement and their academic achievement (Salmela-Aro & Upadyaya, 2014).

Evidence shows teachers' workload (including instruction, assessment, materials development, tutoring, advising, etc.) influences student attitudes towards learning. For example, Salley and Shaw (2015) noted a heavy teaching load affects both teacher effectiveness and student learning outcomes. Thus, students' overall satisfaction with their course is significantly affected by how they perceive workload. Demanding course loads can be a source of stress and may cause student burnout due to feelings of exhaustion and stress and student burnout can in turn trigger high levels of absenteeism, low motivation and engagement, and reduced productivity (Meier & Schmeck, 1985). However, evidence remains inconsistent since other research shows workload has little to do with burnout (Jacobs & Dodd, 2003).

Our results could also be interpreted in the context of easy access to information and the availability of alternative study materials, which may account for student absences (Massingham & Herrington, 2006). Evidence shows technology and the Internet have multiple benefits for education where it is being utilised as a convenient educational tool (Dogruer, Eyyam, & Menevis, 2011). Dissimilar to traditional classes, the Internet is oftentimes employed by students as a convenient tool to complete homework assignments (Cranmer, 2006). One could argue the Internet in particular makes it possible for some students with extended absences to make up for their missed lectures.

The results also yielded a negative relationship between teachers' perceptions of student absenteeism/presenteeim and curriculum content reviewing. Could this imply that the more the curriculum content is reviewed, the less likely teachers are to perceive student absentee/presentee behaviour? Moreover, could this signify that reviewing the existing curriculum helps spark student interest, motivation and engagement? This study's findings reinforce results from past research and emphasise the importance of curriculum revision in motivating students. The current study also shows reviewing curriculum content helps to lessen boredom and reduce absences from school.

Curriculum development and renewal are important components of any educational reform. Research unveils a recent surge of interest in the impact of curriculum reforms on educational outcomes (Allais, 2012; Souto-Otero, 2012). Common to many reform initiatives is a growing interest in the influence of curriculum materials on classroom instruction (Moyer, Cai, Wang, & Nie, 2011). With the focus on outcomes as a force driving curriculum design and development, student attendance and engagement are viewed as critical for academic success (Chang & Romero, 2008). Documented research consistently shows that curriculum review and revision aid in enhancing student engagement and academic performance (Vander Jagt, 2013). When curriculum practices (teaching materials, instruction and assessment) are revised, students tend to demonstrate successful learning and achievement.

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These findings support the results of other studies by underscoring the role of the curriculum in enhancing student attendance and triggering active involvement in class (Kousalya, Ravindranath, & Vizayakumar, 2006). The key role of the curriculum and curriculum revision in engaging students in learning is documented in a recent study by Mills, Krouse, Rossi-Schwartz, and Klein (2017) and previous work by Windham (2005). Curriculum revision significantly influences student success and remains an option that can help to curtail absenteeism among students (Kumar & Giri, 2012). For Schalge and Soga (2008), dissatisfaction with the curriculum causes boredom and the structure of the curriculum, coupled with good teacher-student communication concerning curriculum content, is a key to curbing student absences. No doubt, an engaging pedagogy and an engaging curriculum instigate active student engagement (Parsons & Taylor, 2011).

Against our expectations, our results reveal a positive relationship between teachers' perception of students' absenteeism/presenteeism, and their expected graduation rate. Surprisingly, the data suggest that the more teachers expect their students to graduate, the more likely they are to perceive student absenteeism/presenteeism. Empirical evidence demonstrates that attendance does matter for students to graduate on time and that chronic absenteeism puts them off-track to graduation (Allensworth, Gwynne, Moore, & de la Torre, 2014). However, this contrasts with our results, which point to the opposite, indicating absentee/presentee behaviours tend to be associated with graduation from school, as reported by teachers. It needs to be noted that in the absence of attendance record data and data regarding graduation rates in Qatar, it is difficult to clarify the likely effect of absence or attendance on student success and achievement. It is unfortunate that access to such valuable information is not readily made available to the public.

A drop in attendance rates is a predictor of course failure, thus setting students off-track to graduation. Prior research shows consistent links between student attendance and being on the path toward eventual graduation. Hence, attendance is a predictor of whether students are on-track to graduation from school and absence from classes puts students at high risks of not graduating at all (Allensworth, Gwynne, Moore, & de la Torre, 2014; Kieffer & Marinell, 2012). In Qatar, anecdotal reports increasingly point to a prevalent absenteeism/presenteeism epidemic amongst the student population at all levels of schooling. This situation has not improved despite multiple K=12 education reforms initiated over the past two decades (Brewer et al., 2007). The public also has been largely unaware of the gravity of the problem of absenteeism/presenteeism. Unfortunately, the difficulty of obtaining access to accurate and reliable empirical data on the scope and extent of this phenomenon in Qatar makes it difficult to paint a clear picture of the scale and scope of student absentee and presentee behaviour.

Whereas we acknowledge the missing link between students' absences and their graduation prospects in our study, previous documented research that shows associations between graduation and absenteeism is lacking. A tentative explanation for our observation above, and the paradox it alludes to, lies in contemplating the global expansion of private tutoring in recent years, with private lessons increasingly perceived as an alternative to regular schooling (Bray & Kwo, 2014). Due to weak formal

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education, private tutoring is turning into a supplement, and even a substitute—to mainstream public schools (Ali, 2013), as evidenced by findings from Silova and Bray's research (2006). In Qatar, the prevalence of tutoring for secondary, and even primary-level students is vivid and has turned into a convenient means of compensating for missed classes (Stepney, 2016).

8. Conclusion and Recommendations

Absenteeism and presenteeism flourish when students realise the risk of being penalised for their behaviour is minimal or non-existent, eventually making absences and disengagement a gateway to dropping out of school altogether. Since poor student attendance and presenteeism have far-reaching consequences on students, schools, and society, the solution to this problem requires a multidimensional approach involving the interaction and interplay between personal, scholastic and socio-cultural factors. As key players in children's education, school leaders, teachers, families, and the community all have a share of responsibility in raising awareness of the importance of school attendance and active engagement starting at the pre-school level.

In the interest of effective management of the problem, strategies for scaling down chronic absence/absenteeism should start within school sites. Teachers and school officials need to understand and monitor attendance and disengagement behaviour. Early identification of absenteeism/presenteeism patterns will provide opportunities for early intervention to engage students and families before these patterns become chronic. Similarly, a strict school attendance policy must be adopted and maintained and an early-warning system implemented. Stressing that regular attendance is a priority, along with continued recognition of and rewards to students with good and improved attendance records, is important. Students and their families need to be aware of the positive impact of good attendance and active participation in class. Motivation and positive engagement with the curriculum are critical requisites for them to be on-track to graduation.

Presenteeism is a relatively new field and very little is known about this phenomenon within school environments. Lack of scholarship on this topic makes it hard to identify relevant characteristics that can easily be measured empirically. Therefore, any attempt that seeks to quantify presenteeism is fraught with difficulty. Investigating different factors that are at play in order to establish the validity of self-reports of class disengagement is useful to inform our understanding of the impact of presenteeism on the individual learner, the school and society at large.

While this study focused on a few school-related variables affecting teachers' perceptions of absenteeism/presenteeism, it would benefit from also looking at other important influences. By analysing personal variables (attitudes, beliefs, motivation, etc.) and contextual factors (demographic, social, cultural, etc.), research stands to gain fresh insights into the nature and impact of absenteeism and, more specifically, presenteeism. A limitation of this study lies in its use of a survey method confined to a sample of teachers. Employing qualitative research methods that include the perspectives of teachers, students and school officials would help to explore, in depth, the levels of concern of these

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different groups, and the supports required to deal with student absences and disengagement.

Further research is required to expand participant recruitment to comprise other K-12 grade levels, including primary and preparatory levels of schooling. Expanding the study would allow comparisons within and across different student groups and thus provide rich and robust data; it would also help to identify the grades at which absentee/presentee behaviour is more or less visible. We recognise problematic behaviours may alter with age and will vary from one school to another depending on different contextual factors. However, understanding the factors that shape absentee/presentee behaviours can be very useful in gaining deeper insights regarding this problematic behaviour and ways of support planning.

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