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Autonomy-Supportive Teacher Behaviours and Their Impact on Student Attendance at University Level

ABSTRACT

Previous research on the motivation types located along a self-determination continuum revealed that the autonomy in students' motivation has a positive impact on getting favourable results and underlined the importance of autonomy-supportive environments. Given that teacher behaviour is addressed as one of the forms of autonomy-supportive environments, the present study aimed to understand the nature of teacher behaviours in a mass course where the students explained the teacher as the most important motivational drive for their attendance in lectures. To this end, 101 first-year students studying at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences participated in semi-structured interviews. The content analysis of qualitative data showed that the students were motivated by the teachers' structured guidance, promotion of active participation, and acknowledgement of their ideas. Most importantly, their responses showed that lively teaching performance with use of humour and changing the tone of voice were the most important factors influencing their attendance behaviour. The results indicated that attendance was autonomously motivated by not only teachers' informative, interactive, and caring behaviours but also teaching performance with some desired characteristics for university level students.

KEYWORDS

self-determination theory, motivation, university students, autonomy, teacher behaviour

INTRODUCTION

The significance of attending university lectures has been acknowledged in terms of how it affects students (Landin and Perez 2015), lecturers (Bennett 2003), and the university as a whole (Mearman et al. 2014). It is thought to play an important role in determining students' engagement with coursework and student success rates (Moores, Birdi, and Higson 2019). Therefore, declining lecture attendance rates have become a key problem in several higher education contexts (e.g., Aypay, Çekiç, and Boyacı 2012; Moore, Armstrong, and Pearson 2008). The studies reported different explanations for student (non)attendance (e.g., Bati et al. 2013; Dolnicar et al. 2009; Kelly 2012), and motivation has emerged as a key determinant of absenteeism among teaching-related and personal explanations (Fryer et al. 2018; Sloan et al. 2019).

The self-determination theory has been used to understand students' motivation in a considerable number of studies (e.g., Litalien and Guay 2015; Trouilloud et al. 2006). Those studies focused on the autonomous type of motivation defined as the main drive to perform an activity for the satisfaction it gives (Ryan and Deci 2000). Past studies provided evidence for the effect of autonomy-supportive teachers in fostering autonomous motivation in their students at different educational levels (Ng and Wu 2024; Reeve 2006), with higher education levels remaining relatively unquestioned.

Lecturing is one of the commonly preferred modes of instruction in Turkey, since it's one of the most cost-effective teaching methods, can be utilized in different contexts, and offers opportunities to address a large number of students at once (Svinicki and McKeachie 2011). University lectures have recently been directly linked with student absenteeism (e.g. Oldfield et al. 2017), and results like low accomplishment and improper professional skills have been recorded. Despite the fact that previous research has called into question the issues the Turkish higher education context is facing (Deniz 2022), comparatively little attention addresses student motivation and attendance. Adopting a self-determination lens, this paper aims to shed light on the teacher's position as a motivational reason behind student appearance or absence in university lectures, with a focus on the potential ability to promote autonomous attendance motivation. It highlights the significant role teachers play in fostering students' intrinsic motivation, thereby potentially increasing lecture attendance. Understanding these dynamics can inform teaching practices and policies aimed at enhancing student engagement and academic performance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Self-determination theory

Student motivation has been under investigation through the critical lenses of self-determination theory, which considers individuals as proactive and emphasizes the interaction between individuals and their environment as a means of understanding human motivation (Ryan and Deci 2017). It views motivation along a continuum from autonomous to controlling motivation, differentiating clearly between intrinsic motivation and four types of extrinsic motivators. Intrinsic motivation is explained as the behaviour awakened by the satisfaction growing out of engagement in the activity, such as curiosity or enjoyment (Ryan and Deci 2020). It is the most autonomous form since the initiation and regulation of behaviour completely belong to the individual. Constructivist learning theory, as well as more general educational theory, supports this viewpoint by emphasizing that knowledge is created by students via meaningful interactions with their surroundings. Since they are allowed to actively participate and take responsibility for their education, students are more likely to experience intrinsic motivation in autonomy-supportive environments where teachers promote inquiry and reflection.

Extrinsic motivation, on the other hand, is a controlling form of motivation with external incentives. It differs in terms of motivational regulations based on a continuum of underlying self-determination (Ryan and Deci 2020). On one end of the continuum is hardly self-determined extrinsic motivation, where external regulation characterizes the behaviours stimulated by external pressures, praise, and rewards. Slightly more self-determined extrinsic motivation, introjected regulation, concerns the behaviours characterized by internal pressures such as obligation or guilt. According to constructivist principles, students are less likely to develop deep, meaningful understanding in learning contexts where external regulation (driven by pressures, praise, or rewards from outside sources) or introjected regulation (driven by guilt or obligation) dominate. Identified regulation is associated with high self-determination and the behaviours exhibited by the individuals who identify with reasons for performing or find it important to achieve. This type of regulation is reported as a meaningful predictor of university learners' well-being, life satisfaction, and academic achievement (Thomas, Müller, and Bieg 2018). The most self-determined form of extrinsic motivation is integrated regulation, which describes behaviours demonstrated with a stable and mature value system to accomplish the most significant personal goals. This type of motivation is consistent with constructivist principles because it involves students acting in a way that is consistent with a stable

and mature value system to accomplish personal goals, which promotes both intrinsic motivation and meaningful learning (Vygotsky 1978).

The research on the motivation types located along a self-determination continuum provides evidence that the changing degrees of autonomy and revealed that autonomy in students' motivation has a positive impact on learning (Guay et al. 2016; Otis, Grouzet, and Pelletier 2005). Autonomous motivation is associated with a more positive emotional experience, deeper level of learning, higher grades, and lower levels of dropout (e.g., Vansteenkiste et al. 2005). For the provision of autonomous motivation that would lead to desirable outcomes, the theory underlines the importance of autonomy-supportive environments (Deci et al. 1991). Teacher behaviour is one of the forms of autonomy-supportive environments, described as a motivational style where students' needs, interests, and preferences are encouraged to direct instruction (Reeve, Deci, and Ryan 2004). Autonomy-supportive teachers are reported to foster autonomous motivation in their students. Therefore, the study focuses on the teacher behaviours which affect student motivation for attending the lectures.

Motivation for attendance

University student lectures attendance has been approached from a motivational perspective, and it has been widely asserted that motivational drives have a major influence on attendance behaviour. The motivational drives reported in the literature can be described as teacher- and teaching-related factors. Regarding teaching-related factors, positive outcomes in terms of attendance rates are produced by the contents that include students in decision-making processes and clearly explain goals for learning and assessment. For instance, Fazey and Fazey (1998) suggested that inspiring learning environments are produced by valuing students and including them in decision-making processes. Similar to this, teaching students about the requirements for passing the course and the assessment criteria encourages them to attend lectures (e.g., Dolnicar 2005; Oldfield et al. 2017).

As for teacher-related factors, the studies about teachers' position in motivating university students for attendance pointed to the sense of belonging, defined as a personal emotion connected to a fundamental and pervasive motivational drive (Baumeister and Leary 1995), as an important factor (O'Keeffe 2013; Thomas 2012). For instance, Thomas (2012) discovered that although students who felt alone withdrew from their courses, those who had positive relationships with peers and staff encouraged them to continue. The development of a sense of belonging in students is strongly influenced by the caliber of their interpersonal relationships (Mellor et al. 2008). The results of the studies also showed that the qualities and style of instruction were closely related to students' motivation to attend. In their study, Clark et al. (2011) showed that when a lecturer is genuine and passionate about their subject, students view them as pleasurable social events. These educators are known as authentic educators because they help their pupils achieve more academically (Soares and Lopes 2020). The teaching methods of authentic teachers provide psychological safety through listening to various points of view and genuinely understanding each one, which boosts student attendance and academic achievement. Fjortoft (2005) asserts that attentive and helpful instructors are highly valued by university students and that the caliber of instruction—particularly that which applies to real-world situations—has an impact on student attendance. Similarly, 62% of the students were motivated by a welcoming instructor style, according to Baderin's (2005) study. A friendly attitude that allows the students to express themselves gives each student an opportunity to embody who they are and creates a psychologically safe environment in the classroom. As suggested by Soares and Lopes (2020), creating a psychologically safe environment in the classroom contributes to

students' overall motivation. Giving psychological safety allows students to promote motivation for attendance in the classroom, and this attitude indirectly helps their continuation of the self.

Autonomy-supportive behaviour

Teachers are the main adults with a significant impact on the students' motivation to be autonomous in the classroom. The studies conducted about the teacher role on autonomous motivation concluded that autonomy-supportive teachers promote the development of autonomous motivation in students at all educational levels (Nunez and Leon 2016; Trouilloud et al. 2006). At the university level specifically, Nunez and Leon (2016) analysed the relationship between autonomy support and intrinsic motivation of 276 university students. The researchers found that student perception of autonomy-supportive behaviours from teachers had a positive effect on their learning, concluding that teachers are key elements in fostering intrinsic motivation and deep learning. Similarly, the findings in Patrick, Hisley, and Kempler's (2000) study indicated that the students had greater intrinsic motivation when they received an enthusiastically delivered lecture. With first-year students, Girelli et al. (2018) found that teachers with autonomy-supportive behaviours are one of the sources to increase motivation and self-efficacy of the students, which can be further associated with better academic performance (Siacor, Ng, and Liu 2024). Ratelle et al. (2007) also showed that students with high levels of autonomous motivation were more persistent than the ones with lower levels of autonomous motivation.

Research also suggests that teachers, in practice, employ teaching strategies to promote motivation, with more adopted one being the controlling motivational strategies, such as rewards (Ryan and La Guardia 1999). However, as asserted by Reeve, Deci, and Ryan (2004), the use of autonomy-supportive teaching strategies (i.e., nurturing inner motivational resources, using an informative but non-controlling language, promoting value in uninteresting activities, and acknowledging students' expressions of negative affect) resulted in positive outcomes in terms of student engagement. Based on a review of research evidence, Chang et al. (2017) also made some suggestions for teachers to become autonomy-supporting through communicating expectations, acknowledging students' feelings, providing more choices, avoiding control in learning, promoting active participation, giving positive and informational feedback, and structured guidance. The strategies in these categories were suggested to maximize student motivation and subsequent development in the classroom.

Based on existing literature, motivation to attend higher education classes is influenced by teaching-related factors, (such as goal clarity and student inclusion) and teacher-related factors (including authenticity, enthusiasm, and fostering a sense of belonging). Research highlights autonomy-supportive teaching as a key driver of intrinsic motivation, promoting active participation and academic persistence, while controlling strategies, such as external rewards, are less effective in sustaining long-term motivation. Although it is well-established that teacher behaviour plays a crucial role in fostering student motivation, with autonomy-supportive strategies linked to greater emotional engagement, deeper learning, and academic success, the type of teacher behaviors that would lead an autonomy-supportive environment still remains in question, a research gap addressed by this study.

METHOD

Past studies have explored the students' attendance behaviour in relation to academic success and attainment at university, with various motivational reasons that could explain the obtained results (e.g. O'Keeffe 2013; Oldfield et al. 2017). On the one hand, student behaviours are

strongly associated with autonomous forms of intrinsic motivation that can be supported by teachers through autonomy-supportive behaviours in classrooms. In the analysis of the relationship between motivation and student attendance, teachers who were reported by students as a motivational drive for attendance may indirectly perform autonomy-supportive behaviours (e.g. Nunez and Leon 2016; Soares and Lopes 2020). However, the studies seeking an answer to what sort of autonomy-supportive behaviours are impactful for university students and especially for the attendance are very limited.

Focusing on one of the student behaviours, attendance, the present study attempted to provide deeper insights into the relationship between motivation and teacher behaviours at the university level. It specifically aims to uncover the nature of teacher behaviours that create an autonomy-supportive teaching environment from the perspective of students. In doing so, the study contributes to the existing literature on autonomy-supportive behaviours at university level by reporting insights from the Turkish higher education context, which is an under-researched context, especially in terms of student attendance. It adopts a qualitative research design to be able to provide in-depth insights and understanding of teacher behaviour as the qualitative data allows for a detailed, context-rich data collection and analysis. The research question leading the study is "what is the nature of autonomy-supportive teacher behaviours that promote attendance as perceived by first-year students?"

Research context and participants

In Turkey, the first step in the higher education path is to pass a difficult national exam in order to enrol in a university. Students have the option to enrol in four-year undergraduate programs at faculties of public and private universities or two-year programs at vocational high schools, depending on their test results (except for some particular fields like medicine or physics education). Undergraduate programs include various disciplines ranging from language teaching to mechanical engineering, depending on the scope of the faculty (e.g. Faculty of Science and Letters, Faculty of Education, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities). The study was conducted in the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities of a private university in Istanbul, Turkey, where one of the researchers was teaching for the last three academic years. The undergraduate programs offered at the faculty were mathematics, psychology, political science and international relations, sociology, and statistics.

The participants for the study were chosen through convenience sampling and the students' attendance behaviour was investigated in the course titled "academic success and life skills" since it was among the most crowded mass courses available for first-year students at the faculty. The fourteen-week Academic Success and Life Skills course is intended to equip students with the foundational knowledge and abilities they will need during their four years of university study. The syllabus covers fundamental topics, such as the transition from secondary to university education, communication within the university, effective presentation skills, how to handle stress, critical and analytical thinking, time management, self-knowledge, and goal setting. The course readings consist of one primary source on life skills for young adults and three supplemental materials on what makes some people successful and what can be done to improve academic quality. Although the course is taught in person, the materials are also provided on a learning management system used in the institution. The evaluation processes include a midterm and a final test. Active participation is encouraged and graded. Active participation is operationalized as contributing freely, including questions, responses, and comments. Presentations about readings recommended in the course syllabus are also not required but are rewarded with bonus points. One receives 10 bonus points for participating actively throughout the entire term by asking, responding, and commenting. In addition,

students can gain an additional 10 points if they support their active participation with a presentation. The course is offered to all first-year students enrolled in five undergraduate programs of the faculty. In the 2022–2023 academic year, 158 first-year students aged between 18 and 25 enrolled for the course. In this follow-up study, the participant pool consisted of 101 students who stated "teacher" as the most important motivational drive to attend the course in the study conducted previously (Gülbak and Gülbak 2023). The students from the department of mathematics composed 28% of the participants, 13% of the students were in the department of political science and international students, 27% of the students were studying at the department of psychology, 14% of the students were from the department of sociology, and 18% of the students were in the department of statistics.

Data collection and analysis

The present exploratory research used a qualitative approach in collecting data in line with the research question addressed. This qualitative approach offered a deeper and wider grasp of the students' perceptions. The data were collected through individual semi-structured interviews to understand participants' perspectives by establishing a greater rapport with them via conversation (Patton 2002).

All students in the participant group were fully informed about the research aim and procedures by the second author. At the end of the fall semester in the 2022–2023 academic year, individual interviews with the students were conducted after they had provided written informed consent. Students earned five extra points on their final test for taking part in the interviews. Data collection was finished in one week after the study received ethical approval from the university ethics committee.

During the interviews, students were asked questions about what teacher behaviours influence their attendance and how those behaviours made them attend. The duration of each semi-structured interview was roughly 25 minutes. To lessen the chance of a language barrier, the interviews were conducted in Turkish, the participants' native tongue. With the participants' consent, the interviews were audio recorded, and the researchers transcribed the interviews verbatim. To protect their identities, participants were assigned a pseudonym during the transcription process.

The transcripts of 101 interviews in total were analysed using content analysis using three stages of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Miles, Huberman, and Saldana 2013). First, each researcher studied the transcriptions to eliminate irrelevant information and classify the participants' comments into meaningful conceptual motivation-related categories. The categories were mainly drawn from Chang et al.'s (2017) review of autonomy supportive teaching practices. Next, two different tables were created to represent the data. Any possible connection between the categories was examined by the researchers. Lastly, each researcher re-examined the themes to ensure that they truly reflected the nature of its supporting data to be able to draw conclusions. Reliability was ensured through intra- and inter-rater reliability, a crucial factor in determining whether an investigation can be trusted (Merriam and Tisdell 2015). The repetition of the identical analysis technique by each researcher in the coding of the data with three-week intervals ensured the intra-rater reliability. After making small adjustments, findings were reached by comparing the themes and sub-themes to remove any disparities.

The two researchers met to compare their classifications for inter-rater reliability. The agreement rate among the raters for the classified instances was over 90%. Then, each rater carefully considered the connections between various themes and organized those with a similar nature into key groups (Table 1). Cohen's Kappa statistics was performed as interrater reliability analysis to

determine consistency among the raters. The analysis showed that interrater agreement was substantial, with Kappa=0.83 (p<.001).

Table 1. Emerging main themes and sub-themes

Themes	Sub-themes
Structured guidance	-Informative -Examples
Promoting active participation	-Thought-provoking -Interactive
Acknowledging students' feelings	-Sincerity -Valuing ideas
Teaching performance	-Lively -Humour -Tone of voice

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The present study aimed at understanding autonomy-supportive teacher behaviour at the university level, with a primary aim to provide deeper insights into the relationship between motivation and attendance at university level. It focuses on the student reported nature of teacher behaviours that motivate them to attend class. In line with the study purposes, the interview data were mainly categorized based on Chang et al.'s (2017) autonomy-supportive teaching strategies: Communicating expectations, acknowledging students' feelings, providing more choices, avoiding control in learning, promoting active participation, giving positive and informational feedback, and structured guidance. The data obtained from first-year students revealed three of those main categories influenced student behaviour; structured guidance, promoting active participation, and acknowledging students' feelings. The students' responses also revealed teaching performance as the fourth category. Each category is explained in the following sections along with subthemes and sample student quotes, identified by pseudonyms OR with student names, which students consented to for publication.

Structured guidance

Structured guidance is described as explicit, understandable instructional behaviours and constructive feedback (Jang et al. 2010, cited in Chang et al. 2017). During the interviews, it was observed that 30 of the students in total (30%) referred to the teacher's informative style while teaching and also underlined that the frequent use of examples was an important motivational drive for them.

Considering the first-year of the students at university, it is expected that the exposure to a new teaching environment might influence their perception of the teacher and teaching and be compared to previous high school learning environments. However, as students also had the opportunity to make comparisons among different classes offered in the same semester, their ideas deserved careful attention. For example, among the students who mentioned that teacher's informative way of teaching was an important driver to keep attending class, Selin, an interviewed

student, stated that the class ". . . was informative and thus entertaining for us. I can say that it is the lesson I enjoyed most compared to the other classes we attend throughout the week."

Similarly, another student interviewed, Gonca, mentioned that she easily got distracted in the other courses when she found the information given irrelevant, but she did not experience such a distraction in this class. The students' comments revealed that informativeness influenced attendance in lecture, providing support for the effect of using an informative language as an autonomy-supportive strategy on student engagement (e.g. Reeve, Deci, and Ryan 2004). It is important to note that the educational system in Turkey is comparatively hierarchical, with a strong emphasis on the authority and knowledge of teachers. The informative teaching approach may resonate with students on a cultural level because they have been socialized to anticipate precise direction and organization from their teachers. Since first-year students often come from high schools where teacher-directed learning is the norm, the emphasis on informative teaching fits with students' expectations of their instructors.

In relation to structured guidance, the students further elaborated on how they found the course informative. Their responses showed that use of examples helped them understand better, which increased their attendance motivation. For example, Furkan stated, "The teacher has a remarkable style of expression. The fact that he constantly uses examples from daily life while teaching increases my willingness to attend and listen." Another student, Mesut, mentioned the use of examples by teacher as follows:

> I sometimes had hard times to understand the topic and the new terms mentioned. When I saw an example about my student life, our university or . . . something that I could observe around, I could easily make connections and the topic becomes clear to me.

The comment indicates that incorporating examples into lectures has an impact on motivation for student attendance behaviour. This finding might be specific to the content for this course. The course is designed to raise students' awareness about university education and student engagement. Thus, they were able to make easy connections between the new knowledge and newly gained experiences in university context. However, the role of examples should not be ruled out for other courses since attendance is affected by the quality of the instruction, particularly when it applies to real-world situations (Fjortoft 2005). It seems that incorporating a variety of examples in course content may foster the intrinsic motivation and deep learning for university-level students (Nunez and Leon 2016). It may also be an important supplementary strategy that complements informative teaching language employed by teachers, ensuring attendance. However, it is possible that Turkish students are more familiar with organized, example-driven instruction since it gives them definite frameworks for comprehending new material. Often, utilizing examples can help to connect abstract knowledge to real-world application, which is important in a culture of learning that values instructors who communicate clearly and directly with students.

Promoting active participation
The instructional behaviours promoting active participation, and thus associated with autonomy-supporting teaching, were exemplified as offering challenging and problem-solving tasks (Chang et al. 2017). During the interviews, 25 students in total (25%) referred to the teacher's interactive style while teaching and also underlined that the use of thought-provoking questions was an important motivational drive.

The student responses emphasized interaction as a common trend, and it was determined that the students greatly preferred interaction. One of the students, Arda, stated that when the teacher "keeps asking questions in a continuous interaction with the students," encouraging them to participate. Another student, Buğlem, mentioned that the questions used during the class grabbed her attention when she got distracted. These comments illustrated that using questions is a way to encourage listening and therefore to promote interactivity. Including questions and asking for opinions may serve as an identified regulation tool and give students a reason to attend (Ryan and Deci 2020). Course delivery including such practices have also potential to contribute to university learners' well-being and life satisfaction (Thomas, Müller, and Bieg 2018). Eda also mentioned this in her interview:

> I pay attention to passive teachers only for the first 5–10 minutes of the course. Eventually, I become tired of listening and stop, but I continue to listen to the teacher who moves the course forward in an engaging manner even when it is lengthy. Questions make me awake.

The questions used during the course to promote active participation were identified by the students as thought-provoking. Yağmur underlined the impact of thought-provoking questions as: "He encourages us to think. The questions I believe stimulate us and give some clues to question our lives." Barkin also stated that the questions made him "think about the things the students never thought about." Provoking thinking seemed to increase the students' intrinsic motivation as it provides satisfaction derived from curiosity (Ryan and Deci 2020), as well as the autonomy in students' motivation resulting in a positive impact on favourable attendance rate (Guay et al. 2016; Otis, Grouzet, and Pelletier 2005). The effect of thought-provoking questions on attendance rate was specifically referred to by Berk who stated that "I get excited every week about what kind of a conversation we will have in the class because there are interesting questions and answers every week. I enjoy this a lot." The emotional experience reported provides support for the earlier findings suggesting that autonomous motivation is associated with a more positive emotional experience and lower levels of course dropout (e.g., Vansteenkiste et al. 2005). For the university students, promoting active participation through interactive practices and thought-provoking questions are important components of an autonomy-supportive environment (Deci et al. 1991; Reeve, Deci, and Ryan 2004). While critical thinking and student engagement have been prioritized by recent reforms and global influences, traditional Turkish education has generally placed a greater emphasis on teachers. The students' appreciation of challenging questions may be a reflection of their increased desire for intellectual challenge and autonomy. Additionally, in a collectivist culture that places a strong emphasis on problem-solving, cooperation, and group cohesiveness, thought-provoking topics may align with students' inclination towards collaborative learning and social interaction in the classroom.

Acknowledging students' feelings

Regarding the acknowledgement of students' feelings, Chang et al. (2017) emphasize good communication that provides emotional support, identifies students' needs, and acknowledges their feelings may support autonomous motivation. During the interviews, forty students referred to the teacher's sincerity and also underlined that their ideas were valued when they expressed themselves.

The students in the study commented that they were motivated to attend the class especially because the teacher valued every idea put forth and encouraged students to share their thoughts

freely. The room for self-expression was highly appreciated by the students, as can be understood in Arven's comments:

> I was terrified of going to school up until I started university because all I experienced in high school and secondary school was my teachers' demands and reprimands. Here I learned that I can express myself, all of my prejudices have been destroyed.

Valuing ideas and their effect on attendance motivation was also mentioned by Serra, who said that "I like going to the class because it encourages us to be more open-minded." The comments showed that the opportunities for self-expression made the students feel special as mentioned by Erva: "Students' thoughts are elicited, and their ideas are evaluated, creating a relationship of mutual respect." Consequently, respect for one another and their opinions leads to stronger commitment from first-year students to both their classes and overall education. Based on the student comments, listening to other points of view provides psychological safety (e.g. Soares and Lopes 2020), pointing the teacher's role in inspiring students to attend the lectures offer proof of the strategies for fostering a sense of belonging. These findings are consistent with earlier research showing how crucial belonging is for attendance. (e.g., Mellor et al. 2008; O'Keeffe 2013; Oldfield et al. 2017; Thomas 2012).

The sense of belonging provided through valuing ideas was also evident in student comments that mentioned the teachers' sincere approach. The comments centred around sincerity indicated that attitude played a key motivational factor for the first-year students. For example, Ayhan stated that "I was unintentionally drawn to the class by the teacher's sincerity." Selda also mentioned that "I value the teacher style since it fosters our sense of confidence. His sincerity reflects on the students because students do not hesitate to respond more readily." Similar sentiment was supported by another student, Mesut, who said "We sometimes feel scared to participate in some class due to a kind of threatening manner, which we do not experience in this class. I do not hesitate to attend and approach the teacher." The responses showed that first-year students were inspired to attend class when the teacher had a welcoming approach (Baderin 2005). Sincerity was found to be another component of an autonomy-supportive environment created by teacher behaviour caring for students' needs and interests (Reeve, Deci, and Ryan 2004). In study context, much value is placed on emotional expressiveness, and thus, in addition to promoting autonomy, sincere teachers who acknowledge their students' emotional states also create a culturally relevant setting in which students feel heard and encouraged, both of which are essential for engagement and motivation.

Teaching performance

While not found in Chang et al.'s (2017) categorizations, the data showed that the students paid attention to the teacher's instructional performance and stated that it had a positive impact on their attendance behaviour. It was the most popular reference, compared to other autonomy-supportive strategies, and half of the students' answers centred around lively teaching, use of humour, and the change in tone of voice. All three themes were cited by the students in different combinations during the interviews, defining how teaching was experienced by students. Choosing lively as an adjective, Buse stated that "Our teacher's lively lectures affected my participation. He prefers a more colourful and dynamic expression." In a similar vein, Fatih also expressed his learning experiences as he was exposed to ". . . brainstorming. First, the listing of the concepts related to the subject and then the explanation of these concepts in a dynamic way rather than monotonous." The finding echoes the findings in Patrick, Hisley, and Kempler' s (2000) study which showed that the students had greater intrinsic motivation when they received an enthusiastically delivered lecture.

Similarly, it evidently supports Clark et al.'s (2011) suggestion that lectures are perceived as enjoyable social occasions when the teacher is enthusiastic about knowledge and the subject.

The feedback from the students indicated that the teacher's use of humour was another key component in making the class entertaining. Mehmet explained it as: "The teacher explains things humorously. This increases interest because he can attract even the attention of the disengaged student." Burak similarly stated that listening to a lecture that was not monotonous was the main motivation to attend the lecture: "The major reason I went to the lecture was to listen to a lecture that was not boring but fun. I would take this course again if I could."

Use of humour was found to be accompanied by the tone of voice from the perspective of students. It was observed during the interviews that changing the tone of voice is effective to grasp the students' attention. Like Sila, many students pointed out the lecturer's careful use of ". . . stress and tone keep the students alert." From time to time, the first-year students may lack concentration, a possible reason why it's important for teachers to change their tone of voice in order to raise awareness and concentration. As indicated by Soares and Lopes (2020), authentic teachers with lively and humorous traits succeed in raising interest. Nunez and Leon (2016), who analysed the relationship between autonomy support and intrinsic motivation of university students, also stated that student perception of autonomy support from teachers had a positive effect on their learning. Other possible results are better academic performance, increased motivation level, and student self-efficacy (Girelli et al. 2018; Siacor, Ng, and Liu 2024). Although there is no objective evaluation of academic success in this study, it is feasible to infer that the teaching performance had an effect on achievement, at least from the viewpoint of the students.

The teaching performance defined by the students as lively and humorous, with a changing tone of voice, was found to be the most important indicator of attendance rate for university-level students. When the digital learning experiences of current university students, especially the time spent watching videos of any kind, are taken into consideration, the result is expected since tone of voice and lively performance keep students' interest for longer. Especially considering the role of humour and storytelling in Turkish culture, teachers who incorporate humour and changes in tone create a more engaging and culturally resonant learning environment.

Such factors also merit attention in face-to-face classrooms, since they increase student motivation to attend lectures and are thus a crucial element for an autonomy-supportive teaching environment. Therefore, it could be inferred that teaching performance has a larger share for first-year students than the other autonomous strategies categorized as structured guidance, promoting active participation, and acknowledging students' feelings.

CONCLUSION

This study sheds light on the teacher's position as a motivational reason behind student appearance in university lectures, with a focus on its potential to promote autonomous motivation. Given the assertion that autonomy-supportive teachers foster autonomous motivation in their students, this follow-up study examined the responses of first-year students who stated in an earlier study that the most important motivator to attend the class was the teacher. It specifically focuses on the reported teacher behaviours in order to understand what teacher behaviours motivated them to attend the lectures. The study results suggest that student attendance behaviour was influenced by teacher's structured guidance, promotion of active participation, and acknowledging students' ideas. The most important influencer and accordingly autonomy-supportive behaviour was found as teaching performance that should be included and listed among autonomous strategies. The findings of this study identify specific teacher behaviours that motivate students to attend lectures, such as

structured guidance, promotion of active participation, and acknowledgement of student ideas that teachers can use to foster a supportive learning environment that enhances autonomous motivation. Since teaching performance is so important in fostering student engagement, professional development programs that give autonomy-supportive practices priority are also necessary for university instructors. Training of this kind ought to concentrate on teaching performance, supervision, and efficient classroom management, with a focus on student involvement and active participation. Teachers can effectively manage multiple learning demands in large classes with limited resources by implementing methods such as tailored instruction and peer-assisted learning. By offering such training that demonstrates how to use them in the classroom, universities can raise student attendance and academic achievement. Universities should reevaluate strict attendance regulations in favour of strategies that increase students' intrinsic motivation. For example, implementing flexible attendance policies linked to engagement in the classroom and active participation could motivate students to attend for purposes other than merely meeting requirements. Learning management systems and other interactive platforms can be encourage student participation outside of the classroom by providing discussion boards, tests, and feedback loops that encourage proactive participation and self-control.

Curriculum reform can promote autonomy-supportive learning outside of individual classrooms, especially if that reform includes adding more student-centered learning activities. This includes providing students with the opportunity to investigate topics of interest, make decisions, and reflect on their learning through project-based or problem-based learning approaches. Courses for first-year students and orientation sessions must be designed with autonomy-supportive components in mind. Students may acquire goal-setting, self-regulation, and active learning practices from these programs. Retention and success rates can be raised by providing workshops that assist students in taking charge of their education, communicating their needs to instructors, and participating more actively in their education. This is especially important on larger campuses where students frequently feel alone or unsupported. For ongoing assistance, these programs might be provided to more experienced students as occasional workshops.

Although the study provided insights into the autonomy-supportive teacher behaviour at university level, it is not without limitations. First, the participant pool is restricted to a set of students enrolled in a single mass course. Mass courses provide excellent possibilities to reach a larger audience. However, the findings of this study were drawn out of one single course. Thus, future research in this area should include more different lectures to enable inviting more students to disclose. This study also recruited first-year students exclusively, and more experienced students who are more aware of the rules may behave differently towards teaching activities. Further studies may invite students from upper classes in order to understand what kind of teacher behaviours are important to increase their attendance. Future studies may also be longitudinal, following specific students to determine if effective teacher behaviours remain the same or change. The institutional context might also be enlarged since the present study was conducted in one faculty. Although interview is a data collection tool that allows for in-depth inquiry, employing quantitative data collection tools might make it easier to reach a larger sample. In addition, the study is based on students' comments. On-site observation of teaching practices with a structured observation form is needed to draw conclusions about the relationship between teacher behaviours and autonomous motivation and to minimize the possibility that the students may have inaccurate recall or response bias because they may have overrated the influence of teachers they admire. In addition, non-autonomous factors, such as learning preferences or socio-economic status, were not explored in this study but may be included in further studies for broader conclusions.

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ETHICS

Research was approved through the Istanbul Ticaret University ethical review process (E-65836846-044-280125 – 02/27/2022).

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