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"I realized that I can express myself": Motivational Drives Behind Freshmen Attendance in Lectures

"Kendimi ifade edebildiğimi fark ettim": Birinci Sınıf Öğrencilerinin Derslere Devam Etmesinin Arkasındaki Motivasyonel Sebepler

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Özet

Bu makale, derslere katılımın ardındaki ana motivasyonel dürtüleri ve bu güdülerin katılım oranına göre farklılık gösterip göstermediğini anlamak için yürütülen bir ara tırmanın bulgularını rapor etmektedir. Çalı ma, özellikle birinci sınıf öğrencilerinin yükseköğretim bağlamında sunulan bir kitle dersi için bildirdikleri katılım nedenlerini anlamayı amaçlamaktadır. Ara tırmanın katılımcılarını İstanbul ilinde İnsan ve Toplum Bilimleri Fakültesi'nde öğrenim gören 158 birinci sınıf öğrencisi olu turmaktadır. Ara tırmada, nitel veriler yarı yapılandırılmı görü meler yoluyla ve nicel veriler öğrencilerin devam oranlarını açıklayan istatistiksel veriler aracılığıyla toplanmı tır. Verilerin analizi, öğrencilerin öncelikle öğretim elemanının tarzı tarafından motive edildiğini göstermi tir. Öğrencilere göre, öğretim elemanlarının ders i leme biçimi, öğrencilere kar ı tutumu ve kendini ifade etme olanağı sağlaması, derse katılım motivasyonlarında büyük rol oynamaktadır. Birinci sınıf öğrencileri için ikincil motivasyon, ilginç bir içeriğe sahip müfredat, önerilen okumalar ve bonus puanlar olarak bulunmu tur. Ayrıca öğrencilerin bir kısmı derslere sadece devam zorunluluğu olduğu için katıldıklarını belirtmi lerdir. Devam oranlarına bağlı olarak motivasyonu arttıran dürtülerin deği imine ili kin veriler, zorunlu devam uygulamasının yüksek devam oranlarına sahip öğrenciler üzerinde bir etkisinin olmadığını göstermektedir. Makalede, sonuçlar ilgili literatüre dayalı olarak tartı ılmakta ve yükseköğretim bağlamlarında motivasyonu artırmaya yönelik çıkarımlar sunulmaktadır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Motivasyon, Yükseköğretim, Ders katılımı, Birinci Sınıf Öğrencileri

Abstract

This paper reports the findings of a research study conducted to understand the main motivational drives behind attendance in lectures and whether the drives differ based on the attendance rate. The study particularly seeks to gain insight into the attendance reasons reported by freshmen students for a common course offered in a higher education context. The participants of the study consisted of 158 first-year students studying at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in İstanbul, Türkiye. Qualitative data was collected through semi-structured interviews, and quantitative data was collected through statistical data describing students' attendance rates. The analysis of the data showed that the students were primarily motivated by the lecturer's style. According to the students, their lecturer's way of teaching, attitude towards the students and providing room for self-expression play a major role for their motivation to attend the lectures. The secondary motivation for freshmen was found as the syllabus with an interesting content, suggested readings and bonus points. Additionally, some of the students stated that they attended the lectures only because the attendance is compulsory. Regarding the change of motivational drives based on the attendance rates, the data revealed that compulsory attendance does not have an impact on the attendance of students with very high attendance rates. The results are discussed in light of the relevant literature and the implications for increasing motivation in higher education contexts are provided.

Keywords: Motivation, Higher Education, Attendance, Freshmen

The main objective of higher education (HE) at the undergraduate level is to graduate individuals who have field-specific competences as well as generic skills (Chan, 2016). In achieving this aim, lectures are still perceived as one of the most economical HE teaching practices with its capacity to address large number of students at the same time (Svinicki & McKeachie, 2011), and to give students a general overview of the subject, fundamental understanding of the field, as well as the opportunity to hear competing viewpoints (Bligh, 2000). Despite the positive link between attendance and skills development (Sloan et al., 2019), university lectures have been closely associated with student absenteeism recently and negative outcomes such as low achievement and inappropriate professional skills have been reported (e.g. Oldfield et al, 2017).

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In Türkiye, HE mainly consists of all post-secondary programs in universities and faculties in various disciplines (Mızıkacı, 2003). As in other HE contexts, lecturing is one of the most preferred modes of instructional delivery, especially in the first year of undergraduate programs in the faculties of social sciences and humanities. Although a plethora of HE research has addressed the problems experienced in Türkiye (Deniz, 2022), student attendance has received relatively little attention. Motivated by this gap, this paper aims to shed light on the motivational reasons behind student attendance in university lectures, in the case of a common course at a faculty.

Motivation and Attendance

The importance of attendance in university lectures has been well-acknowledged in the related literature as it has an impact on students themselves (Landin & Perez, 2015), lecturers (Bennett, 2003) and university (Mearman et al., 2014). It is considered to be an important factor in determining students' level of engagement with their course and student success (Moores et al., 2019). Declining attendance rates in lectures, therefore, have become a major concern in different HE contexts (Moores et al., 2019; Aypay et al., 2012).

The reasons behind student absenteeism have been investigated by a number of research studies and several explanations have been offered (e.g. Bati et al., 2013; Dolnicar et al., 2009; Kelly, 2012). Moores et al. (2019) conceptualized the salient reasons as related to teaching on the course and personal issues. Some of the frequently cited reasons related to teaching on the course were students' preferences to work on other assignments, subject difficulty, (dis)enjoyment of the class, the number of students in the class, timing of the classes and classes with materials provided online. The personal issues cited by the researchers included spending time on social activities, personal time management, emotional issues such as stress and depression, illness, transportation and financial problems. Among the teaching related-reasons and personal reasons for (non) attendance, motivation has become a prominent theme as an important indicator of absenteeism (Fryer et al., 2018; Sloan et. al., 2019). For example, finding out a statistically significant relationship between actual rates of attendance and the importance students attached to attendance, Gump (2006) concluded that inherent motivation might be a key factor that affects student behavior in attending the lectures. It plays an influential role even in the case of unrequired attendance (Massingham & Herrington, 2006; Woodfield et al., 2006).

Considering the widespread agreement on the significance of motivation for attendance behavior, existing literature also discusses the factors influencing motivation. It is possible to define those motivational factors as lecture- and lecturer-related factors. Regarding lecture-related factors, the review of literature shows that lecture contents that involve students in decision-making processes, explain clear expectations for assessment and learning and provide online versions of the materials are reciprocated by different outcomes in terms of attendance rates. For example, Fazey and Fazey (1998) proposed that valuing students and involving them in decision-making processes encourage intrinsic motivation and create a motivating teaching environment. As a similar outcome, learning about assessment criteria and what is necessary in terms of subject knowledge to pass the course motivates students for attendance (Dolnicar, 2005; Oldfield et al., 2017). However, the availability of lecture content online is reported to negatively influence motivation for attendance and learning (Friedman et al., 2001; Massingham & Harrington, 2006).

As for lecturer-related factors, it is indicated in the relevant literature that teaching style and lecturer characteristics play inseparable and major role for students' attendance motivation. Clark et al. (2011) showed in their study that lectures are perceived as enjoyable social occasions when the lecturer is authentic and enthusiastic about knowledge and the subject. Those lecturers are referred to as authentic lecturers who have an impact on increasing academic performance for their students (Soares & Lopes, 2020). Authentic lecturers' teaching style by listening to different perspectives and fostering understanding, create a sense of psychological safety which increases attendance and academic performance. According to Fjortoft (2005), students value lecturers who are engaging and helpful, and attendance is influenced by the quality of the instruction, especially the instruction with application to real world settings. In addition, the lecturer-related motivator factor for student attendance is characterized as interesting by Gump (2004), based on the report that the first-year students were most motivated to attend class when the lecturer and topic were interesting. Similarly, Baderin's (2005) study showed that 62% of students were motivated by the welcoming lecturer approach. The welcoming lecturer approach, which allows students the opportunity to express themselves, fosters the embodiment of self for each individual and creates a psychologically safe learning environment in the classroom. As Soares and Lopes (2020) hypothesized, forming psychological safety in the classroom helps the increase in motivation. Providing psychological safety directly encourages students to attend the class, while also indirectly supporting the development and continuity of their sense of self. According to psychiatrist Robert D. Laing (1960), the embodiment of self in various aspects of life is crucial for addressing challenges. Consequently, creating a secure classroom environment not only makes students feel safe, but also fosters a sense of belonging and increases their motivation to attend.

Studies on the lecturer's role in motivating student attendance provide evidence for promoting a sense of belonging, which is defined as a personal emotion connected to a fundamental and pervasive motivational drive (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Belonging is cited as another factor for (non)attendance in

relation to motivation (Oldfield et al., 2017). As indicated in PISA 2000 results, a sense of belonging increases student engagement and participation (Willms, 2003). Similar research has shown that belonging is a key aspect of attendance (e.g. O'Keeffe, 2013; Thomas, 2012). For example, Thomas (2012) found out that positive relationships with peers and staff made the students continue with their courses whereas the students who felt isolated withdrew from those courses. The quality of the interpersonal relationships students experience is therefore important in forming a positive sense of belonging (Mellor et al., 2008).

The review of the related literature reveals that the studies have explored the students' attendance behavior in relation to academic success and attainment at university, with various reasons that could explain the obtained results. Considering that the results have the potential to shed light on ways to improve teaching in HE institutions and accordingly improve students' success, studies investigate (non)attendance across diverse HE contexts worldwide. delve into the reasons for student (non)attendance in various HE contexts around the world. However, to the best knowledge of the researchers, there has been no study conducted in the Turkish HE sectors, leaving a context that has been witnessing a major growth in university education unresearched. Originated in this research gap and believing that the exploration of attendance issue for freshmen students in the very beginning of university life will contribute to their progress throughout university education, the study aims to understand the main motivational drives behind student attendance in lectures with a focus on the freshmen students in a mass course. The research questions that lead the study are as follows:

- What is/are the main motivational drive(s) of freshmen to attend lectures in a Turkish HE context?
- Do(es) the main motivational drive(s) differ based on the student attendance rates?

Method

Research Context and Participants

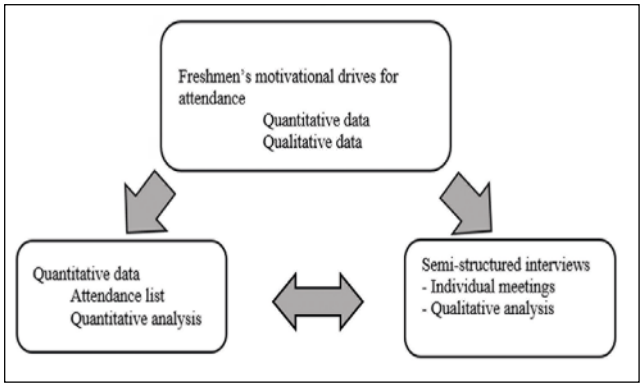
HE journey in Türkiye starts with a competitive nationwide test taken to be enrolled in a university. Based on the scores, students become entitled to register either for two-year programs at vocational high schools or four-year undergraduate programs (except for some disciplines such as medicine or physics education) at faculties of public and private universities. Undergraduate programs include various disciplines ranging from language teaching to mechanical engineering based on the scope of the faculty (e.g. Faculty of Science and Letters, Faculty of Engineering, Faculty of Education, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities). The study took place in the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities of a foundation university in İstanbul, Türkiye, where one of the researchers was working as a lecturer. The undergraduate programs offered at the faculty were Psychology, Sociology, Political Science and International Relations, Mathematics and Statistics.

The students' attendance behavior was investigated in the course titled "Academic Success and Life Skills" since it was one of the most crowded common courses available for first year students of all programs at the faculty. The Academic Success and Life Skills course is designed to last for fourteen weeks and aims at preparing students to have fundamental skills for all four years of university life. The syllabus of the course covers fundamentals of basic issues such as transition from secondary education to university, communication within the university, effective presentation skills, how to cope with stress, critical and analytical thinking, time management, self-knowledge and setting goals. The readings for the course include one main source about life skills for young adults and the three supplementary sources about why some people are more successful and what can be done for a better quality education. The course has a face to face format, but content is also provided online in the LMS utilized by the institution. The assessment procedures consist of one midterm and one final exam. Attendance is compulsory and active participation is also promoted and graded. Active participation is operationalized as asking and answering questions, making comments and providing all kinds of contributions without hesitation. Similarly, making presentations about suggested readings given in the course syllabus is not a compulsory criterion, but rewarded by bonus points. The students who actively participates by asking, answering and commenting for the whole term are awarded with 10 bonus points, and 10 bonus points are additionally given for the ones who support their active participation with a presentation. The course is offered to all freshmen students enrolled in five undergraduate programs. At the time of this study, among 158 freshmen aged between 18 and 25, 54 of the students were studying at the Department of Psychology, 24 students were from the Department of Sociology, 13 of the students were in the Department of Political Science and International Students, 30 students were from the Department of Mathematics and 37 students were in the Department of Statistics.

Data Collection and Analysis

The present exploratory research used a mixed method approach in collecting data, since the research questions addressed in the study necessitated the use of both qualitative and quantitative methods. The qualitative approaches were helpful in offering a deeper and wider grasp of the students' perceptions, while the quantitative methods enabled the categorization and organization of the data. As shown in Figure 1 below, the quantitative data was obtained from the attendance records of 154 students, whereas qualitative data came from individual semi-structured interviews conducted to understand the issue in depth from the participants' perspectives by establishing a greater rapport with them in a conversation (Patton, 2002).

Figure 1. Data Collection Tools and Procedures.



All students taking the course were fully informed about the research aim and procedures. Out of 158 students, 154 students consented to take part in the study.

The participant students gave fully informed written consent and a total of 154 individual interviews were conducted at the end of fall semester in the 2022-2023 academic year. The students received five points in their final exam for participation in the interviews. The study gained ethical approval from the University Ethics Committee (E-65836846-044-280125 – 02/27/2022).

For the interviews, the researchers arranged the time for each participant on their convenient day and conducted face-to-face individual interviews in three weeks. They were asked questions about their main motivation to attend the lecture, the reasons behind that motivational drive and whether there is any other source of motivation for themselves.

Each semi-structured interview lasted for about 20 minutes. The language of the interviews was Turkish, the native language of the participants, to reduce the risk of language blockage. The interviews were audio-recorded with the permission of the participants and transcribed verbatim by the researchers. At the transcription stage of the interviews, participants were allocated a pseudonym to ensure anonymity.

Table 1. Sample coding.

Participant	Excerpt	Codes	Category
Burak (pseudonym)	Our teacher's style increases our interest in the lesson. The examples he gives make us more enthusiastic and I enjoy participating in the lesson.	Way of teaching	Use of examples
Zeynep (pseudonym)	The sincere and caring attitude of the teacher indirectly drew me into the lesson	Attitude	Sincerity

Table 2. Emerging main themes and codes.

Key themes	Subthemes	Codes
Lecturer's style	Way of teaching	Use of examples
		Lively
		Informative
		Enjoyable
		Interactive
		Active/effective teaching
		Humor
		Thought-provoking
		Tone of voice
	Room for self-expression	Valuing ideas
	Attitude	Sincerity
Syllabus	Content	Real life topics
	Suggested readings	Interesting and useful topics
	Bonus points	High grades
Compulsory attendance	Compulsion	-
	Other work	Financial concerns Social concerns

The data analysis of attendance records was completed through SPSS 27.0 for the Windows software package. Descriptive statistics, namely frequencies, were computed on the weekly lists of the student attendance throughout 14 weeks. For the analysis of the interview data, the transcripts of 154 interviews in total were analyzed using content analysis. Miles, Huberman & Saldana (2013) suggest the use of three stages in content analysis: data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing. According to this framework, data reduction includes the elimination of irrelevant information in the transcribed data and coding of the raw data into conceptual categories. In the second stage, 'data display', the data is represented in the form of a table or chart and any possible connection between the categories is examined. In the last stage, which is 'conclusion drawing', the validity of the results is ensured by referring to field notes and conclusions were developed. Following this model, each researcher studied the transcriptions to identify and classify the participants' comments as motivation-related themes. Then, the relationships between different themes were carefully checked whether they could be placed under the same theme. Finally, each researcher reexamined the themes to ensure whether the emergent themes truly reflected the nature of its supporting data. Sample coding is illustrated in Table 1 below.

As an important criterion for a scientific inquiry to be trustworthy (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015), reliability was ensured via intra- and inter-rater reliability. The intra-rater reliability was ensured by the repetition of the same analysis process by each researcher in the coding of the data with three week-intervals. The first and second coding were compared to eliminate the differences and conclusions were drawn after minor revisions.

For inter-rater reliability, the two researchers had a meeting to compare their classifications. With the classified instances, the agreement rate among the raters was 90%. Then, each rater examined the relationships between different codes carefully and placed the codes with a similar nature into major categories (Table 2).

An interrater reliability analysis using Cohen's Kappa statistics was performed to determine consistency among the raters. The analysis showed that interrater agreement was substantial, with Kappa=0.83 ($p<.001$).

Results

The Main Motivational Drives

The primary aim of the present study is to explore the main motivational drives behind student attendance in a Turkish HE context. To this end, the analysis of the interviews conducted with freshmen students revealed three main themes that indicate their reasons to attend the lectures: Lecturer's style, course syllabus and compulsory attendance. Each key theme is explained in the following sections together with subthemes accompanied by sample student quotes.

Lecturer's Style

Cited by 101 students, the prominent key theme in students' responses was found as lecturer's style. The students indicated that the lecturer's way of teaching, communication style and allowing room for self-expression were the factors that made them attend the lecture. Regarding the way of teaching, the students defined the lecturer's way of teaching as lively and enjoyable, as shown in Beren's comment:

"Our lecturer's entertaining and lively lectures affected my participation. He prefers a more colorful and dynamic expression rather than a monotonous expression. The way of expression is like brainstorming. First, the listing of the concepts related to the subject and then the explanation of these concepts is very fluent."

Berke similarly stated that listening to a lecture that was not monotonous was the main motivation to attend the lecture: *"The main factor is the style of the lecturer because the lessons are not boring, monotonous, but fun. I would take this course again if I could"*. The students' comments showed that use of humor by the lecturer was an important factor that made the lecture fun. Mehmet explained this factor as: *"The lecturer has a humorous explanation style. This increases interest because he can attract even the attention of the distracted student."*

The way of teaching was also cited by the students with the adjectives as informative. Selma stated that the way the lecture delivered "*...was both informative and entertaining for us students. I can say that it is the most enjoyable lesson we have studied after the other lessons we have seen throughout the week*". The students reported that use of examples throughout the lecture helped them understand the topic which increases their motivation. As Fatih stated, "*The lecturer of the course has an effective and remarkable style of expression. The fact that he constantly uses examples from daily life while teaching increases my willingness to attend the lecture*", indicating that supporting lecturing through examples influences student attendance behavior. Similarly, the way of lecturing was reported to be thought-provoking, as a support to further explain the effect of examples provided in the lecture. Yaren underlined the impact of thought-provoking teaching style in the following words: *"Our lecturer encourages our friends to think. While questioning life with thought-provoking questions, it gives stimulating clues. It also provides examples that prepare you for life."*

Interactivity was another reported factor that shaped the motivational drive related to teaching. Interactivity was observed to be highly favored by the students since it was a popular theme among the student responses. One of the students, Ali, for example, stated that when the lecturer "*keeps asking questions in a continuous interaction with the students*", which encourages them to participate. According to Ece, an interactive way of teaching is the most preferred type of instruction for them:

"The lecturer's style is important to me because, for example, I only listen to the lecturer who is not active while teaching or who is involuntarily teaching for the first 5-10 minutes of the lesson. Then I get bored and stop listening but I listen to the lecturer who advances the lesson in an interactive way without boring the student even in a very long lesson."

In addition to interactive style, the tone of voice and language used during the class shape the way of teaching from the perspective of students. It was seen during the interviews that playing with the tone of voice is effective to grasp the students' attention as the students referred to the lecturer's changing tone of voice when they are elaborating on the lecturer's way of teaching. Like Sevgi, many students pointed out the lecturer's careful use of "*...stress and tone keep the students alert*". From time to time, the freshmen students may lack concentration to follow and that could be why it is important to note the changing tone of voice to raise awareness and concentration.

Apart from the way of teaching, self-expression is another theme reported by the students. Students commented that they were motivated to attend the lecture especially because the lecturer allowed them to express their ideas freely and value each idea articulated in the classroom. The room for self-expression was highly appreciated by the students, as can be understood in Asu'S comments:

"Until I went to university, the idea of school was very scary for me because in high school and secondary school, there were only the impositions and scoldings of my teachers. All my prejudices were destroyed in this course because I realized that I can express myself with respect."

Offering opportunities for self-expression by lecturer was referred to by the freshmen students many times as a motivating factor. Selin underlined this idea by stating "*I enjoy attending the class because being able to express ourselves makes us more willing*". Those opportunities also make the students feel special as they thought that "*eliciting ideas from students and evaluating their ideas establishes a bond of mutual respect*" (Elif). Thus, valuing others and ideas turns into mutual respect and tightens freshmen's commitment to the lecture and accordingly university education.

The lecturer's approach to students with a sincere attitude was another popular theme regarding the lecturer's style. A considerable number of comments centered around sincerity, indicating that attitude was an important motivational factor for the students. For example, Arda stated that "*The sincere attitude of the lecturer indirectly drew me to the lesson*". Sevil also mentioned the same theme commenting that "*the lecturer's approach is important to me because it makes us self-confident. The sincere approach reflects on the students and they can respond more easily*".

Syllabus

The second key theme was the syllabus, which emerged in responses of 39 students. The students reported that the lecture content, suggested readings and bonus points were the syllabus-related factors that made them attend the lecture. The lecture content was found as engaging by the students since they thought that including real-life topics really help them internalize new knowledge. For example, presentation skills were highly appreciated by the students as this would be a usual practice in following years at university.

Table 3. Attendance rates and emergent themes.

Attendance rate (out of 14 weeks)	Number of students (out of 154 students)	Emergent themes
30% and below	16 (10,4%)	Lecturer's style: 7 Syllabus: 7 Compulsory attendance: 2
31%-50%	14 (9,1%)	Lecturer's style: 9 Syllabus: 1 Compulsory attendance: 4
51%-60%	21 (13,6%)	Lecturer's style: 14 Syllabus: 5 Compulsory attendance: 2
61%-70%	24 (15,6%)	Lecturer's style: 16 Syllabus: 7 Compulsory attendance: 1
71%-80%	63 (40,9%)	Lecturer's style: 43 Syllabus: 14 Compulsory attendance: 6
81%-100%	16 (10,4%)	Lecturer's style: 11 Syllabus: 5 Compulsory attendance: 0

Gökhan mentioned it clearly in the following words: "*During my education life, I used to think that I would not be able to make presentations because I did not know if I would like it. In the lesson plan, both our lecturer showed examples and the ways how a good presentation should be prepared with simple tips and tricks and then the lecturer asked us to make a presentation, which made me understand that I could overcome this situation and confidently make a presentation next year.*"

The lecture content was found authentic by the students since the course plan consisted of university and real-life topics. They thought that they can easily apply new knowledge as they are the actors of university life themselves, like Zehra stated: "*The topics allow us to critique our own experiences*". Due to the similar reasons, the students found the suggested readings interesting and also useful, as some of the students thought that the readings "*...increased interest in reading and reading frequency*" (Deniz). In addition, bonus points given for the completion of some tasks were motivating for some students who thought that they "*…need to get high grades*" (Sedat), evidencing that the concerns related to grades influences students' motivation. As long as their grade concerns are eliminated through such practices as bonus points, motivation levels change for the positive.

Compulsory Attendance

Compulsory attendance was the third main motivational drive stated by the students. Among the participants, 14 mentioned that they attended the lecture only because they were obliged to do so. For some students, there was no clear reason as they, as in Ahmet's comments, "*...prefer to stay at home instead of coming to the university*", whereas some students pointed to financial and social concerns as a reason not to attend the lectures. A small number of students mentioned that they had to work and thus had actually no time to attend the lecture but tried to create time for the lecture due to the compulsory attendance. Apart from financial concerns, a few students responded that they could meet their friends outside instead of being in the class. Though there was a small percentage of them, it is important to note that a few students explained that they had to spend their time in the lecture to make sure that they would not miss the required number of courses to attend.

The Main Motivational Drives and Attendance Rates

The secondary aim of the present study is to understand whether the reported main motivational drives differ based on the attendance rates. To this end, the descriptive statistics were computed to define the attendance rate of 154 freshmen who participated in the interviews.

As shown in Table 3 above, around 10% of the students attended 30% of the lecture and the main motivational drives for this group were lecturer's style and syllabus. The second groups of students (9%) were the ones who had attendance rates between 31% and 50% of the lecture. Those students thought that the lecturer's style was the most important motivational drive whereas compulsory attendance was a more important drive for them than syllabus itself. Forty-five students in the following two groups attended the lecture 51%-70% of the term, with the most main motivation being the lecturer' style and the syllabus as the second important reason for attendance. Most of the students (40,9%) attended 71%-80% of the lecture time in the semester and the lecturer's style was the most important motivational reason. The group that had the highest attendance rates (81%-100%) were around 10% of the students. According to their responses, it was found that their attendance was influenced by the lecturer's style and compulsory attendance did not make a change for them.

Discussion and Conclusion

The present study was conducted to understand the main motivational drives behind freshmen attendance in lectures in a Turkish HE context and whether those drives differ based on the attendance rates. Based on the students' responses, it was found that the lecturer's style, syllabus and compulsory attendance were the main reasons for attendance. The most important motivational drive, lecturer' style, was cited by a great majority of participant students. The students' comments revealed similar findings as in the relevant literature showing that teaching style and lecturer characteristics inseparably play a major role for students' attendance motivation (e.g. Clark et al., 2011). The analysis of main motivational drives based on the attendance rates also showed that the lecturer, with teaching style and characteristics, was the most inspiring factor irrespective of whether the student physically came to the lecture.

Thematized as lecturer's style in the present study, the lecturer's teacher position defined by the students as lively, enjoyable, informative, humorous, changing tone of voice and thought-provoking through examples brought an effective teaching in the eyes of the students, which increases their motivation and arouses willingness to attend the lecture. As indicated by Soares and Lopes (2020), authentic lecturers with such personalities become successful in increasing interest and accordingly academic performance. Although this study does not include an objective assessment regarding academic achievement, it is possible to state based on the results that the lecturer's personality had an impact on achievement at least from student perspectives.

In relation to the lecturer's style, an interactive way of teaching and providing room for self-expression with a sincerity to value each idea put forward during the lectures were underlined by the freshmen students in the study. Teaching methods that encourage listening to other points of view and a sense of understanding each one provides psychological safety (e.g. Soares & Lopes, 2020). Accordingly, this study also discovered that first-

year students were most inspired to attend class when the lecturer has a welcoming approach (Baderin, 2005; Gump, 2004). The students' comments as "*I realized that I can express myself*" provide evidence to support the idea that lecturers' roles in inspiring students to attend the lectures offer proof of the strategies for fostering a sense of belonging, which is linked to a fundamental motivational drive. Therefore, the findings were compatible with the previous studies demonstrating the importance of belonging for attendance (e.g., Mellor et al., 2008; O'Keeffe, 2013; Oldfield et al., 2017; Thomas, 2012).

The second main motivational drive reported by the freshmen in the study was the syllabus. According to Fjortoft (2005), attendance is affected by the quality of the instruction, particularly when it applies to real-world situations. Similarly, in the present study students mentioned that they were motivated by the lecture content that includes real-life topics, which could be due to the lecture itself. The course is designed to raise students' awareness about university education and what they are currently engaged in. Thus, they were able to easily connect new knowledge with their experiences in university context. That could also explain the reasons why the students found the suggested readings in lecture content as interesting and useful. Thus, it can be suggested that the content might be a reason for the students to attach importance to the lecture and therefore to attendance (Gump, 2006) because the syllabus was reported by the second main motivational drive for all students with different attendance rates except for the lowest group. For approximately 10% of the students who participated, less than 30% of the lecture attached the same amount of importance to the syllabus and lecturer's style. It is possible to comment that syllabus and content play the same role for some of the students, which could be due to the online provision of the materials as shown by the previous studies suggesting that the availability of lecture content online influence attendance negatively (e.g. Friedman et al., 2001; Massingham & Harrington, 2006). With regard to syllabus, bonus points were another factor that affects students' motivation, as revealed by the students' comments. The finding shows that provision of some incentives might be a good solution for attendance problems.

The third motivational drive found in the study was compulsion to attend the lecture. Some of the students responded that they attend the lecture only because the attendance is obligatory, whereas some of them explained their own concerns. The concerns of the students fall into the personal issues category of Moore's et al.'s (2019) non-attendance reasons as the students in the study stated that they would prefer to spend time on social occasions or had to work because of financial concerns. Considering the number of the students, the result is understandable, because each student was coming from a different socio-economic background and some of them had to deal with studying and working at the same time. Also, each student had different kinds of awareness on the need and necessity of the HE. Since the number of those comments is very small, obligation for attendance is the least cited motivational source in every group of students with different attendance rates. When the answers obtained by the students with the highest rates were examined, it was found that compulsion was not a criterion for them, indicating that the lecture and lecturer were the most important sources to increase inherent motivation for attendance (Massingham & Herrington, 2006; Woodfield et al., 2006).

The study provided insights into the main motivational drives behind freshmen attendance in a Turkish HE context with a concern to voice the findings from an under researched area. However, it is not without limitations. First, the participants of the study are limited to a group of students who are enrolled in one mass course. Common courses offer great opportunities to reach a larger number of students, therefore, further studies in this context should involve more lectures to be able to invite more students for disclosure. The institutional context might also be enlarged since the present study was conducted in one faculty. Although interviews allow for in-depth inquiry, employing quantitative data collection tools could make it easier to reach a larger sample. Lastly, this study does not include any assessment for academic achievement, which is reported as a highly relevant variable to motivation and attendance. Thus, further studies might address the connection between motivation for attendance and academic achievement in the Turkish HE context.

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