

ASSESSING POOR ATTENDANCE OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ILORIN IN GENERAL STUDIES CLASSES FOR A CHANGE

Muhinat Bolanle Bello¹

Abstract

Student attendance in General Studies (GNS) classes at the University of Ilorin has significantly declined despite institutional efforts to improve participation through scheduling adjustments and blended learning options. This persistent low attendance raises concerns about the effectiveness of GNS courses, which are designed to provide students with foundational knowledge across disciplines. The problem is multifaceted, with administrative, infrastructural, student-related, and lecturer-related factors contributing to absenteeism. Despite the university's policy requiring 75% attendance for eligibility to write examinations, students frequently disregard GNS classes, potentially undermining their academic development and overall university experience. To investigate this issue, the study adopted a qualitative case study design, allowing for an in-depth exploration of the factors influencing poor attendance. Data were collected through an unstructured, two-item interview instrument administered via Google Forms to ensure respondents' anonymity and encourage honest responses. The study sampled undergraduates from ten faculties using a purposive sampling technique, selecting 24 participants through simple random sampling. Data were analyzed thematically using ATLAS.ti. The findings highlight the urgent need for institutional reforms, infrastructural improvements, and pedagogical innovations to enhance student engagement and attendance in GNS classes.

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Keywords

Attendance, undergraduate, qualitative, Nigeria, West Africa, case study

INTRODUCTION

In the educational setting, schools bear the fundamental responsibilities of creating an environment conducive to learning and providing effective knowledge to students. However, the achievement of these goals is intrinsically tied to the consistent presence of students in classrooms. The learners need to be available in the school to learn. In the context of the autonomy granted to higher education students, a noteworthy challenge persists in the form of poor attendance, particularly in General Studies (GNS) classes. Higher institution students have the freedom to attend class or not to some degree, yet a certain percentage of attendance is required to qualify for entering final examinations. All higher institutions have their peculiar policy on the attendance system that suits the situation of the school involved. In the Undergraduate Academic Program of the University of Ilorin, this percentage was 75% as of 2024. Despite the knowledge of this, poor undergraduate attendance is at a high level, especially in General Studies Classes.

Proper attendance of students encourages both the teacher and the student in every institution of learning, from the primary session to the higher institution. The availability of students encourages the teachers to teach effectively, and it will enable the students to learn all they are supposed to learn as a whole. Half knowledge of a subject matter is not enough to create a positive and expected learning outcome. In every institution of learning, adequate attendance is important for both the teacher and the student. Teaching cannot take place without the presence of

students; this is why adequate measures are put in place to better effective teaching and learning.

The challenges associated with poor attendance are not confined to a specific geographical location or course discipline. Ezeji's (2017) research underscores that poor attendance is a widespread issue across tertiary institutions. The advent of e-learning, as a potential solution, prompts questions about the effectiveness of different teaching modalities in addressing attendance concerns. The intricate web of factors influencing poor attendance in General Studies classes necessitates a thorough understanding of motivational, institutional, and personal aspects contributing to this phenomenon. Addressing these factors is essential for developing targeted interventions, allowing institutions like the University of Ilorin to enhance attendance rates and foster a more enriching and effective learning environment for their students.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Attendance plays a pivotal role in establishing a dynamic and symbiotic relationship between teachers and students. Sekiwu et al. (2020) highlight that consistent attendance is a prerequisite for academic success, creating an environment where teachers can effectively impart knowledge, and students can actively engage with course content. Attending school regularly is essential to developing the abilities and knowledge needed for academic achievement (Reid, 2005). It makes it possible for each student to acquire new knowledge that will support the growth of the intended abilities and potential. But this cannot happen in the context of poor attendance.

School absenteeism or poor attendance is defined as a student's excused or unexcused absences from school (Reid,

2005). Students' absenteeism is commonly characterized as "intentional or frequent absence from the class without a justifiable explanation, excluding sickness or accidents", according to Teixeira (2013). Students' absence from class is defined as the period of time during which students do not attend classes (Teasley, 2004).

According to Teasley (2004) and Ruel et al. (2021), students' attitudes and passion for learning have a significant role in their absenteeism, with less motivated students missing more school than more motivated ones. According to Schwartz et al. (2009), absenteeism is negatively related to future-oriented academic goals. This indicates that students' lack of enthusiasm to attend class may have a more negative influence on their academic development. For pupils who consistently attend the class, it would be different. Because they pay attention to all of the courses and tests, kids who attend class regularly will advance academically. Students who have paid attention to all of the class lessons are well-prepared and knowledgeable for the test (Teixeira, 2013). However, the opposite is true when attendance is low. Class attendance and academic performance of second-year university students in organic chemistry courses were examined by researchers like Ayoko et al. (2023). The findings indicated a substantial positive correlation between exam scores and class attendance. Similarly, Sekiwu et al. (2020) investigated the connection between attendance and academic achievement in Uganda's universal primary education system. Even if, in this case, academic performance was not significantly impacted by the school attendance variable, one of the results indicated a favorable association between the two.

According to Balkis et al. (2016), low attendance disrupts the dynamic teaching-learning environment. Chronic

absenteeism puts the teaching-learning environment at risk by making the classroom a tedious and unpleasant place where students are irritable and uncomfortable when they attend. To put it another way, people who miss courses for any reason miss out on the chance to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed academically and hence lose out on long-term advantages. According to Crede and Kieszczynka (2010), consistent attendance at school does not ensure academic success because many students may attend courses, but not participate in learning activities. Crede and Kieszczynka went on to suggest that to maximize academic value, both teachers and students should actively participate in class attendance. Therefore, to guarantee that students have a smooth teaching and learning experience, care must be taken to manage absenteeism at the tertiary education level. Numerous earlier studies show a wide range of absentee rates in higher education, which has worried instructors and school officials. Since absenteeism is a major factor in subpar academic performance, higher education institutions are becoming concerned about the drop in student attendance (Sekiwu et al., 2020).

Absence from lectures by students in higher education is becoming a more widespread issue that cuts across nations, institutions, and subject areas. This may be because of the new order of e-learning, where different platforms can be employed for effective teaching and learning. Additionally, it has drawn a large number of studies in which interested parties have attempted to explain the difficult trend by outlining the contributing variables in many academic settings and potential remedies for it through a variety of strategies (Egede & Bivwiere, 2021).

The reasons students struggle with attendance are varied. These include academic difficulty, financial struggles,

mental health issues, family responsibilities, and social pressures (Egede & Bivwiere, 2021). These challenges intersect to create barriers to attendance, prompting the need for institutions to provide targeted support to address these multifaceted issues and improve attendance rates.

Academic difficulty is a major factor in poor attendance among undergraduate students (Knoster, 2016). Students who are struggling with academics may feel overwhelmed or discouraged and therefore avoid attending classes. Additionally, students may feel as though their lack of understanding will be evident to their peers, and they may become embarrassed or ashamed (Penteado, 2024). Financial struggles are another factor that can lead to poor attendance in undergraduate students (Blad, 2023). College tuition and living costs can be expensive, and many students struggle to pay for their education. This may lead to students working long hours and finding it difficult to attend classes (Knoster, 2016).

Mental health issues are another factor that can influence the turnout of undergraduate students in General studies classes (Blad, 2023). Students who are struggling with depression or anxiety may find it difficult to motivate themselves to attend classes. Additionally, students may not be aware of the resources available to them on campus and may not seek help. Additionally, research has found that students who have poor attendance are more likely to be delinquent and have poorer mental health (Knoster, 2016). Good attendance is essential for academic success. To improve attendance, teachers and administrators should create a positive school environment that encourages students to be in class (Golann, 2015). This can include providing incentives for good attendance and reinforcing positive messages about the importance of attending school (Amalu

& Abang, 2016). Additionally, schools should provide resources and support to students who may need additional assistance to attend school regularly (Ayoko et al., 2023).

Poor attendance is paramount among university undergraduate students as they move from high school to post-secondary education, and university undergraduate students encounter several difficulties. While they may be prepared academically, the shift in expectations and demands can be difficult to adjust to (Tinto, 1993). Common issues include increased workloads, increased academic competition, and new social dynamics (Vanderkam, 2016). Students may also struggle with time management, stress, and feelings of isolation. University students can benefit from the support of peers, faculty, and university resources to assist students in acclimating to their new surroundings (Schwartz et al., 2009). However, all these have also affected their academic commitment to General Studies.

General studies are a broad subject area that encompasses a wide range of topics, from the natural sciences and technology to the humanities and social sciences. It is a field of study often seen as a stepping stone to further academic studies but can also be used as a foundation for specialized academic fields. General Studies is an important part of any educational system. It is the foundation for all other areas of study, providing students with the skills and knowledge to become informed and responsible citizens. It helps to create well-rounded individuals who can think critically and make informed decisions. General studies also help to equip students with the skills to communicate and work with others effectively. Recent research has shown that General Studies is particularly important for helping to develop student resilience and self-awareness. The National Leadership Council for Liberal Education and America's Promise

[LEAP] (2007) said that “General education courses help students to understand their behaviours and the behaviour of others, to think critically and creatively, to understand the complexities of the world, and to develop the skills needed to effectively navigate the world” (p. 4). The report also found that General studies courses can help promote student engagement and help build a sense of purpose and civic engagement.

General Studies provide a strong foundation for students to improve their communication, problem-solving, and critical thinking abilities as they create well-rounded individuals who can effectively engage with the world around them. Overall, general studies continue to be an important field of study, as they provide a comprehensive view of the global context and investigate the impacts of globalization and other social issues on contemporary society.

Tinto’s Student Integration Theory (1975, 1993) explains student retention based on academic and social integration. In the context of this study, academic disengagement due to the perceived irrelevance of GNS courses, poor teaching methods, and infrastructural challenges reduces student motivation to attend classes. Similarly, social disconnection, influenced by peer influence, poor institutional communication, and financial constraints, further weakens attendance. To improve GNS class participation, the university must enhance course relevance, adopt interactive teaching strategies, improve learning environments, and strengthen institutional support. Addressing both academic and social integration will foster a culture of consistent attendance and meaningful engagement in GNS classes.

METHODOLOGY

Background of the research

In recent times, attendance at the General Studies Classes at the University of Ilorin has raised a source of concern in both physical and online classes; during physical classes, a lot of undergraduates in the locale university are usually outside the classroom while the lecturers are teaching. This has been a source of concern for the University, the timing was seen as a challenge, and thereby, it was changed from 8 am - 10 am to 12 pm-2 pm on the university timetable. After two academic sessions of teaching with the rescheduled timetable, the population of attendees kept reducing. This made the University implement blended teaching, meaning accommodating both physical and online classes.

In a scenario of 100 level GNS class of over 13,000 students, only 40 students attended class for week one, 101 for week two, and 63 for week three, while the highest attendance for that session was 210 students at the end of thirteen weeks of lecture in a virtual class. The same was the case of GNS for 200 Level with a student population of over 14,000 in virtual class; the attendance was very low. This was what prompted the researcher not to ask the lecturers but the students why they were not attending both the physical and online General Studies Classes and the factors that could be responsible for the poor Attendance of Undergraduates of the University of Ilorin in General Studies Classes.

Research gap

Despite extensive research on student absenteeism in higher education, limited studies have specifically examined attendance challenges in General Studies (GNS) courses, particularly in Nigerian universities. Existing literature

often focuses on course-specific attendance patterns rather than multi-disciplinary courses like GNS, which are compulsory but perceived as non-essential by students. Additionally, while prior studies address institutional and infrastructural barriers, they rarely explore student perceptions and motivations for non-attendance within the Nigerian context.

Furthermore, research on blended learning and attendance in large-scale GNS classes remains scarce, especially in West African institutions, where digital learning infrastructures are still evolving. This study fills these gaps by exploring the underlying reasons for poor GNS attendance from the students' perspective and proposing context-specific interventions to improve engagement.

Objectives

The study explores Factors contributing to the Low Attendance of Undergraduates of the University of Ilorin in General Studies Classes. Specifically, the study examines:

1. factors responsible for Poor Attendance in GNS Classes at the University of Ilorin as assessed by undergraduates;
2. possible solutions to factors responsible for poor attendance in GNS Classes at the University of Ilorin as assessed by Undergraduates.

Research questions

To direct this study, the following research questions were developed:

1. What do undergraduate students at the University of Ilorin consider to be the main causes of their low attendance in GNS classes?

2. What are the probable solutions to causes related to poor attendance in GNS Classes as assessed by Undergraduate Students at the University of Ilorin?

Research design

The research adopted a qualitative approach of a case study design. Creswell and Creswell (2017) emphasize that qualitative research is particularly useful for gaining in-depth insights into complex phenomena. Assessing poor attendance is a multifaceted issue, and qualitative methods allow for a comprehensive exploration of the reasons behind it.

Data collection methods

An unstructured 2-item interview with psychometric qualities of content validity was the only instrument that was adopted to elicit the needed data for the study. It was presented to the respondents in a Google Form, the essence of Google Form is to allow the respondents to express themselves without fear of intimidation or cancelling information. This was in line with the opinion of Creswell (2012), who maintains that administering a research instrument through Google Forms gives respondents a good opportunity to express themselves freely behind the was used.

Participants and sampling procedure

The population used for this study were all undergraduate students of the University of Ilorin. Purposive sampling techniques were used to sample 10 faculties out of the 16 faculties in the university; Faculties of Education, Agriculture, Social Sciences, Basic Medical Sciences, Physical Sciences, Life sciences, Arts, Veterinary Medicines, Law and Communication and information sciences. A total of 24

undergraduates were sampled using a simple random sampling procedure in ratio 2:2:2:2:2:2:2;2;2:2;2 and 4 across the sampled faculties.

Data analysis

The ATLAS.ti statistical package was used to analyze the qualitative data with thematic coding. According to Creswell (2012), it is used to make the process of storing, sorting, coding, analyzing, and performing data representation easier.

Ethical considerations

The study reported the participants' perceptions using a pseudonym to preserve their privacy, following the recommendation of McCann and Clark (2003). Creswell (2012) points out that the researcher needs to be aware of how to maintain the anonymity of the people and the location where the data is being collected.

RESULTS

The results of this investigation were presented following the inquiries for the study using ATLAS.ti, data collected were coded through thematic coding.

Research Question One: What do undergraduate students at the University of Ilorin think are the main causes of their low attendance in GNS classes?

The first figure shows the analysis of the data in themes.

Figure 1 shows the responses on reasons for poor attendance in four main themes, which are; Administrative, infrastructural, students and lecturers, which means that these four are all factors responsible for why students' attendance to GNS classes is poor.

Each of these factors is responsible for students' poor attendance is not expanded and explained further.

Figure 2 revealed the students identified the factors that contributed to their poor attendance in GNS classes as, first, administrative reasons, which have to do with the lack of importance placed on class attendance by the school administration, so students don't show up for class since they felt the class is not important. Also, the public address system is not audible enough to reach all the students in the classroom, and the lack of proper planning of the team teaching by lecturers is another reason for poor attendance. Lack of communication on class cancellations to the students discourages most of them, leading to poor attendance.

Figure 3 shows that the second reason for poor attendance in GNS classes is infrastructural factors; first on the list is poor internet access, especially during online classes. The majority of the students find it very difficult to join the class because the network is poor, while those who joined can't make any meaning from the class because the network keeps fluctuating. It was also pointed out that the class atmosphere is always unbearable due to the heat when it is physical. It is either the case of non-functional air conditioning to none non-functioning ceiling fans in most of the lecture halls. Another major reason is insufficient space for sitting; GNS classes are general classes which makes them too large to be effective.

Figure 4 revealed that the third factor revealed students' reasons, such as lack of phone and data required for the virtual classes, poor network, time management, and transportation problems. Some students felt the classes were uninteresting and lacked relevance to their major course of study in the university, so they felt their major course of study was more important than the GNS course. Some do

not attend classes because their friends do not attend, and some refuse to attend because they believe they can read the textbook and pass on their own without attending classes.

Figure 5 revealed the teachers teaching the GNS as one of the reasons for their poor attendance. This is because lecturers sometimes come late to class and lack proper class management as the class is mostly noisy. The lecturers also lack the will to make the lecture explanatory and interesting enough to make the students understand and be willing to always come for more classes. Many lecturers failed to make virtual teaching and learning activity-based. Also, postponement and cancellation of classes without timely information passed across to the students.

Research Question Two: What are the probable solutions to causes related to poor attendance in GNS Classes as assessed by Undergraduate Students at the University of Ilorin?

Data on possible solutions were also presented under three themes in line with the responses. Figure 6 revealed the categories of possible solutions to poor attendance in GNS classes based on institution, students and lecturers.

Figure 7 revealed an institution solution that can encourage or promote positive class attendance at GNS, as it ranges from; making the classes be on a departmental basis rather than on a faculty basis. The students want the university to provide a more conducive seating arrangement and a hall that can accommodate the specified number of students who are required to be present in the class for physical classes. The lecturers should be time-conscious, and the unit load should be increased. The students prefer a physical class to a virtual class. Good teaching, which is the present practice, should be discouraged; classes should be less cumbersome, among others.

Figure 8, explains that some students felt eradicating the course is the solution since it is not relevant to their field of study, while others felt making the class virtual is the best once a working Wi-Fi is put in place. Figure 9 also explains the lecture-based solutions that there is the need for lecturers to always take class attendance very seriously and attract scores to it. Also, new and interesting topics should be introduced for discussion in the GNS classes.

DISCUSSION

The relevance of GNS in every university is to widen the horizon of students beyond their area of specialization. Every undergraduate in a Nigerian university they are expected to undertake general studies in key courses that help to shape moral values, societal values and entrepreneurial skills. That is why GNS 111 and 112 use English. GNS 211; Philosophy, logic and Nigerian Culture and 212: Introduction to the Social Sciences and Citizenship Education. GSE 202 theoretical aspect of entrepreneurial skills. GNS 311; is History and Philosophy of Science while GNS 301 is on practical entrepreneurial skills to be undertaken by all students despite their faculties or course of study in the University. The recent surprise now is that students are absent from these general courses' classes. It was changed from physical class to virtual, yet the attendance is low. Reasons for attendance were revealed to be in four categories based on the findings of the study—administrative, Infrastructural, Student and Lecturer factors.

From the findings of the study, it was revealed that four bodies are responsible for students' poor attendance at GNS classes. The reasons listed are administrative, infrastructural, students and lecturers. The school administration failed to make adequate provisions for a conducive

teaching-learning environment, especially when classes were held physically. Facilities such as a public address system that will make lecturers audible for students to enjoy lessons are lacking. Students also consider a constant change of lecturers as a vital reason for their poor attendance. They wanted a situation where only one lecturer would handle all the content, meaning the whole idea of team teaching was not a welcome development by the students. There is also the administrative reason for poor recording during virtual classes. When recordings are not clear and audible, students will fail to interact with such material. At times classes are cancelled with prior information regarding the class. This corroborated with the findings of Akomolafe and Adesua (2016) that there was a significant relationship between physical facilities and students' level of motivation to class attendants.

Infrastructure was another reason students' attendance at GNS was poor, such as poor or epileptic internet access and overcrowded lecture halls without electricity to power the Fan and the Air conditioners, thus making the lecturer hall so hot for effective teaching and learning process. This is in agreement with previous findings of Ayoko et al. (2023) on the inadequacy of infrastructural facilities in public universities in Nigeria, that influences effective teaching and learning in public universities.

On the part of the students constituting reasons for their poor attendance at GNS class, some of their reasons are time management on the part of the lecturers taking the class; they also claim that so many times the class are so boring. It is also a teaching center and lacks students' active participation. They also gave the irrelevance of some of the contents of the course as a reason for poor attendance. Poor transportation to school was also mentioned as a reason,

insufficient data or no data at all to join the virtual class. Some even complain that because the class is virtual, others maintain the fact they can read the textbook that is available for them, so attending class is not compulsory peer influence was also pointed out as a reason, meaning because my friend did not participate in GNS class so do I. This is in agreement with the work of Oweikpodor et al. (2022), which revealed that “most students show a negative attitude toward lectures because they can borrow lecture notes from fellow students, buy a textbook, create a study group or engage in personal reading” (p. 11).

Lastly, it was revealed that lecturers also contribute to why students’ attendance at GNS classes is so poor; in a sense, most time, they fail to keep to lecture time, thus always going late to class. Even when they come for lectures, they fail to make the lesson interesting and lack motivation. Students also claim that most class schedules are not clear. Thus, students don’t always have an idea of who or which lecturer is coming for the next class. Among the reasons given by the students is that lecturers also display a lackadaisical attitude towards the lecture, which was why most of the time they failed to control their class and the class became so noisy. Even when classes were virtual, so many lecturers were very inactive and used a teacher-centered approach. This agrees with Penteado’s (2024) findings, which revealed that the primary excuses for skipping lectures are poor motivation by the teachers and the teaching approach which is teacher-centered.

The second finding on the possible ways of promoting students’ attendance at GNS classes, the study revealed some solutions suggested by the students, and it was categorized under three categories, which are institutional-based, student-based and lecturer-based. One of the

institutional-based suggested solutions is consistency in a physical class, meaning that the university administration should stick to one physical class. There should be an increase in the unit load of GNS. Maybe students will be more serious with class attendants when they know that it is not just two credits but three or four units. The provision of an adequate hall with good space to take care of the student population can go a long way in promoting good class attendance. The University administration should reorganize GNS to be departmental-based rather than Faculty wield. This will help to reduce the cumbersome nature of the class, and the problem of space will not arise. Also, a lecturer can conveniently handle the course without changing lecturers weekly. Institutions of learning should provide good and spacious learning spaces to promote class attendance.

Moreover, the students and lecture-based solutions suggested that emphasis should be more on the online classes, and there should be working Wi-Fi for students and the lecturers. Class attendance should be made compulsory, and it should attract marks. The lecturers also suggested that some of the topics in the GNS are obsolete; the GNS unit should try and review the content and inject more current and relevant content. The student also considers outright cancellation of the course since it is not relevant to some of their area of discipline. This is in support of the recommendations made by Ajiboye and Tella (2006) that the administration of the school should create a system for giving grades to students who attend lectures to motivate those who dislike them.

CONCLUSIONS

From the study, it was clear that undergraduates of the University of Ilorin's poor attendance to GNS classes are

centered on four major premises, which are administrative, infrastructural, students and lecturers. All these four constitute, in one way or the other, why GNS class attendees are poor. At the same time, solutions or suggestions were also institutional, student and lecturer-based. The study's conclusions lead to the following recommendations:

1. To effectively eradicate poor attendance, necessary and conducive infrastructural facilities should be put in place such as students would be encouraged to attend GNS class lectures with convenience.

2. Lecturers should be dynamic and flexible in their teaching approaches, making it more lively and engaging for students. This will reduce the level of boredom in a general class. Marks can be awarded for attendance; this will also serve as reinforcement not to miss class.

3. The institution should provide enough means of transportation to reduce the stress of getting to school for hours of lectures. This will enable the students to have a settled mind to learn and encourage them to be encouraged to attend classes.

4. The course contents for general classes should be reviewed to address current social problems, making the class interactive and helping the students to get the most out of the lectures.

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APPENDICES

Figure 1

The theme for reasons

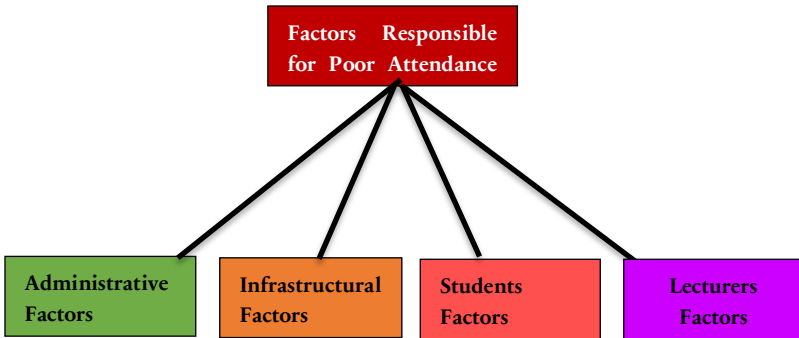


Figure 2

The administrative reasons

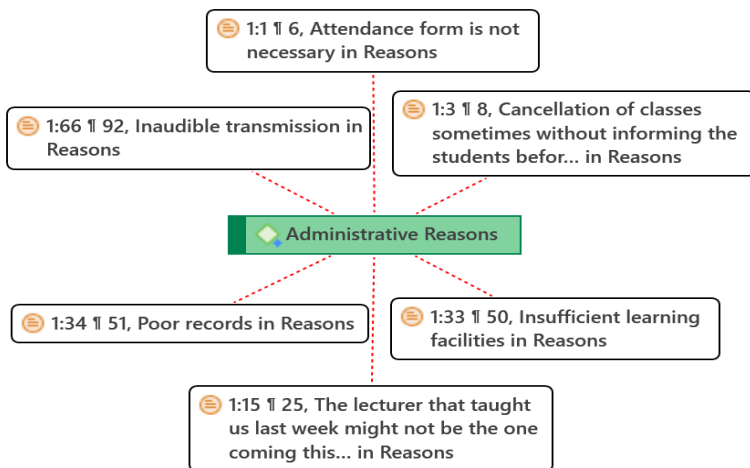


Figure 3

Infrastructural factors

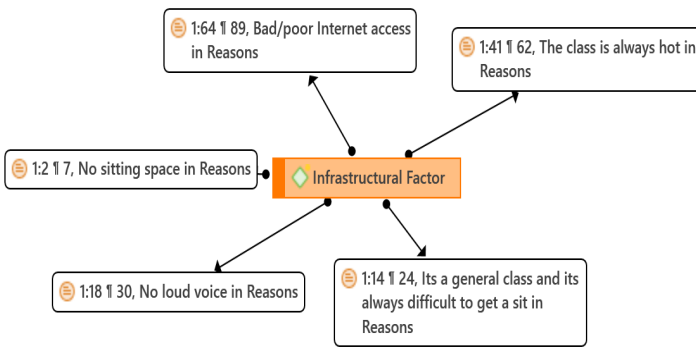


Figure 4

Students' factors



Figure 5

Lecturer factor

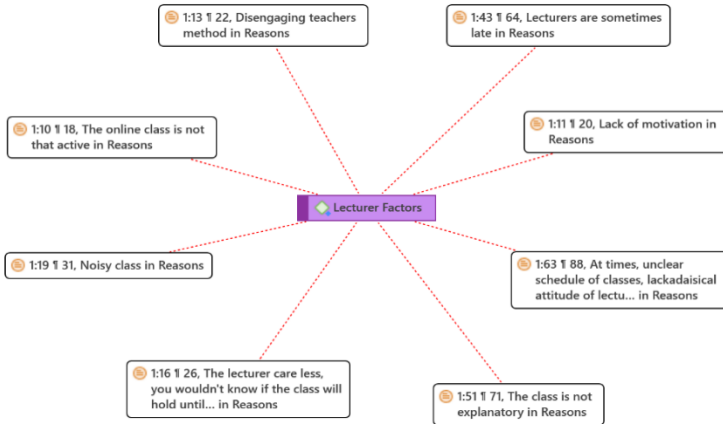


Figure 6

Possible solution

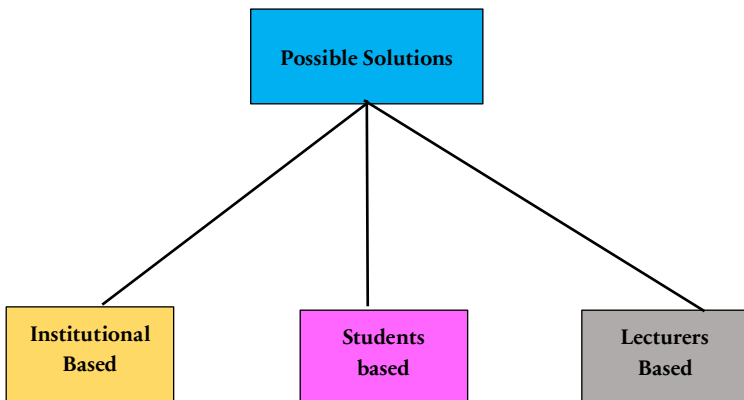


Figure 7
Institutional base solution

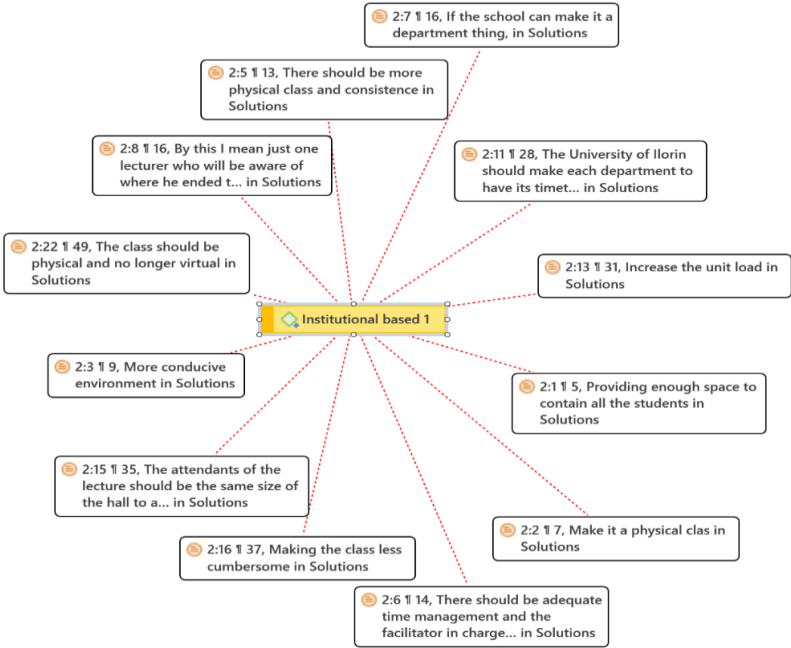


Figure 8
Student-based solutions

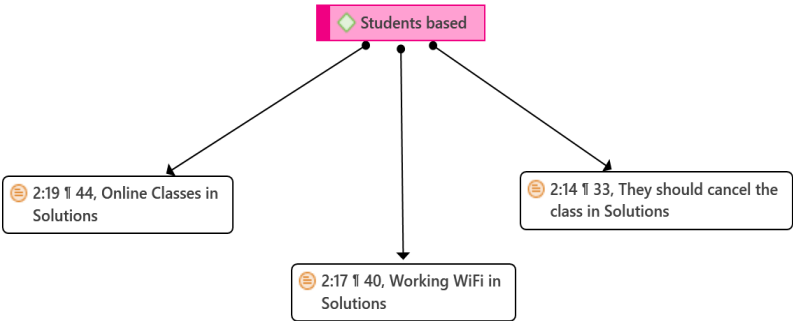


Figure 9

Lecturers-based solution

