

**MOTIVATIONAL FACTORS INFLUENCING
STUDENT ABSENTEEISM IN SECONDARY
SCHOOLS IN AL-AIN CITY, UNITED ARAB
EMIRATES (UAE)**

**REEM MOHAMMED HADDAF RADWAN
ALMENHALI**

UNIVERSITI SAINS MALAYSIA

2025

**MOTIVATIONAL FACTORS INFLUENCING
STUDENT ABSENTEEISM IN SECONDARY
SCHOOLS IN AL-AIN CITY, UNITED ARAB
EMIRATES (UAE)**

by

**REEM MOHAMMED HADDAF RADWAN
ALMENHALI**

**Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**

September 2025

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to express my gratitude to Allah SWT for giving me the strength to finish this study. An incredibly special gratitude goes out to my main supervisor, Datuk Professor Dr. Azlinda Azman and co-supervisor, Associate Professor Dr. Paramjit Singh Jamir Singh. The top management of USM Library and the founder of Strategic Program in the Research Support Service (SPiReSS) and Encik Moh'd Nasir Md Rashid. In particular, the USM Thesis Formatting team members; Mdm. Jamilah Hassan Basri, Mdm. Lizawati Muhammadan, Mdm. Noor Adilah Azmi, Mdm. Rosnani Ahmad and Ms. Rabiahtul Adauwiyah Abu Hanifah for their commitment and patience in overcoming numerous obstacles in finishing the task. Moreover, in the process of completing the template, I received assistance and guidance from some respected persons, who deserve my gratitude; Dr. Mohd Zuli Ja'afar and Mr. Wan Zuki Wan Azman from the MZJ Formatting Team, for guiding and helping me in numerous consultations. Last but not least, to Mdm. Nur Husna Mansor and the team members from the Institute of Postgraduate Studies (IPS) for their input, consultation, and involvement in updating the USM Guidelines in finishing the template. A special dedication to the participants who attended the Research Support Workshop in USM Library. Thank you for the tremendous positive feedback given along with the continuous support received.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	iii
LIST OF TABLES	viii
LIST OF FIGURES	xi
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	xii
LIST OF APPENDICES	xiii
ABSTRAK	xiv
ABSTRACT	xvi
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Research Background.....	2
1.3 Problem Statement	2
1.4 Research Questions	11
1.5 Research Objectives	11
1.6 Research Significance	12
1.7 Significance to Social Work.....	15
1.8 Significance to Social Change.....	16
1.8.1 Significance to Social Policy	17
1.9 Organization of the Study	17
CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW	19
2.1 Introduction	19
2.2 Prevalence and Causes of Student Absenteeism	19
2.3 Outcome or Consequences of School Absenteeism	21
2.4 Factors Influencing Absenteeism	22
2.5 Motivation of Absent Students of Secondary Schools.....	23

2.5.1	Attendance Policy - Ministry of Education.....	31
2.6	Motivation for Enhancing School Attendance in the UAE.....	33
2.7	Prevalence of School Absenteeism in the UAE Context	36
2.7.1	School Environment.....	40
2.7.2	Family Factors.....	43
2.7.3	Student Personal Factors.....	49
2.7.4	School Motivation Factor.....	52
2.7.5	School Interventional Factors	57
2.7.6	Cultural and Social Expectations	59
2.8	Social Work Practice in School Settings.....	64
2.9	Theoretical Framework	64
2.9.1	Ecosystems Theory	67
2.9.2	Cognitive Theory	63
2.9.3	Social Cognitive Theory	69
2.9.4	Cognitive Behavioral Theory (CBT)	76
2.9.5	Social Learning Theory.....	79
2.10	Conceptual Framework	84
2.11	Operational definitions	88
2.11.1	Student Absenteeism or Truancy	88
2.11.2	Student motivation for absenteeism.....	89
2.11.3	Individual Student Factors	89
2.11.4	School Factors.....	90
2.11.5	Family Factors.....	90
2.11.6	Community Factors.....	90
CHAPTER 3	RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	91
3.1	Introduction	91
3.2	Research Design	91

3.3	Study Location	92
3.4	Population.....	92
3.4.1	Schools Selection Based on Ministry of Education Criteria.....	94
3.4.2	Inclusion Criteria.....	95
3.4.3	Exclusion Criteria	97
3.5	Sampling Technique.....	98
3.5.1	Participants' Selection for Students' Survey	99
3.5.2	Participant Selection for Teachers	100
3.5.3	Participant Selection for Parent's Survey	101
3.6	Sample Size	102
3.6.1	Demographics of Sample Selected	104
3.6.2	Research Hypotheses and Research Variables.....	104
3.7	Data Collection.....	108
3.7.1	Quantitative Data	109
3.8	Research Instrument.....	109
3.8.1	Survey Questionnaire.....	109
3.9	Data Collection Process	116
3.9.1	Quantitative Data Collection Process	116
3.10	Data Analysis	118
3.10.1	Assessment of Multicollinearity	118
3.11	Hypotheses Testing	119
3.11.1	Structural Equation Modelling.....	120
3.12	Pilot Study	121
3.12.1	Pilot Study of the Survey Questionnaire.....	121
3.12.2	Results of Pilot Study.....	123
3.13	Validity and Reliability	124
3.14	Scope	126

3.15	Common Method Bias Test.....	126
3.16	Descriptive Analysis of Major Variables	127
3.17	Analysis of Missing Data	128
3.18	Analysis of Normality	128
3.19	Assessment of Multicollinearity.....	129
3.20	Evaluation of PLS-SEM Result.....	131
3.21	Ethical Considerations.....	132
CHAPTER 4	RESULTS	134
4.1	Introduction	134
4.2	Response Rate	134
4.3	Nonresponse Biase Test	136
4.4	Demographics of Respondents.....	138
4.4.1	Age of Respondents	138
4.4.2	Gender of Respondents	139
4.4.3	Qualification of Respondents.....	141
4.4.4	Designation of Respondents.....	142
4.5	The Measurement Model	144
4.5.1	Outer Loadings.....	145
4.5.2	Cronbach's Alpha	147
4.5.3	Composite Reliability	148
4.5.4	Average Variance Extracted	149
4.5.5	Discriminant Validity.....	150
4.5.6	Coefficient of Determination (R^2)	152
4.5.7	Assessment of Predictive Relevance (Q^2).....	152
4.6	Assessment of Direct Relationships	153
4.7	Chapter Summary.....	171

CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS & CONCLUSION 182

5.1	Introduction	182
5.2	Recapitulation of Objectives of the Study.....	183
5.3	Discussion on Hypothesis	183
5.3.1	To investigate the influence of school environmental factor over motivation for school absenteeism among secondary school students of Al Ain city	184
5.3.2	To investigate the influence of family factor over motivation for school absenteeism among secondary school students of Al Ain city	190
5.3.3	To investigate the influence of personal resonance of students (individual factors) over motivation for school absenteeism among secondary school students of Al Ain city.....	196
5.3.4	To investigate the influence of school motivational programs over the motivation for school absenteeism among secondary school students of Al Ain city	202
5.3.5	To investigate the influence of school interventional programs over motivation for school absenteeism among secondary school students of Al Ain city	208
5.4	Recommendations	213
5.5	Implications of the Research	217
5.5.1	Implications to Social Policy	217
5.5.2	Implication to Social Work Practice	220
5.5.3	Implication to Social Work Education.....	222
5.5.4	Theoretical Implications	224
5.6	Limitations of the Study	227
5.7	Recommendations for Future Research	229
5.8	Conclusions	230
REFERENCES		232
APPENDICES		

LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 2.1 Ministry of Education, The UAE Criteria for Ranking Schools (Source: Ministry of Education (2020)).....	32
Table 2.2 Predictors of School Dropout. Addressing the Early School Leaving Challenge 2011, Knowledge, and Human Development Authority - Government of Dubai. Source (Jamil et al., 2021)	37
Table 2.3 Primary to Secondary Transition Rate the UAE (Source: UNESCO (2019), United Arab Emirates, UNESCO, Retrieved 28 June 2019 from (http://uis.unesco.org/country/AE)).....	39
Table 3.1 School Selection Based on Ministry of Education Criteria (Source: By Author)	95
Table 3.2 Preliminary data collected from targeted government schools in Al Ain (Source: Collected by Author from the Respective Schools)	96
Table 3.3 Selected School Strength In 5-8 Grades (Prepared by Author)	102
Table 3.4 Data Analysis against Hypotheses..	103
Table 3.5 Demographic details of the sample selected..	104
Table 3.6 Independent Variables and Their Sub-Variables (Source: Prepared by Author)	107
Table 3.7 Category of Factors Leading to Student Absenteeism and Subthemes Related to it in The Questionnaire (Source: Prepared by Author)... ..	111
Table 3.8 Research Variables and Sub-Variables and Number of Items in Each Sub-Variables Posed in the Questionnaire (Source: Prepared by Author)	112
Table 3.9 Items in Independent Sub-Variable – School Environment (Source: Prepared by Author).....	113
Table 3.10 Items in Independent Sub-Variable - Teacher Related Factor (Source: Prepared by Author).....	113

Table 3.11	Items in Independent Sub-Variable- Class Climate (Source: Prepared by Author).....	114
Table 3.12	Items in Independent Sub-Variable - School Attitude (Source: Prepared by Author).....	114
Table 3.13	Items in Independent Sub-Variable - Family-Related Factors (Source: Prepared by Author).....	114
Table 3.14	Items in Independent Sub-Variable - Student Activity (Source: Prepared by Author).....	115
Table 3.15	Items in Independent Sub-Variable - Health Issues (Source: Prepared by Author).....	115
Table 3.16	Items in Independent Sub-Variable - Peer Related Factors(Source: Prepared by Author).....	115
Table 3.17	Items in independent sub-variable - Electronic media factor (Source: Prepared by Author).....	115
Table 3.18	Findings of Pilot Study	123
Table 3.19	Variables Covered in The Questionnaire and the Items Reliability (Source: Prepared by Author)	124
Table 3.20	Internal Consistency Table for Cronbach's Alpha Values	125
Table 3.21	Descriptive Analysis of Major Variables.....	128
Table 3.22	Multicollinearity Analysis.....	130
Table 4.1	Response Rate of the Questionnaires.....	136
Table 4.2	Descriptive statistics for early and late respondents	137
Table 4.3	Age of Respondents	138
Table 4.4	Gender of Respondents	140
Table 4.5	Qualification of Respondents.....	141
Table 4.6	Designation of Respondents.....	143
Table 4.7	Outer Loadings.....	146
Table 4.8	Cronbach's Alpha	147

Table 4.9	Composite Reliability	148
Table 4.10	Average Variance Extracted	150
Table 4.11	Discriminant Validity.....	151
Table 4.12	Predictive Relevance.....	153
Table 4.13	Path Coefficient Direct Effect.....	161
Table 4.14	Path Coefficient Direct Effect.....	166
Table 4.15	Path Coefficient Direct Effect.....	171
Table 4.16	Path Coefficients Direct Effects.....	175
Table 4.17	Path Coefficient Direct Effect.....	179
Table 4.18	Summary of Hypotheses Testing	180

LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 1.1 Percentage of Students whose index of good attendance at school is high. Source: (Alkeaibi, 2019).....	6
Figure 2.2 School Inclusion Model for Reducing School Absenteeism (Farooq, 2013).	35
Figure 2.3 Number of Out-of-school children in the UAE from 2009 – 2016. Source: UNESCO (2019).....	39
Figure 2.4 Ecological Systems Theory (Source: Bronfenbrenner, (1979)	65
Figure 2.5 Social Cognitive Theory	71
Figure 2.6 Cognitive Behavior Theory Aeron Beck (Source: McLeod, (2016)..	77
Figure 2.7 Behaviorist Model (Only Study Observable/External Behavior) and Cognitive Model (Only Study Observable/External Behavior) Source (McClelland et al., 2017).	78
Figure 2.8 Study's Conceptual Framework (Source: Author)	87
Figure 3.1 Cronbach's Alpha for Causes of Absenteeism (Source: Prepared by Author)	125
Figure 4.1 Age of Respondents	139
Figure 4.2 Gender of Respondents	141
Figure 4.3 Qualification of Respondents.....	142
Figure 4.4 Designation of Respondents.....	143
Figure 4.5 PLS Algorithms Measurement Model	145
Figure 4.6 PLS-SEM Algorithms	155
Figure 4.7 PLS-SEM Bootstrapping.....	156

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

UAE	The United Arab Emirates
PLS-SEM	Partial Least Square-Structural Equation Modeling
IPS	Institut Pengajian Siswazah
USM	Universiti Sains Malaysia

LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix A	Research Questionnaire
Appendix B	Ethical Approval Form

**FAKTOR MOTIVASI MEMPENGARUHI KETIDAKHADIRAN
PELAJAR SEKOLAH MENENGAH DI BANDAR AL-AIN, EMIRIAH ARAB
BERSATU (UAE)**

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini bertujuan untuk meneliti pelbagai faktor yang mempengaruhi motivasi untuk ketidakhadiran sekolah dalam kalangan pelajar sekolah menengah di Bandar Al Ain. Kajian ini menyiasat faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi motivasi untuk ketidakhadiran dalam kalangan pelajar sekolah menengah di Bandar Al Ain. Ia mengkaji kesan faktor persekitaran sekolah, dinamik keluarga, dan ciri-ciri individu, termasuk resonans peribadi, terhadap tingkah laku ketidakhadiran. Selain itu, kajian ini menganalisis keberkesanan program motivasi dan intervensi sekolah dalam menangani dan mengurangkan kadar ketidakhadiran. Kajian ini berlandaskan teori pembelajaran sosial, teori kognitif, dan teori ekosistem sebagai rangka kerja teorinya. Menggunakan reka bentuk penyelidikan korelasi kuantitatif, kajian ini dijalankan di Al Ain, UAE, dengan memberi tumpuan kepada sekolah kerajaan (awam) kerana perwakilan mereka terhadap sektor yang lebih luas dan dasar pengurusan kehadiran mereka. Teknik pensampelan bertujuan telah digunakan untuk memilih responden tinjauan yang relevan, termasuk pelajar, ibu bapa, dan guru. Pengumpulan data berlangsung antara 21 Jun dan 5 Ogos 2022, dengan kebenaran rasmi diperoleh daripada pihak sekolah. Sampel tinjauan terdiri daripada 202 pelajar, merangkumi lima pembolehubah utama untuk memastikan pengumpulan data yang menyeluruh. Persetujuan ibu bapa dan kesediaan pelajar untuk mengambil bahagian telah diperoleh sebelum menjalankan tinjauan, memastikan pematuhan kepada amalan penyelidikan etika. Melalui penyelidikan ini, kajian ini bertujuan untuk menerangi faktor-faktor

kompleks yang mempengaruhi ketidakhadiran pelajar dan memberikan pandangan berharga untuk membangunkan strategi intervensi yang berkesan. Penemuan menunjukkan bahawa faktor persekitaran sekolah, pengaruh keluarga, resonansi peribadi, dan program motivasi serta intervensi memberi kesan yang signifikan terhadap kadar ketidakhadiran. Cadangan praktikal termasuk memperuntukkan sumber untuk memodenkan kemudahan sekolah, mempromosikan keterangkuman melalui inisiatif yang dipimpin oleh pelajar, dan melaksanakan program motivasi yang disesuaikan dengan minat pelajar. Sekolah-sekolah harus meningkatkan strategi pengenalan awal dan intervensi, memupuk penglibatan pelajar melalui pembelajaran kolaboratif, dan menyediakan perkhidmatan kaunseling dan sokongan untuk menangani cabaran yang menyumbang kepada ketidakhadiran. Implikasi dasar menekankan keperluan untuk kerjasama antara sekolah, keluarga, dan organisasi komuniti bagi membangunkan strategi komprehensif untuk mengurangkan ketidakhadiran. Dasar sosial harus mewujudkan persekitaran sekolah yang inklusif, memupuk sistem sokongan keluarga, dan mengutamakan pendekatan pembelajaran yang diperibadikan. Mengintegrasikan pekerja sosial dalam sekolah dan rangkaian sokongan yang disokong oleh kerajaan adalah penting untuk menangani isu-isu pelbagai yang menyumbang kepada ketidakhadiran dan memupuk kesejahteraan pelajar. Oleh itu, kajian ini memberikan pandangan praktikal kepada pembuat dasar dan pendidik untuk membangunkan strategi yang disasarkan bagi meningkatkan kehadiran dan mewujudkan persekitaran pendidikan yang menyokong.

**MOTIVATIONAL FACTORS INFLUENCING STUDENT
ABSENTEEISM IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN AL-AIN CITY, UNITED
ARAB EMIRATES (UAE)**

ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the various factors influencing motivation for school absenteeism among secondary school students in Al Ain City. This study investigates the factors affecting motivation for absenteeism among secondary school students in Al Ain City. It examines the impact of school environmental factors, family dynamics, and individual characteristics, including personal resonance, on absenteeism behaviour. Besides, the study analyses the effectiveness of school motivational and interventional programs in addressing and mitigating absenteeism rates. The study is grounded in social learning theory, cognitive theory, and ecosystem theory as its theoretical framework. Using a quantitative correlational research design, the study was conducted in Al Ain, UAE, focusing on government (public) schools due to their representation of the broader sector and their attendance management policies. Purposive sampling techniques were employed to select relevant survey respondents, including students, parents, and teachers. Data collection took place between June 21 and August 5, 2022, with formal authorization obtained from school authorities. The survey sample consisted of 202 students, covering five key variables to ensure comprehensive data collection. Parental consent and student willingness to participate were secured prior to administering the survey, ensuring adherence to ethical research practices. Through this investigation, the study seeks to illuminate the complex factors influencing student absenteeism and provide valuable insights for developing effective intervention strategies. The findings indicate that school

environmental factors, family influences, personal resonance, and motivational and interventional programs significantly affect absenteeism rates. Practical recommendations include allocating resources to modernize school facilities, promoting inclusivity through student-led initiatives, and implementing motivational programs tailored to students' interests. Schools should enhance early identification and intervention strategies, foster student engagement through collaborative learning, and provide counselling and support services to address challenges contributing to absenteeism. Policy implications highlight the need for collaboration among schools, families, and community organizations to develop comprehensive strategies for reducing absenteeism. Social policies should create inclusive school environments, nurture family support systems, and prioritize personalized learning approaches. Integrating social workers within schools and government-backed support networks is crucial for addressing the multifaceted issues contributing to absenteeism and fostering student well-being. Thus, this study provides practical insights for policymakers and educators to develop targeted strategies for improving attendance and creating a supportive educational environment.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The Ministry of Education in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) stresses that the UAE's vision for the future relies on parents and students who take education seriously and thus attend schools regularly (Alkeaibi, 2019). The Ministry of Education prescribes 189 working days of school, where students should be present for at most 21 days per year (UNESCO Digital Library, 2019). Most private schools adhere to the rules, but attendance policies vary across schools in Abu Dhabi (Ministry of Education, 2022). Some reasons for absenteeism from school, ranging from grief and illness to other personal family matters, are justifiable. Notwithstanding, if students are absent more frequently and for trivial reasons, the absent student is at a disadvantage because they risk their learning process (UNESCO Digital Library, 2019). The student's absence from school becomes a massive problem when it becomes chronic. Chronic absence is a case where students miss 10% of school-working days over the entire school year for any reason, including excused or unexcused absences and suspensions. Chronic absence is consequential, resulting in students losing much of their learning time, reducing academic achievement, and risking dropping out before completing secondary high school (Allen et al., 2018). The phenomenon of absenteeism among students is rampant in the UAE. Emirati school administrations have asked the Ministry of Education, students, and policymakers to urgently solve the problem as 50% of students are reported absent from school before and after holidays. School administrators fail to limit absenteeism in their schools because, in some cases, students' absenteeism occurs due to valid reasons. Still, in other cases, it is a

consequence of indiscipline. There is also a high number of parents who do not view student absenteeism as an urgent issue (Ministry of Education, 2022).

1.2 Research Background

In the past century, educational research has suggested several broad indicators of students' behavior, such as school climate, student engagement, and student well-being; these are all linked to students' educational attainment, academic performance, and the risk of dropping out of school. In recent years, student absenteeism has gained prominent attention as the primary indicator of student performance. Studies show that school absenteeism significantly impacts students' performance. The need for more sufficient data, however, determines how schools may put such data into use concerning absenteeism. Researching students' attitudes about school absenteeism and the factors that lead to absenteeism from school would help students, schools, teachers, and policymakers to adopt remedial methods that will drive students to attend school regularly (LaRose & Eastin, 2004). From this perspective, this thesis attempts to examine the trends of school absenteeism among secondary students in Al-Ain city schools while identifying the root causes or factors that lead to school absenteeism.

1.3 Problem Statement

Existing literature has examined and highlighted the importance of school attendance and how absenteeism and high school dropout affect students' performance and academic achievements (Arbour et al., 2016; Birioukov, 2021; Rogers & Feller, 2018). They found that student absenteeism impacts students negatively. Likewise, it impacts the public domain as it entails economic losses for the nation and increases government expenditure on welfare benefits. Gottfried and Hutt (2021) stressed that truancy or school absenteeism is the first step in a lifetime of problems for individuals;

therefore, it is a severe issue for students, parents, and policymakers. Chia (2018) and Jennings and Cook (2017) also stated that school absenteeism has a detrimental effect on students, resulting in low academic performance and several serious social problems.

The UAE also suffers from chronic student absences and truancy (Khaleej Times, 2018). Truancy is a term used to define students' absence from school without a real reason, hence, an unexcused absence (Jennings & Cook, 2017). According to Emirates National School Abu Dhabi city director Dieu Anh Nguyen, the biggest challenge in Abu Dhabi's secondary schools is attendance and tardiness (Vidyakala, 2017).

According to comprehensive research Alkeai (2019), the dropout patterns of male students in secondary education are very high (students between the 10th and 12th grades). This is mainly due to poor academic performance, failing to reach acceptable retention levels, exceeding the number of absences, lack of motivation, disengagement, and other contributing personal reasons.

From a larger perspective, this regression slows the pace of taking the UAE's knowledge-based economy to a higher level (Ocak et al., 2018). However, it is essential to note that this study focuses only on male students in higher secondary schools, covering 10th to 12th-grade students and their dropout issues while neglecting other students' absenteeism among different grade students and education levels. Though this study showed truancy and dropout problems among male students, it also revealed a need for more research on the reasons behind the dropout and high student absenteeism in schools.

A study Vidyakala (2017) examined the dropout patterns in UAE schools involving 416 male and female students in seven higher secondary schools of Sharjah Emirate. The study also found that male students' dropout rate is much higher, 35%, compared to a 25% level in females in grades 10 to 12. This study also focused mainly on the secondary education level and why the student dropped out, specifically examining Sharjah, and did not elaborate on why the student dropped out.

According to the Vidyakala (2017), education report card of the Arab World, which presented and analyzed data from the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) of countries and states that participated in the test in 2007, the city of Dubai has a comparatively better result with a low attendance rate compared to the average. The international attendance rate in fourth grade is much lower than that of eighth-grade students. This data also shows that Dubai students' attendance in secondary schools is lower than the international average but better than other Arab countries, indicating the truancy problem in UAE (Barqawi et al., 2021; Bernabeo et al., 2020; Ghanim et al., 2016).

Very few studies explored the reasons behind the truancy problem in the UAE (See Jamil et al., 2021; Sellami et al., 2020). Such as the TIMSS report revealed that the school and class climate characterize students' attendance and that the school and class climate characterize students' attendance and achievement in Arab countries. According to Palmer (2017), Dubai indicates a more positive school climate due to the high quality of student services, the high salary scale provided to the school staff and teachers, impressive facilities, and an established learning support system, especially in its international private schools. These private schools in Dubai accounted for 65% of the TIMSS' eighth-grade sample. In terms of the school climate, Dubai, compared

to other Arab countries, pays better teacher wages and has private schools that follow international standards more closely, which makes its school's overall climate comparatively better (Hijazi, 2023).

On the other hand, the class climate in Dubai schools showed negative results due to the absence of students from school, not because they are sick, but because of the teachers' traditional approach to teaching, lack of interest in the topics taught, family obligations, or the general inability to understand the subjects of the curriculum. The adverse classroom climate leads to a decrease in the attendance rate in the classroom, which reduces the learning time. It disrupts the continuity of learning, ultimately affecting student achievement in Dubai and other Arab regions (Alkeaibi, 2019).

According to the report by Majeed et al. (2019), most schools in the GCC do not provide quality education to 8th-grade children, and teachers do not do their job effectively, affecting students' grades. In addition, many teachers ask parents to help their children with projects, homework, and exam preparation, this forces parents to hire private tutors to assist them in tutoring their children. While wealthy and upper-class parents can hire private tutors to help their children, many middle and lower-class parents in the GCC countries cannot afford private tutors due to their high costs; this means they are forced to personally take on the job of assisting their children themselves, resulting in them accepting the children's poor performance in classes (Allen et al., 2018).

A study Rogers and Feller (2018) also claimed that although there is an evident relationship between student absenteeism and negative student achievement in Gulf countries, these countries do not consider it a serious problem, resulting in students

feeling the same way. The report also concluded that although the school climate in Dubai portrays a positive evaluation, there are still many serious areas for improvement in its educational system. Hence, it should work to improve the classroom climate, students' social and emotional security, and physical safety, decrease student absenteeism, and reduce parents' dependence on private teachers, thereby increasing parents' involvement in school affairs (Kiani et al., 2018).

This report sheds light on the positive and negative features of the educational system regarding fourth and eighth grades in Dubai and how these characteristics may affect student absenteeism and academic achievement. However, such studies concerning Al Ain city are insufficient, and there is an urgent need for such research dedicated to Al Ain schools, especially since student absenteeism is quite high.

The following figure 1.1 visually represents students' attendance in the fourth and eighth grades in different Arab countries.

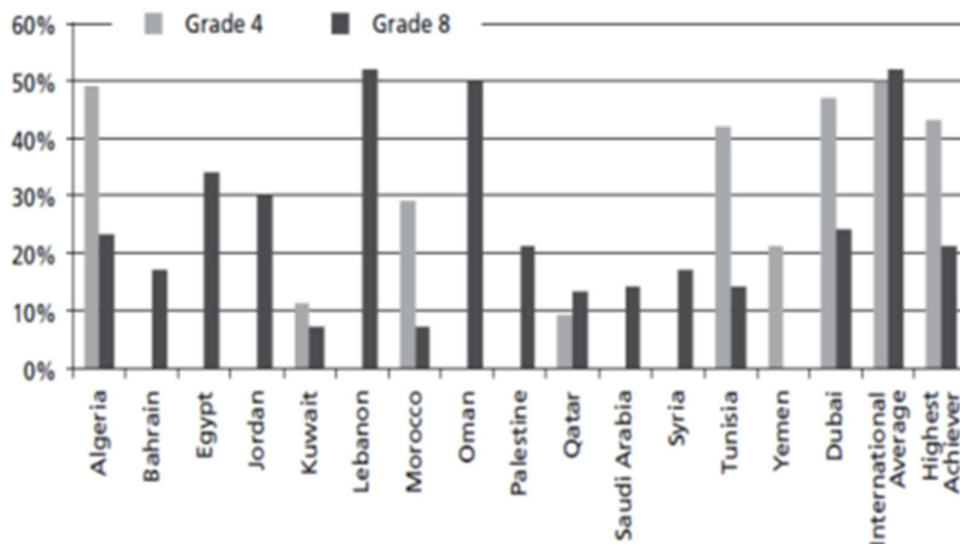


Figure 1.1 Percentage of Students whose index of good attendance at school is high (Alkeabi, 2019)

The reports discussed above, including the studies by Mellal et al. (2018) and Alkeabi (2019), focused on the Emirates of Dubai and Sharjah. However, there are no studies that specifically covered schools in Al Ain. The preliminary review of previous studies indicated a need for more research that has adequately studied the prevalence and trends of school absenteeism among secondary schools in Al Ain and its causes. These trends and issues highlight a need for remedial actions by policymakers, schools, and parents to motivate absent students to increase their attendance in secondary schools and prevent them from dropping out of school (Palmer, 2017). In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching, it is common for instructors and students to come from very different cultural backgrounds. Instructors who leave their home countries and go to teach abroad may have trouble adjusting to the culture of their new teaching context, and cultural misunderstandings that interfere with learning may occur in the classroom (Chafloque Céspedes et al., 2018). This research focused on cultural conflicts between Western, native English-speaking instructors and their Arab students at two university-level EFL programs in the UAE. Questionnaires and interviews were used to discover the details of specific classroom cultural conflicts and categorize them. Nine categories of classroom cultural conflicts were identified, the major ones being inappropriate materials/discussion topics, mixed-gender issues, and disrespect for religious customs before completing secondary school.

Moreover, very few studies in the UAE focus on school absenteeism, its causes, and how to address this key issue. The few studies available, such as that of (Rogers & Feller, 2018) study, investigated the Dubai population's dropout rate and found that Emiratis' highest dropout is in their higher secondary grades (10-12 grades). A study by Gottfried and Hutt (2021) cited the KHDA report stated that students' dropout rate is higher in secondary schools and showed that male students drop out

more than female students. Sellami et al. (2020) research also focused only on male students' dropouts from higher tertiary education levels and the reasons why this happens.

The study by Barqawi et al. (2021) interestingly focused on the time and place of physical violence among teenagers in Dubai, UAE. It involved students from 7th to 12th grade, consisting of male and female students from both public and private schools in Dubai. The study found that physical violence mainly occurs at school and on the way to school amongst teenagers, adversely impacting students' attendance because students feel completely unsafe to attend school. This study sheds light on one of the many reasons for school absenteeism among adolescents, which is the physical violence they face at school, but it is worth noting that this study only covers Dubai schools. Since there are no similar studies for Al Ain schools, it can be assumed that this could also be a contributing reason for school absenteeism.

Singh (2019) suggested that the use of the English medium as a postgraduate education encounters resistance from students, resulting in them engaging in many resistant practices such as truancy, missed assignments, or unfair academic practices. This study covers higher secondary grade students and university students from around the UAE. However, such a study needs to be included among secondary grade students, specifically covering Al Ain schools.

A report Komakech and Osuu (2016) focused on education and literacy in the UAE showed that most students drop out during their transition from primary to secondary and that this occurs mainly in males. Therefore, the research focus on the secondary level (5 to 8 grades) is imperative because understanding the reasons behind school absenteeism in these grades would help prevent dropouts in the higher

secondary level. Furthermore, research focused on secondary grades (5 to 8) needs to be improved in the UAE.

The studies discussed above, such as Majeed et al. (2019) and Birioukov (2021), covered the entire UAE region and Dubai specifically but did not focus on Al Ain city and did not provide data on reasons behind students' absence from secondary schools, i.e., for grades 5 to 8, and mostly focuses on upper secondary grades, from grades 10 to 12. Moreover, the research mentioned above focuses on students dropping out of school, and the predominant theme in all these studies was male student dropouts at upper secondary levels. Previous studies have indicated that high student absenteeism in secondary grades is a major cause of high dropout rates in upper secondary grades (Gottfried & Hutt, 2021b) and, consequently, negatively impacts an individual's life and future career. However, no existing study focused on understanding the causes and factors behind the high rate of student absenteeism in secondary grades (5th to 8th grades).

A study Masogo (2017) found that more advantaged students are skipping school in the UAE, and student truancy is becoming more common. The absentee students' share was observed to increase in the UAE in advantaged students, both in rural and city schools, and more students were arriving late to school at least five times every two weeks. This report showed that the student truancy problem in the UAE is generally increasing in all types of schools and in both groups of students, both advantaged and disadvantaged. Another report by Gulf News confirmed that absenteeism is ramping up in the UAE (Abdullah, 2023).

The lack of research on student absenteeism in secondary grades and the lack of research that focuses specifically on school absenteeism and its causes in Al Ain

city schools necessitates the need to conduct research that investigates the cause of students' chronic absence in secondary school. It desperately calls for reducing student absenteeism and eliminating student dropouts in the future. Given the lack of data in this area, more research is needed to examine trends in student absenteeism in secondary schools, to justify the factors affecting student absenteeism in secondary grades, and to determine how student absenteeism can be reduced if not eliminated. Therefore, this research proposes to bridge this gap by examining the trend of the absence of secondary school students in Al Ain schools and analysing how absent students can be motivated to go to school regularly. Despite existing studies on student absenteeism in the UAE, a significant research gap remains concerning its core causes in Al Ain's secondary schools, especially among students in grades 5 to 8. Most prior research focuses on dropout patterns in higher secondary levels or schools in Dubai and Sharjah, overlooking the social, familial, and environmental dynamics unique to Al Ain. This study is important in the field of social work, as it adopts an in-depth approach that combines school-based social work perspectives to analyze intervention models addressing absenteeism through collaboration among schools, families, and communities. This approach provides practical, context-specific solutions to support student well-being and educational continuity.

The model developed by Farooq (2013) (Figure 2.2) is relevant to this study because it identifies the causes of high school dropouts and high school absenteeism such as rigid, unfriendly, and unhealthy school climate. Trying to address the problem through school, teacher, and social transformation would lead to a healthy, open, welcoming, and inclusive environment for students to improve their overall achievement. It can be used to develop a conceptual model in this study for motivating students to attend schools regularly.

1.4 Research Questions

The research aims to investigate why students are frequently absent from secondary schools in Al Ain and analyze how these students could be motivated and driven to attend school regularly and increase their academic performance accordingly.

RQ1. How do school environmental factors shape students' motivation for school absenteeism in Al Ain City?

RQ2. In what ways do family-related factors contribute to students' motivation for school absenteeism in Al Ain City?

RQ3. How do individual (personal) factors affect students' motivation for school absenteeism in Al Ain City?

RQ4. What is the perceived effectiveness of school-based motivational programs in reducing school absenteeism among secondary students in Al Ain City?

RQ5. How can school-based intervention programs be designed or improved to address student absenteeism from a social work perspective in Al Ain City?

1.5 Research Objectives

This research has the following Objectives as indicated below:

RO1. To investigate the impact of school environmental factors on motivation for school absenteeism among secondary school students in Al Ain City.

RO2. To assess the role of family-related influences in shaping motivation for school absenteeism among secondary school students in Al Ain City.

RO3. To explore the effect of individual (personal) factors on students' motivation for school absenteeism in Al Ain City.

RO4. To evaluate the effectiveness of school-based motivational programs in addressing absenteeism among secondary school students in Al Ain City.

RO5. To propose and assess a potential intervention model targeting school absenteeism, drawing on school-based social work practices in Al Ain City.

1.6 Research Significance

The research study is also significant in the context of education, policy, students' performance, target groups and culture, academicians, policymakers, parents, for purposes of social work, and the UAE government, which is discussed below. The research background has shown that student absenteeism in the UAE without a valid excuse is a real problem and slows down the UAE's goal of making itself known as a knowledge-based economy. Preliminary research indicates that there is a considerable research gap in this area. As very few studies were conducted regarding student absenteeism in secondary schools in the UAE, no research was done in the context of Al Ain City focusing on student absenteeism, its causes, and how to motivate the reoccurring absent students. This research proposes filling that gap where the research results are predicted to improve students' performance outcomes and contribute to the UAE in achieving its national priorities.

The UAE 2021 vision has mapped six national priorities as key focuses of government action in the coming years (see Appendix 1). The six national priorities are creating a competitive knowledge economy and achieving a first-rate education system in the UAE. The UAE government believes that a quality education system is

a fundamental element for developing a nation and that the best investment the government can invest in is the youth (UAE Vision, 2021). The student's absence in secondary schools is a critical and genuine issue that needs immediate attention because it creates obstacles in achieving these two strategic goals of the UAE. This research focuses on this critical issue and highlights the prevalence of students' absence in secondary schools in Al Ain city and the major reasons for truancy in secondary grades (5 to 8). Based on the research findings and literature review, the research would propose recommendations on motivating absentee students to attend schools regularly. Increasing students' attendance would ultimately improve students' performance, competitiveness, and the education system. Most importantly, it would help the UAE government to create a competitive knowledge economy and a first-rate education system.

Therefore, this proposed study attempts to fill the research gap and help identify the causes of school absenteeism and the factors responsible for it. The study's results would help different academic scholars, policymakers, and educational leaders to identify and eliminate the causes of students' absence and find out how to motivate absent students to attend school regularly, which would benefit not only individual students & their families but also the public community.

This study highlights the prevalence and urgency of addressing absenteeism for educationists, academicians, and the UAE government. They would identify its significant causes in secondary schools of Al Ain city. By applying the different learning theories, the research results will discuss the various measures that can be adapted to motivate absent students at secondary schools to attend schools in Al Ain city regularly.

The study results also enable a better understanding of the influencing factors for policymakers and educationists and help them to understand better factors for managing students' attendance in secondary schools. Similarly, it would help educational planners make better strategies for improving education in Al Ain and how to reform schools and the education system in the area. Moreover, it would assist in better training of educational leaders and teachers' abilities to manage student needs and motivate them to improve their attendance and performance at schools.

This research would help students, teachers, parents, and policymakers to understand the reasons behind student absenteeism in secondary schools and how to address this critical issue. The students would learn how to motivate themselves to attend school regularly, while parents would understand their children's behavior, the factors that are leading to their behavior of school absence, and how they can contribute to changing that behavior by manipulating the environmental factors. Parents and teachers play an important role in a student's life. Hence, these research results help them understand how to motivate students to attend school regularly. The research results would also help policymakers such as the Ministry of Education and school leadership in undertaking educational reforms and implementing policies that address factors that lead to school absenteeism and motivate students to attend schools regularly. The research implications are far-reaching because it would help change the culture of school absenteeism in the UAE and make students and parents understand that school absenteeism is unacceptable and that attendance should not be optional. Thus, student attendance in secondary schools will improve student performance outcomes and push students to become more prosperous and productive citizens, thereby improving their society and the UAE.

1.7 Significance to Social Work

One of the central areas of social work intervention is social work with children. Child social workers help protect vulnerable youth and impoverished families to meet the needs of their children. As the National Association of Social Workers (NASW, 2018) highlights, child social workers “specialize in building upon the strengths within a family and their community to help provide a safe and loving environment for their children” and also “intervene to protect children from harm.”

This study is significant because it supports the goals of child and school social work by identifying the multidimensional factors, namely, school environment, family conditions, individual traits, and program effectiveness, that contribute to student absenteeism. These insights directly inform child social work practice by offering evidence that helps practitioners design prepared, context-sensitive interventions to support students’ engagement in education.

Understanding the motivations behind absenteeism can help school social workers adopt a preventive and holistic approach that supports both students and their families. For example, recognizing how home instability or lack of motivation at school contributes to absenteeism allows social workers to implement targeted casework, counselling, and family-focused interventions that are both proactive and restorative.

Furthermore, the study's findings will help school social workers advocate for policy changes and institutional support within schools, such as the development of inclusive, motivational, and intervention programs that involve all stakeholders, including teachers, counsellors, and parents. It also provides empirical grounding for multidisciplinary collaboration, a cornerstone of effective social work practice.

Additionally, this study is consistent with social work values of empowerment, advocacy, and social justice, particularly in ensuring that all students, regardless of background, have equitable access to education. By addressing absenteeism, social workers contribute to preventing educational disadvantage, reducing dropout rates, and promoting long-term well-being and resilience among young people.

Finally, this research highlights the crucial role of social workers in addressing not only cases of absenteeism but also in comprehending and addressing the underlying causes, making it a valuable resource for both practice and policy development in the field of child and school social work.

1.8 Significance to Social Change

Socially, this research is intended to ignite a positive social change by providing insight into the factors behind school absenteeism among 5th to 8th graders so that school social workers, school leaders, and education policymakers can partake in manipulating these factors to have a positive effect on students attendance at school (Askeland et al., 2015). A competency training program based on the results and conceptual framework can be implemented involving school social workers, teachers, parents, and school leaders to transform the school environment and individuals to motivate them to attend schools regularly. Students attending school regularly will positively impact their school achievement and performance, ultimately contributing to realizing UAE's vision of becoming a knowledge hub (Daily & Matson, 2008). It is hoped that the findings of this study concerning the motivations of student absenteeism will not only highlight the problem of truancy in Al Ain schools but also present a conceptual framework for dealing with the truancy problem generally. It will also help other schools in other emirates not to ignore the significant truancy problem, focus on

it, and take remedial actions. Thus, trying to bring a small social change throughout the education system.

1.8.1 Significance to Social Policy

This study aimed to identify the reasons behind the absenteeism behavior of the students in Al-Ain City in the United Arab Emirates. The most significant implication for social policy is that it allows policymakers at government school levels to identify the most observable components of teachers and parents in which their perceptions might affect the student's absenteeism, together with classroom teaching and learning of the school students (Kearney, 2008a). Thus, guiding the government to take relevant and immediate concerns, which might include providing additional attention to teachers' training and professional development, adequate furnishing of the school environment to ensure that the school is properly equipped in line with the changing demands of the students, desired teacher characteristics, types of professional development offered at the school, and teacher qualifications.

1.9 Organization of the Study

For a better understanding of the research, the thesis is divided into chapters based on its discussion topics.

Chapter One: Introduction

This chapter introduces the research background and presents the research problem, questions, objectives, and the importance of research to the UAE, especially in social work.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

The second chapter critically reviews past literature about chronic absence and the factors or motives identified by different researchers in the past. The literature review also highlights the students' absence trends and factors of their absence in the context of the UAE. It also reviews and analyses the measures that educationists and policymakers can take to increase student attendance.

Chapter Three: Research Methodology

This chapter covers the research methodology that is used to conduct the research. It explains the conceptual research framework, research methods, data collection tools, research instrument, research variables and sample size, the study's techniques, and how data would be analyzed.

Chapter Four: Results and Discussion

This chapter presents the data findings of the surveys to examine the trend of students' absence from secondary school in Al Ain and the main factors responsible for this issue. It also discusses the results and shows their agreement with previous literature.

Chapter Five: Conclusion and Recommendations

This chapter would be the last chapter of the research study, which would present the research findings' key summary points and recommend the measures to improve the student's attendance at Al Ain secondary school based on the research findings.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter critically reviews past literature on school absenteeism, trends, and factors identified in past research that influence the prevalence of school absenteeism among students worldwide and school absenteeism in the context of the UAE.

2.2 Prevalence and Causes of Student Absenteeism

The California Dropout Research Project (2008) policy brief also identifies why students drop out of school. It states that dropping out of school is not an event that happens suddenly within a day, but rather, it is a process that occurs over time with the influence of many factors related to school, individual and institutional, which influence the decision of students to drop out. The main reasons students drop out from school are poor academic achievement, non-engagement of students in school either academically or socially such as failure to do homework, participating in sports or extracurricular activities, misbehavior at school, substance abuse outside school, and high school absenteeism. This factor, high absenteeism, is a high indicator of dropout because students are lagging behind the educational process and becoming less able to cope with current school activities.

There are also other reasons, including personal reasons, such as, the presence of friends or siblings who drop out of school or engage in criminal behaviors, having teenage children and raising children, working students, and low proficiency in the English language, all push students to miss school. Other institutional reasons include lack of social support from family, low access to economic opportunities, changes in the structure of the family, living in an extreme poverty community without any positive

role models, or limited access to community resources and health issues of students also results in high absenteeism eventually leading to dropout. However, the Akkuş and Çinkir (2022) stressed that there is no single reason for students dropping out of school, rather, it is a multifaceted and complex issue that calls for solutions that consider all the aspects of the problem.

Masogo (2017) stated that the main causes of truancy among children of age over seven years are the influence of peers and friends, teachers' relationships, where they lack respect for their students, curriculum content and delivery, attitudes of parents and domestic problems, bullying at school, lack of control or learning difficulties of pupils, absenteeism from school, among others. School absenteeism is leading to serious public health issues for educators, physicians, and mental health professionals.

Unexcused absences from school prevalence are higher than any other major childhood behavior disorder. According to Jennings and Cook (2017), they are a key risk factor for injury, violence, psychiatric disorders, substance use, and economic deprivation. He discussed some programs to improve enrollment in schools, including programs and policies at the school level. In addition, some positive initiatives, such as formulating preventive strategies including attendance policy implementation and service level agreements, which were formulated with the participation of both teachers and students, have achieved clear first-day and initial responses for absence from school.

Implementing early appropriate intervention schemes, targeting and monitoring pupils whose attendance falls below the policy level, having effective strategies to deal with disaffected behavior, identifying problems that result in students' absence from school, and fostering appropriate multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary links are

suggested ways of handling absenteeism problems. Micronutrient therapy such as iron supplementation was found to have a significant positive impact on students' cognitive performance and this resulted in improved attendance in schools. Akkuş and Çinkir (2022) stated that if students' absenteeism is left untreated, it will lead to short-term problems such as family conflict, alienation from peers, academic decline, and financial and legal consequences, as well as long-term problems such as school dropout, economic deprivation, marital problems, delinquent behaviors and difficulty in maintaining employment.

Şahin et al. (2016) conducted an empirical study on the reasons for student absenteeism and school dropouts in Duzce province, Turkey. The study involved a case study strategy involving an interview of 64 principals working in a high, secondary, and primary school in the Duzce province using a semi-structured questionnaire. The study found fifteen main reasons for school absenteeism and categorized them into five distinct categories.

2.3 Outcome or Consequences of School Absenteeism

According to Demir and Karabeyoglu (2017), it was revealed that truancy among boys is relatively more than among girls. Truancy is a risk factor for many other problems, such as early warning signs for dropping out, delinquent activity, suspension, educational failure, or expulsion from school. Furthermore, a lack of commitment to school or truancy is also a risk factor for delinquency, teen pregnancy, and substance abuse. It further leads to low self-esteem among students, and truants experience greater criticism and feelings of rejection from parents compared to non-truants.

It was also revealed that excessive truancy is one of the most common traits among most serious juvenile offenders. It has also been reported that dropouts are a

consequence of absenteeism from school and that high school dropouts earn only 65% of median income and more claim on publicly funded social services expenditures than high school graduates (Bahadori et al., 2020). Among men, dropouts lead to more criminal justice costs, and average costs for dropouts are more than \$200,000 in current dollars throughout their lifetime. The report indicated that to address truancy and its outcomes, many states in the US have introduced laws, and truancy reduction efforts are categorized into three groups as follows, school-based, community-based, and court-based (Birioukov, 2016).

Bernabeo et al. (2020) the study also confirmed that school absenteeism affects children and adolescents' educational, emotional, and social development. Prolonged absenteeism during childhood is a predictor of long-lasting issues during adult life such as delinquency, school dropout, occupational, and relationship problems, psychiatric problems, and economic deprivation. It might even lead children to violence, teenage pregnancy, suicide attempts, unintentional injury to self or others, substance abuse, driving under the influence, and so on.

2.4 Factors Influencing Absenteeism

The five categories of factors influencing absenteeism as determined from the research, are caused by principal and teacher behaviors, family, school environment, individual student factors, and other environmental causes. The 15 themes that emerged from the study of (Klein et al., 2022) are family problems, the relationship between family and child, ignoring absence, teacher-student relationship, principal-student relationship, view of education, ignoring absence at initial stages, teacher's behavior in class, school structure, adaptation of student to school, relationships with the environment, individual reasons and environmental factors among others.

Brown (2017) study also supports this finding where they found that student absenteeism has a negative relationship with attitudes towards the school and teacher, academic self-perception, lack of self-regulation/motivation, goal valuation, and poor academic performance. They also found that personal and family factors can predict previous and current absenteeism from school. Previous school absenteeism negatively affects academic achievement, which in turn leads to current absenteeism. Sahin et al. (2017) also studied the factors affecting school absenteeism, and found that physical and psychiatric conditions of the individual, school climate, family involvement and connectedness, family structure and functioning, community and neighborhood factors, ethnic minority status, and sexual minority status, are the common factors that lead to school absenteeism.

2.5 Motivation of Absent Students of Secondary Schools

Research studies such as Smit et al. (2014) that focused on improving students' attendance in schools recommended the utilization of an attendance system by using information system and communication technology that not only records student's attendance but also keeps their parents updated on their child's attendance in class using SMS gateway. This will help involve parents in keeping a tab on their child's attendance in class and foster discipline among students because it fixes any deficiencies in the attendance system.

Kyndt et al. (2015) recommended strategies that can improve the attendance of students, which include having an attendance policy, using electronic registration of attendance, making use of available data, raising the attendance profile, involving parents, providing targeted support, and using rewards and incentives to encourage

punctuality and attendance. Also, positively reintegrating absentees, making use of attendance checks, and incorporating attendance into transition planning.

Johansen (2018) conducted a study to describe and categorize the different motivators that influence students' attendance and absence. The study involved focus group interviews involving 24 second-year graduate students. Sellami et al. (2020) found that the motivators that influence class attendance include: class handouts, added information presented by faculties in the classroom, and faculties applying the knowledge to solve real problems. On the other hand, the factors that demotivate students from attending classes are having a test, faculty just reading notes, and personal logistics. The study concluded that test schedules and teacher behavior in the class impact students' attendance. Therefore, Mellal et al. (2018) recommended that teachers play a key role in motivating students to attend class by changing testing patterns, class schedules, and teaching methods. However, as this study covers graduate students, the same results may not be applied to secondary school students.

Jamil et al. (2021) discussed the efficiency of rewarding or providing financial incentives for good attendance to motivate students to go to school regularly. However, this concept was considered controversial and provided mixed results in some cases; in others, efficacy was not evaluated. Other interventions to motivate students at risk of dropping out of school and poor attendance were also discussed, including providing students with personal stimuli, closely monitoring their progress, and participating in extracurricular activities. This has been implemented in Ohio and is sufficient in increasing students' performance and attendance rates.

For the first time, Baltimore City Public Schools identified the reason for chronic student absenteeism and provided some individual interventions provided