

The effectiveness of an action research approach designed to improve student attendance

Konstantaki M.

School of Sport, Leisure and Travel, Buckinghamshire Chilterns University College

Previous research has shown that low attendance to classes by students leads to loss of focus, absenteeism, disengagement and eventually, withdrawal from a programme of study (Harvey et al 2006: *The first year experience: a review of literature for the Higher Education Academy*, 46). It has also been postulated that a high attendance score is strongly associated with improved academic performance (Khan et al 2003: *Journal of Ayub Medical College*, 15, 56-8) and that commitment to classes is a potent determinant of achievement (Van Berkel and Schmidt 2000: *Education for Health*, 18, 45-61). The purpose of this study was to investigate student attendance patterns and explore the effectiveness of an intervention designed to improve attendance of students to classes.

Participants included male (n=62) and female (n=24) second year students (mean \pm SD: age: 21 \pm 2.0 years). The study took place during the second semester of the academic year and involved monitoring the attendance of students to seminar (n=49) or practical sessions (n=37). The attendance of each student in both cohorts was recorded for the first 6 weeks of the semester using a paper register. According to the number of sessions

attended, student attendance was classified 'excellent' (6 out of 6 sessions), 'very good' (5 out of 6), 'good' (4 out of 6), 'poor' (3 out of 6) and 'very poor' (2 sessions or less). The intervention comprised an 'attendance letter' sent by the lecturer to every student whose attendance was studied. The letter outlined the attendance category and either commended the student on their attendance or, in the case of poor attendance, recommended that the student attended more sessions in the second half of the semester. Attendance was then recorded in the same manner throughout the second half of the semester. The students' attendance scores prior to the intervention were compared to their respective score following the intervention using one-way Analysis of variance.

Results showed that attendance scores improved significantly following the intervention for the poor ($F = 2.72$, $df = 16$, $P = 0.04$) and very poor attenders ($F = 2.96$, $df = 9$, $P = 0.03$), whereas the attendance score of excellent to good attenders remained unchanged. The student views on this approach were collected in focus groups discussions. Eighty nine per cent of the participants stated that they welcomed the approach and some of them were motivated to change or maintain a positive attendance pattern. These results suggest that a simple, caring approach by the lecturer positively influences student attendance levels.