

The Impact of Class Attendance on Final Examination Scores of Yemeni EFL Student Teachers

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Abstract

This study is focused on research questions regarding (a) the extent of the relationship between class attendance and academic performance, (b) whether the student teachers' academic performance differ according to gender. One hundred and forty Yemeni EFL student-teachers of a third level course, Morphology and Syntax, in the teacher preparation program at the Department of English in the College of Education at Sana'a University in Yemen, participated in this study. Their ages ranged between 21 and 24 years. The results indicated positive and statistically significant relationships between students' attendance and their final examination scores in the Morphology and Syntax course. The more students attended class the higher they achieved. The results also indicated that female students attended class more than male students and that was one of the reasons for the female students outperforming the male students in the academic performance. The study concluded that the number of days a student was present in class positively affected their academic performance. Based on the findings of this study, some pedagogical implications were suggested and for further research into the reasons for lower male attendance and performance.

Index Terms: Class attendance, academic performance, gender

1. Introduction and Theoretical Background

- 1.1. The present study was backed by getting informed by some gaps and issues in the literature such as the scarcity of Arab based class attendance research as well as the debate regarding the relationship between class attendance and academic performance. Therefore, the relationship between class attendance and academic performance forms the backbone of the current study. It contains the reports of a study of a group of Yemeni EFL student teachers' academic performance in relation to their class attendance and performance. Attendance and
- 1.2. Performance section intends to throw light through the findings of empirical research studies and aiming at assessing the relationship between class attendance and

academic performance. In other words, throughout the literature on second and foreign language teaching and learning, one can find some research studies that relate academic performance to class attendance.

For example, some of the recent research studies have claimed that class attendance significantly affects students' academic performance and grades. Al-Mekhlafi (2011) studied the relationship between class attendance and final examination scores in a writing course. His subjects were forty-four female EFL student teachers at Sohar University in Oman during the academic year 2009/2010. For collecting the data, the researcher used the final examination scores in a writing course and attendance records. The results of the study showed that the students, who were absent fewer times in the course of Advanced Writing, scored higher final examination marks for the course.

Based on their findings of a research study on an English course in the English department at Manouba Faculty of Letters, Arts, and Humanities, Tunisia, Ben Ali and Manouba (2014) reported the impact of absenteeism on the performance of Tunisian English students. They provided empirical evidence to confirm the link between absenteeism and students' academic performance. However, they were unable to prove that high rates of absenteeism make students' grades low.

Ozkanal and Arikán (2011) investigated the relationship between absenteeism and academic success. They analyzed 413 students' records of English, French and German classes at the Eskişehir Osmangazi University in Turkey in the academic year 2007- 2008. Their results indicated that when students attended classes regularly, they became successful whereas student absenteeism yielded inadequate learning and academic failure. They also found that the level of success changed according to students' majors. That is a student's major is a significant factor to contributing to his or her academic achievement.

Ajiboye and Tella (2006) investigated the influence of class attendance and gender on some undergraduate social studies students in the University of Botswana. 76 students participated in the study. Their results suggest that class attendance is a mediating factor in student's performance in a social studies course.

LeBlanc (2005) investigated the relationship between class attendance and the grade scores in the college classroom. 1588 students in four different colleges and in nine different courses

through the academic years 1989 to 2003 participated in his study. His results strongly suggested that a strong relationship existed between class-attendance and test score averages. Furthermore, Moore (2005) concluded that high rate of class attendance correlated strongly with high rate of academic achievement.

Moreover, Klem and Connell (2004) support the view that the relationship between class attendance and student performance is a recursive one in which the students who are lower performers, are more likely to reduce their attendance rate which in turn influences their subsequent academic performance and so on until they drop out.

However, Cohall and Skeete (2012) reported that the results of their study indicated that attendance, even though critical to the learning process, was not the single most important factor in the learning process and suggested that other factors were critical to academic success.

The documented relationship between class attendance and class performance made all the instructors at the Department of English at the College of Education at Sana'a University include a graded attendance policy in their syllabus. According to the Undergraduate Courses Handbook (2013), "a student who does not have a minimum of 75% of attendance for a course will not be allowed to take the final examination in that course". Thus, the instructors encourage their students to attend classes in a variety of ways. Some of them count attendance positively in grade determination while others assign some marks for attendance and participation in class.

In addition to the main advantage of attending classes which is believed to enhance learning, some other research studies have highlighted other advantages of regularly attending classes. According to Baloche (1998) class attendance provides students with the chance to socialize with their teachers and colleagues which enhances the atmosphere at the school. This intimate atmosphere at school consequently increases the students' motivation to learn the language (Warrington and Jeffery, 2006). Furthermore, Ben Ali and Manouba (2014) observe that attending classes regularly will result in the students' having the opportunity to go through all the curriculum contents. They also discuss and elaborate academic issues that do not exist in the class materials. Another advantage of class attendance according to Baloche (1998) is that the students get the chance to ask their instructors questions and receive answers to such questions which may result in deepening students' knowledge about the topics included in their syllabus. LeBlanc (2005) investigated the relationship between class attendance and the grade scores in the With the increasing importance given to class attendance there have been many research studies, (Ben Ali and Manouba, 2014; Ozkanal and Arikhan , 2011; Al-Mekhlafi, 2011; Cohall and Skeete, 2012; LeBlanc, 2005; Klem and Connell, 2004 among others) that have explored the

relationship between class attendance and student academic performance. These studies have demonstrated that class attendance is positively correlated with academic achievement.

There is a significant body of research studies that have focused on the domains of general psychology (Clump, Bauer and Whitleather, 2003), medicine (Hamdi, 2006; Cohall and Skeete, 2012), English (Al-Mekhlafi, 2011; Ozkanal and Arik, 2011; Ben Ali and Manouba, 2014), economics (Caviglia-Harris, 2006; Andrietti and D'Addazio, 2012), social studies (Ajiboye and Tella, 2006) and multiple disciplines (LeBlanc, 2005) with the domain of linguistics receiving little attention. Therefore, in the present study, the impact of class attendance on the participants' final scores in a Morphology and Syntax course will be investigated.

1.3. Previous Studies within the Framework of Gender Differences

An area of interest to the present study is the gender differences in academic performance that has been reported in some recent research studies. For example, Ajiboye and Tella (2006) reported that gender had a significant effect on the students' academic performances in a social studies class. The male participants outperformed the female counterparts in the rate of attendance and academic performance. This finding contradicts the common believe that female students are better performers in language and social studies while male students are better performers in mathematics and science (Reis, 1998). Ajiboye and Tella (2006) argue that the main reason for the male students outperforming the female students, is the fact that the male students attended more classes than their female counterparts and thus maximized their chances of success.

Nyame (2010) investigated the difference in class attendance and academic performance of Junior High School male and female students. Her results indicated that female students attended class more than male students. However, there was no statistical significant difference between the mean class attendance by male and female students. Furthermore, she tried to find out whether there was a significant difference in the performance of male and female students. Her results indicated that the male students did significantly better than the female students. However, she concluded that when the effect on size was calculated, it was found to be very small.

To explain why male students outperform their female counterparts, Lynn (2004) claims that males have larger average brain sizes than females and therefore, would be expected to have higher average IQs. One generalization about males as a whole is that they display a greater amount of negative social behavior than females in the classroom and this is thought to play a role in their academic performance (Downey & Vogt- Yuan, 2005).

On the other hand, some other studies have claimed that female students are more motivated and higher achievers than male students (Al-Emadi, 2003). In this regard, Al-Emadi (2003) came up with several environmental reasons why female students outperformed the male students. He claims that in the Arab culture, the socialization of boys and girls and the way of living partially explains the differential gender effects on academic performance. Furthermore, females are more restricted and confined to home, especially during adolescence than boys are and this seems to give females more time to work on school work than males who have more freedom to be outside of their homes. Thus, the focus of female students on schoolwork is much more than that of the male students.

Some other research studies such as Ozkanal and Arikan (2011) reported that gender was determined to be an insignificant factor to affect academic performance and success. Ozkanal and Arikan concluded that gender does not play an important role in the relation between academic performance and absenteeism.

To sum up, the previous research studies on gender differences indicate that gender can have an impact on the students' academic achievement. These studies claim that female students often have higher ability than males in language and arts only, while male students have higher ability than females in mathematics, science, and social studies (Reis, 1998; Ajiboye and Tella, 2006).

2. THE PRESENT STUDY

1.4. Significance of the Study

An understanding of the relationship (if any) between the student teachers' class attendance and their actual performance in a morphology and syntax course is important because it can guide their trainers in working with those who have high or low class attendance. Therefore, the main aims of the current study were as follows:

1. To investigate the relationship (if any) between student teachers' class attendance and their final examination scores in a Morphology and Syntax course.
2. To understand the role of gender on class attendance and students' achievement.

2.2. Study Questions

The following specific research questions were formulated to guide the inquiry:

1. Is there a relationship between the students' class attendance and their academic performance in a Morphology and Syntax course?
2. To what extent, if any, does students' academic performance differ according to gender?

2.3. Study Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated based on the above research questions. They make up the predicted results of the study.

- a. Class attendance is associated with high academic performance while high absenteeism is associated with poor academic performance.
- b. Female students tend to show higher academic performance scores than male students.

2.4. Study Limitations

The scope of this study is limited in terms of the following aspects. It is based on the Morphology and Syntax course scores and the class attendance record. Furthermore, the sample of the study is limited to the Third Level student teachers in the Department of English, College of Education at Sana'a University in Yemen during the academic year 2013/2014. The participants were not chosen randomly, and therefore, caution should be taken in making generalizations from the results to other contexts.

3. METHOD AND PROCEDURES

3.1. Participants

Using the total enumeration sampling technique, a hundred and thirty five students who were enrolled in a Morphology and Syntax course participated in the present study. They studied at the Department of English, Faculty of Education, Sana'a University in Yemen. They were enrolled in a four-year program (a total of 152 Credit hours) leading to a bachelor degree in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL). They had to secure a minimum of 50% in order to pass a course. Upon the completion of the requirements of the program, they would be granted a Bachelor of Education Degree in the Teaching of English. One hundred and four (77 %) of the students were females and the other thirty one (23 %) were males. Their ages were between 21 and 24 and all were speakers of the same first language (Arabic). The student teachers were organized into three groups of about 45 students in each group. They were of mixed abilities in their English proficiency. Most of them were highly motivated and most of them were at the expected level, while a few of them were either below or above the expected level. They all attended seven courses of 19 credit hours per week for about 12 weeks of the academic year 2013/2014. The context of the teaching and learning situation is English as a foreign language (EFL) where the students are exposed to the English language only in the classroom.

3.2 Morphology and Syntax Course

Morphology and Syntax, which is the main concern of the current study, is the third of seven linguistic courses the subjects need to take. It was taught by the researcher, a native speaker of

the participants' first language (Arabic). The course was delivered in two ninety minute lectures per week over a twelve-week semester. The course had two broad sections: Morphological Analysis and Structural Syntax. It provided the student-teachers certain simple tools to enable them to look at their own language more systematically and thereby be able to compare and contrast English and Arabic morphology. The section on syntax, in addition to giving them the necessary knowledge of the way English is structured, was intended to increase their confidence of their language use (Department of English, 2013).

The following are the aims of the Morphology and Syntax, one of the courses that the researcher teaches to the participants of this study. He shares these aims with his students in the first meeting at the beginning of the semester.

1. To acquaint students with the key concepts in morphology such as the notion of word and its structure: morphemes, allomorphs, roots, bases, stems and affixes.
2. To provide students with an overview of the most morphological processes and uses such as affixation, compounding, suppletion, reduplication, word formation processes, derivation and inflection.
3. To acquaint students with how words are organized in phrases and the relationships between parts of a sentence as well as the notion of structural ambiguity.

The main textbooks for this course are Thakur (1997) and Thakur (1998). Through the integration of technology into the course, the student teachers were able to communicate with their teacher and with their classmates out of class by using Nicenet. They were also able to reflect on what they learn in class and during the week by posting on Nicenet.

3.3. Attendance Policy

At the beginning of the course, the instructor explicitly announced the attendance policy to the students. According to Sana'a University policies, the student teachers are required to attend at least 75% of the total number of classes. Any student who fails to secure 75% attendance of classes in a course is deemed to not have satisfactorily participated in the course and will fail the course. The 25% of absenteeism was estimated to meet any mitigating circumstances that the students might go through such as illness or the death of a close relative, etc. The instructor encouraged the students' attendance by making clear to them that testing would be extensive from material presented in class rather than material from the textbook. Attendance was taken at the beginning and at the end of each session by the instructor to ensure clarity in the attendance rates.

3.4 Instruments

3.41 Class Attendance

The Morphology and Syntax course data were obtained from the instructor's class attendance record. Class Attendance is defined as the number of times a student is absent from class lectures according to the following scale:

Table (1): The Scale Used in Recording Class Attendance

Scale	Absent
6	0 time
5	1 time
4	2 times
3	3 times
2	4 times
1	5 times

3.4.1 Morphology and Syntax Final Scores (Achievement)

The researcher used the students' final scores in the Morphology and Syntax course during the second semester of the academic year 2013/2014. They were used as an indicator of the student teachers' academic achievement and they consisted of the following:

- **Class Reflections on Nicenet = 10 %**
- **2 Presentations in class = 5 %**
- **Participation (Tasks)= 5 %**
- **Mid Semester Test = 10 %**
- **Final Examination = 70 %**

The Mid Semester Test and the Final Examination were developed by the course instructor (the researcher) and they contained multiple-choice and essay questions covering the course of Morphology and Syntax. The researcher made sure that the examinations covered material that was taught inside the classroom and was appropriate to the department course objectives. They were obtained from the university records increasing the reliability of such information (Wilson, Ward, & Ward, 1997). The scale used in giving the final grades is shown in Table (2) below:

Table (2): The Scale Used in Giving the Final Grades

Marks	Letter	Scale	Grade
90-100	A	5	Excellent
80 – 89	B	4	Very Good
65-79	C	3	Good
50-64	D	2	Pass
0-49	F	1	Fail

3.5 Data Analysis

Using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Program, the data obtained from the instructor's class attendance records were coded and analysed according to the following scale: 1 (absent for 5 times), 2 (4 times), 3 (3 times), 4 (2 times), 5 (1 times) and 6 (0 time) (research question 1). Similarly, the data obtained from the final results of the Morphology and Syntax class were coded according to a five point scale as follows: 1 (the student's score is 0- 49 marks), 2 (50 – 64), 3 (65-79), 4 (80 – 89) and 5 (90 – 100 marks). Then, basic descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) as well as Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and Pearson correlation coefficients were computed. The significance level in this study was set at $p<0.05$.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

a. Class Attendance

The main focus of this study was to determine if there was a significant, positive relationship between class attendance and student achievement in the Morphology and Syntax class. Class attendance was measured by the number of times a student was present in the class while student achievement was measured by the final scores the students achieved in the course.

The examination of data collected through the class attendance record permitted a description of the student teachers' frequency and percent of absenteeism. Table (3) below presents the distribution of the student teachers according to their frequency and percent of absenteeism.

Table (3): Frequency and Percent of Absenteeism

Category	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Absent 0 times	30	22.2	22.2
Absent 1 times	22	16.3	38.5
Absent 2 times	15	11.1	49.6
Absent 3 times	18	13.3	62.9
Absent 4 time	17	12.6	75.6
Absent 5 time	33	24.4	100.0
Total	135	100.0	

With regard to the student teachers' frequency and percent of absenteeism at class, Table (3) above shows that 30 student teachers (22.2 %) attended all the twenty four classes while 22 (16.3 %) absented themselves from the class only one lecture. The table also shows that 15 student teachers (11.1 %) absented themselves from the class two times, 18 student teachers (13.3%) were three times absent from the class, 17 students (12.6%) missed four classes and the remaining 33 (24.4 %) missed five of the twenty four lectures.

The average student teacher missed 2.51 of the 24 class days, or 10.45 percent of the classes.

b. Students' Performance

The examination of data collected through the final examination performance records permitted a description of the student teachers' performance in the Morphology and Syntax class. The frequency and the percentages of the student teachers performance in the course are given in Table (4) below.

Table (4): Frequency and Percent of Students' Final Examination Scores

Category	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Excellent	10	7.4	7.4
Very Good	21	15.6	23
Good	43	31.9	54.9
Pass	42	31.1	85.9
Fail	19	14.1	100.0
Total	135	100.0	

With regard to the participants' academic performance, Table (4) above shows that 10 student teachers (7.4%) scored excellent (90% and above), 21 (25.6%) scored very good (80 – 89), 43 student teachers (31.9%) scored good (65-79) in the final examination, 42 student teachers (31.1%) scored a pass score (50-64) in the final examination and the remaining 19 (14.1%) failed the course because their final marks were below 50.

The participants' final examination scores in the Morphology and Syntax class averaged around (67) marks and they obtained an average of (2.86) out of the five-point scale and a final overall course grade of C+.

c. Answering the Research Questions

To answer the first question of this investigation, the Pearson Correlations coefficients were computed as to investigate the relationship between the students' class attendance and their final marks in the Morphology and Syntax course. Table (5) below presents Pearson correlation coefficients among all the variables used in the study.

Table (5): Pearson's Correlation Coefficients between the Variables of the Study

		Gender	Attend	Grades
Gender	Pearson Correlation	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)			
	N	135		
Attend	Pearson Correlation	0.316(**)	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000		
	N	135	135	
Grades	Pearson Correlation	0.175(*)	0.440(**)	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.043	0.000	
	N	135	135	135

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Referring to Table (5) above, the final examination scores of the Morphology and Syntax class, correlates positively and significantly with the student-teachers' variable of attendance (Attend). These results seem to show that students who are absent fewer times from classes score higher final examination scores in the Morphology and Syntax class. Based on the results of this study,

we can conclude that the student teachers at Sana'a University are more likely to obtain higher course grades when they attend classes and participate in the class activities. Accordingly, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis is accepted.

This finding lends support to the finding reported by Ben Ali and Manouba (2014) ; Ozkanal and Arikan (2011) ; Al-Mekhlafi (2011) ; Cohall and Skeete (2012) ; LeBlanc (2005) ; Klem and Connell (2004) among others who concluded that class attendance was positively correlated with academic performance. This result suggests that attending lectures will be considered more crucial for a course like Morphology and Syntax that has been described as a verbal based subject according to Gardner's (2006) theory of Multiple Intelligences. This may imply that the nature of the course may require the instructor to provide the students with much information about the course. Accordingly, frequent absenteeism of a student from classes will deny him or her the opportunity of benefiting from the instructor of the course.

The aim of the second question of the present study was to determine whether the student teachers' attendance and academic performance in the Morphology and Syntax class differ according to gender. To answer this question, the Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was computed as shown in Table (6) below:

Table (6) Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

		Std.				
		N	Mean	Deviation	F	Sig.
Attend	Male	31	2.3871	1.92661	14.736	0.000
	Female	104	3.8173	1.78866		
	Total	135	3.4889	1.91173		
Grades	Male	31	2.3548	1.27928	4.177	0.043
	Female	104	2.8173	1.04987		
	Total	135	2.7111	1.11881		

Table (6) shows that the average mean of the male student on the class attendance was 2.38 while the average mean of their female counterparts was 3.82. The mean scores of the male student teachers and the females were compared using an F- test. This analysis resulted in an F-score of (14.736) ($P < 0.000$). This means that the difference between the two samples was statistically significant at $P < 0.05$. The results clearly demonstrate that the female students scored higher on the attendance factor than the male students. This result implies that the female

students attended more classes in the Morphology and Syntax course than the male students. Accordingly, the null hypothesis is rejected.

Furthermore, the female students' scores in the final examination of the Morphology and Syntax course were statistically significant. The average mean of the female students' final examination scores was 2.81 while that of their male counterparts was 2.35. The F value was 4.177 and the P value was 0.043. This indicates that the difference between the two samples was statistically significant at $P < 0.05$.

This result does not lend support to the finding of Ajiboye & Tella (2006) who reported that their male subjects outperformed the female subjects. It, however, goes in line with the finding reported by Al-Emadi (2003) who found that girls were more motivated and higher achievers than boys. He argued that female students had more time to work on school work than males who had more freedom to be outside of their homes. Therefore, one plausible explanation might be that the focus of female students on schoolwork is more than that of male students. Unlike the female students, some of the male students may have to study in the mornings and work in the afternoons to support their families. The researcher noticed that in the 1970s- 1990s the Yemeni government used to give the students of the Faculty of Education financial support which resulted in that the male students did not need to look for jobs to support their families. Therefore, the focus of both male and female students on schoolwork was high. Thus, most of the high performers were males. These days, the female students in school and university levels outperform the male students.

The findings of the present study suggest that success in a college course such as the Morphology and Syntax course is dependent on some factors. More specifically, it is the student's attendance as well as his or her gender that is of most importance when predicting course scores. Motivation is also another main factor in predicting academic performance because the unmotivated students who are forced to attend lectures are unlikely to participate in the class activities or pay attention and as a result gain minimally from the course.

C. Study Implications

Since there exists a strong relationship between class attendance and academic performance, the educational authorities should come out with effective measures to ensure that the students attend classes regularly. Furthermore, teachers need to motivate the students who do not attend classes regularly to increase their class attendance in order to perform better. Teachers can achieve this by exploring creative teaching strategies and technologies. The study indicated that there is a statistically significant difference between class attendance of male and female students

in favour of females. The university authorities should try to reconsider some incentives to make the male students focus on their class attendance and schoolwork. Since high attendance rates are indicators of effective academic success, teachers should monitor student attendance in every class. They should also promote awareness of the important role that class attendance plays in achieving academic success. The findings of this study have proven that class attendance is a valid construct in the Yemeni context.

4. CONCLUSION

This study investigated the significance of attendance in the improvement of academic performance of a third year course, Morphology and Syntax, in the teacher preparation program at the Department of English in the College of Education at Sana'a University in Yemen. The results of this study indicated that a relationship exists between class attendance and academic achievement. The relationship found between academic performance and gender was explained by class attendance and that the focus of female students on schoolwork was more than that of male students who had more freedom to be outside of their homes. Unlike the female students, some of the male students would have studied in the mornings and worked in the afternoons to support their families. Future research studies should examine some of the factors that account for low academic performance in male students in order to take appropriate measures to curb them and help them perform better in future.

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