



Absenteeism in Maritime Education: Insights, Challenges, and Innovative Solutions

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Students' attendance at classes is a measure that reflects students' enthusiasm for the course and their status in the university (Westerman, Perez-Batres, Coffey and Pouder, 2011). A multitude of studies have explored the reasons of absenteeism at higher education institutions and have investigated the correlation between class attendance and academic achievement at the university level (Shaaban and Reda, 2021; Moores, Birdi and Higson, 2019; Pappu, Vandrangi and VizayaKumar, 2006; Keyser, 2019; Summers, Higson and Moores, 2021 & Deng, Jianjun, Jing and Zitong, 2021). University-level absenteeism is influenced by various factors, ranging from academic self-perception and attitudes towards teachers to academic performance. Work-related absenteeism is also linked to stress, group size, commitment, and job satisfaction. It is essential to discern the specific importance of these factors.

The STCW convention provides the international minimum standards for maritime education and training and the minimum requirements for the competences of seafarers (IMO, 2010). IMO also adapted standard models of competence-based training to this convention. Even though all this knowledge and skills are well specified, attendance is only required for some specific maritime courses. Due to the importance of classroom attendance to comply with the STCW, this paper presents the results of the teaching innovation project titled "Active methodologies for face-to-face and participatory learning (ASAP-UPC)" and seeks to quantify current levels of absenteeism, identify its main causes and propose initiatives to improve classroom attendance at the Barcelona School of Nautical Studies (FNB-UPC). The project is structured into three distinct stages: initially, gathering and analyzing student data; secondly, redesigning teaching methodologies to mitigate absenteeism; and lastly, implementing these methodologies to minimize absenteeism, while also evaluating the effectiveness of their implementation.

In the first stage, students are asked about their interest in attending classes, skill development throughout their maritime education, and their perception of the skills required for a career in a maritime field. Information is gathered through both online surveys and in-person interviews (Figure 1 and Figure 2). Results reveal heightened absenteeism in large groups of students at the Bachelor's degree level. Many students express dissatisfaction with in-face-to-face classes, due to their theoretical heaviness and a perceived imbalance between theory, experimental practice, and problem-solving components. Additionally, students perceive a lack of connection to maritime professional needs. Additionally, contracting companies are queried about the skills they seek in prospective employees. In the second stage, each course coordinator designs an improvement action and, in collaboration with the teaching team, they propose enhancements based on identified good practices. Proposals to improve classroom attendance are categorized into three groups: (1) Specific follow-up activities, which include tasks such as quizzes, exercises, tutorials, group assignments and follow-up questionnaires; (2) Teaching innovation activities, which involve incorporating innovative teaching methods such as collaborative activities, the flipped classroom approach, and an increase in laboratory practices and (3) Modification of the syllabus, a proposal for reducing some theoretical contents and introducing more hands-on activities. In the final stage, guided by group reflections, good practices are formulated and integrated into a database. The proposed good practices are expected to be a turning point not only to motivate students but to foster a more significant learning, which can be transferred among Maritime Education and Training Institutions (METIs).

Theme category: Social/Maritime Education & Training aspect

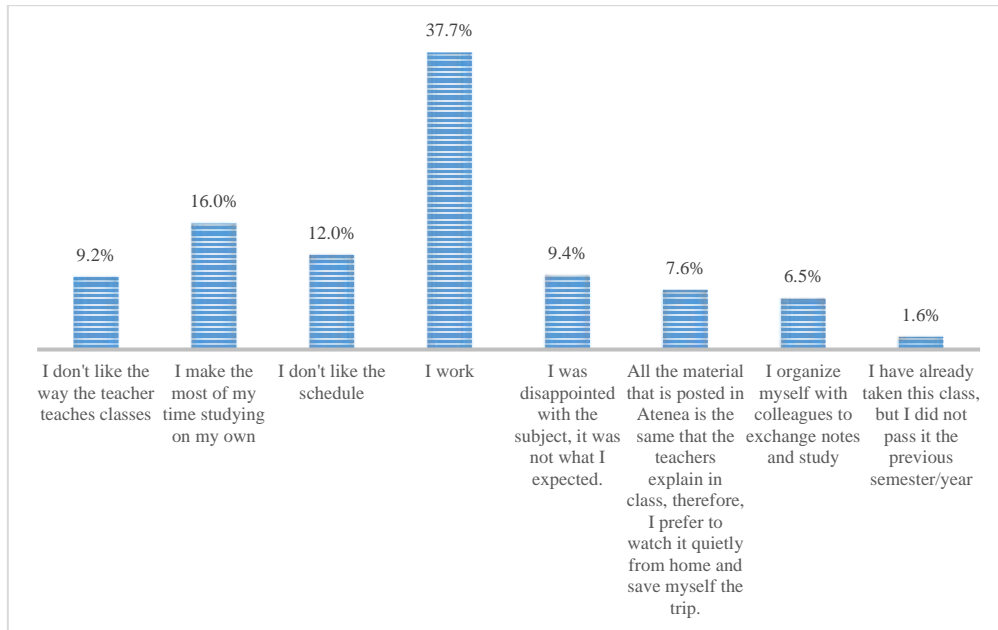


Figure 1. Reasons for non-attendance in classes according to the interviewed students

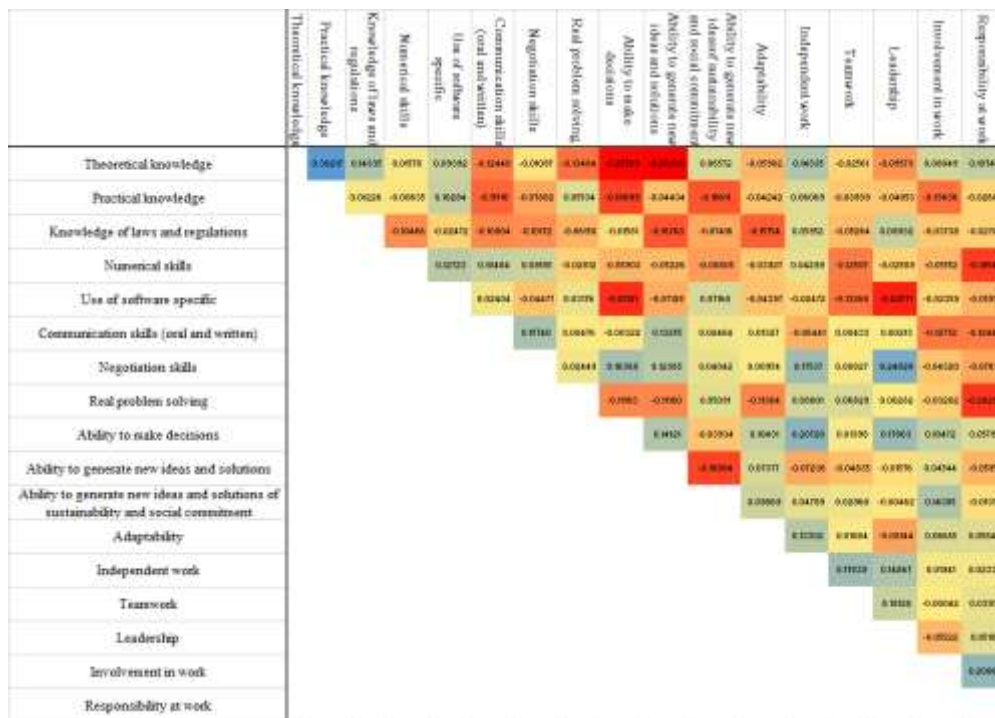


Figure 2. Correlation between proposed competencies according to the interviewed students

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