

A case against Higher Education Commission's mandatory attendance requirement in Pakistan

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Dear Editor The astute article published by Saeed et al. regarding mandatory attendance among preclinical and clinical students drew meaningful comparisons regarding how mandatory attendance impacts student performance inside and outside the class.¹

One key factor that dictates how efficiently a person might perform directly co-relates with his physical and mental health.² And that's precisely why it is essential to discuss the impact of mandatory attendance on students' health.

With the decrease in COVID-19 cases worldwide and the reiteration of typical daily life, we find schools and colleges returning to their regular attendance requirements.

The Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan followed the same trend by making attendance compulsory for university and college students, with the notion of having 75% or more.³ This decision was partly taken with the idea of promoting better education among the university students of Pakistan.

However, as said by Saeed et al., the attendance process and its virtue in learning are more complex than it seems on the surface.¹

Modern gadgets and learning resources have allowed medical students to adopt independent study regimens more efficiently than those which oblige them to sit in ill-resourced classrooms.⁴

As Iqbal et al. highlighted thoroughly, the resources and educational equipment in Pakistani schools, especially those belonging to the government sector, cannot cater to the educational needs of every student.⁵

Another factor that may weaken HEC's case for mandatory attendance in Universities of Pakistan is the overall mental and physical health risks that students face with it; with normal university hours in Pakistan lasting for 7 hours (on average) and the physical strain that students face with

traveling 5-6 days a week.³

Especially in a low socio-economic country such as Pakistan where a small number of people can afford comfortable rides every day, with a large number of the country's vehicles heavily relying on already scarce petroleum supplies and an increasingly large number of university-going students, Pakistan finds itself unable to meet the growing student demand.^{6,7}

Therefore, it is crucial to consider that students should be autonomous in selecting the decision of attendance for themselves, which, unfortunately, mandatory attendance does not provide.

With the above statistics and risk factors in mind, possible solutions can be driven. One possible solution is to have a system that exempts the students who perform adequately in examinations and maintain the required grades from the mandatory attendance requirement.

Similarly, to allow interested in signing an affidavit, which exempts them from the mandatory clause, granted said students could fulfil the academic criteria required by their universities.

This will uplift the students who have an effective means to study so they can generate more productivity and innovative ideas without the injunction of mandatory attendance.

In conclusion, many tangible factors can also determine why mandatory attendance is essential.¹ However, empowering the students of Pakistan to make decisions is in the best interest of both parties.

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