

# Students' Commitment to Attend Classes in Management Higher Education: A Comparative Study of Working Executives and Non Working Students Pursuing Full Time Post Graduate Management Programme

Anu Singh Lather

Director International Affairs, Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University  
New Delhi, India. E-mail: [anusinghlather@gmail.com](mailto:anusinghlather@gmail.com)

Puja Khatri

Associate Professor, USMS, Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University  
New Delhi, India. E-mail: [pujakhatri12@gmail.com](mailto:pujakhatri12@gmail.com)

Shilpa Jain

Assistant Professor, USMS, Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University  
New Delhi, India. E-mail: [shilpajain.usms@gmail.com](mailto:shilpajain.usms@gmail.com)

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## Abstract

The purpose of the present study is to identify the commitment of students to attend classes amongst postgraduate management students (male vs. female, working professionals vs. non working MBA students). The paper attempts to apply the concept of commitment to students in the business higher education. For this the Meyer and Allen's (1991) Three Component Model of Commitment was adapted to measure student's commitment to attend classes and finally the commitment of students was mapped who are working executives and non working students perusing full time post graduate management studies. The study was conducted on 371 MBA students out of which 171 were working professionals and 200 were non working MBA students. The male/female composition of the sample was 223/148 respectively. A commitment to attend class questionnaire was administered on the participants measuring three type of commitment i.e. Normative Commitment, Affective Commitment

and Continuance Commitment. The results of the study show that working professional MBA students significantly differs from non working MBA students on Continuance Commitment where Non working MBA students are significantly higher than working professionals. The interaction results of male/female with working/ non working students comparison shows that the Male non working MBA students are higher on Normative Commitment as compared to the Male working professionals, while the Female non working MBA students are lower than the Female working professionals on Normative Commitment.

**Research limitations/implications** – Why a student is coming to the class will determine his attention and learning in the class. If he/she is attending classes just to abide by norms (Normative Commitment), or coming to class because not attending the same will generate negative results or the student has nothing else to do (Continuance Commitment), then effective learning will not take place. The teachers can identify the type of commitment students are using and can try to convert this into Affective Commitment by new learning methods. The study is conducted in Metro city; differences may even be prominent if extended to three tier and two tier cities.

**Keywords:** Commitment to attend classes, Normative, Affective, Continuance, Working Professionals

## 1. Premise

*“You can take a horse to the water, but you can’t make it drink”—English phrase*

Non committed, disengaged individuals in every sphere of life are a pain. Management literature is bursting with the evidences of how non committed employees are a bane and impede productivity, performance, innovation and growth in the organizations. But this becomes a greater concern when students are not committed to their own learning. We feel important to share one anecdote which served as the genesis of the present study.

*“It was another regular day when one of the authors of the present study teaching Decision Science to MBA students decided to conduct a qualitative focus group analysis in a class of 60 students to check the attentiveness of students in class and whether they apply their brains to logics or not because in every class she was confirming clarity of concepts and poking students to ask questions. So to assess the students she explained a theorem and started solving problems related to it, while solving problems she deliberately missed one part of the formula to be applied in solving the same. She wanted to check that whether any student raise a concern for the same or not. Apart from two students sitting in front row in the class of 60 nobody raised the question. She completed her lecture and left the class. Next day back in class she asked students whether they have any doubts on what they learned in the last class, but to her surprise nobody raised the question. She disclosed that she deliberately missed a part of formula; even then there were no facial reactions except for few students showing the kind of reactions where they could be given the benefit of understanding that they at least might have tried their hands on these problems.”*

This discussion with the other authors prompted this study to understand whether these students are coming to classes or doing post graduation in business studies because they actually want to learn (*Do they have Affective Commitment to the course?*) or is it just out of the herd mentality of earning a higher degree or they have nothing better to do so enrolled themselves for the same (*Is it only Normative or Continuance Commitment towards the course they are doing?*).

The literature in education does not show any studies related to commitment of students to attend classes but there are numerous studies related to the engagement of students focused upon increasing achievement, positive behaviors and a sense of belongingness. Referring to the management literature number of researchers have considered commitment synonymous to engagement while more established relationship suggested is of commitment as an ingredient of engagement (Robinson et al., 2004; Aktouf, 1992; Tamkin, 2005; Ferguson, 2007; Alison, 2006; Lockwood, 2007, Vergne, 2005; Employee Engagement and Satisfaction Models, 2008).

Viewing higher education from the same lens we propose that student’s commitment to attend classes is also an integral part of student engagement with their institution (Figure 1). Talking of engagement from student’s perspective several types of engagement were noted by researchers such as academic, cognitive, intellectual, institutional, emotional, behavioral, social, and psychological to name a few (Willms, Friesen, & Milton, 2009; Willms, 2003;

Harris, 2008) and serious pay out are reported in literature of not engaging students in learning (Prensky, 2001; Tapscott, 1998; Gilbert, 2007; Willms, 2003, p. 56; Claxton, 2007).



Figure 1. Showing model of employee engagement and commitment as its one dimension

Research has evidences that higher levels of engagement in school leads to improved performance. Researchers have found student engagement a strong predictor of student achievement and behavior in school, regardless of socioeconomic status (Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Voekl, 1995; Finn, 1989, 1993; Arhar & Kromery, 1993; Mounts, 1995). Students engaged in school are more likely to earn higher grades (Goodenow, 1993; Willingham, Pollack, & Lewis, 2002) and test scores (Willingham et al., 2002; Roderick & Engle, 2001), and have lower drop-out rates (Connel et al., 1995; Croninger & Lee, 2001). In contrast, students with low levels of engagement are at risk for a variety of long-term adverse consequences, including disruptive behavior in class, absenteeism, and dropping out of school (Steinberg et al., 1996; Finn, 1989; Lee et al., 1995).

Research reports that low level of academic engagement has negative effects, one being a lack of academic achievement (Voelkl, 1997, Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004). Behavioral academic engagement is linked to overall positive student conduct – following the rules in the classroom and a lack of disruptive school behavior (Finn, 1993; Finn, Pannozzo, & Voelkl, 1995; Finn & Rock, 1997). Students who are more emotionally engaged in school shows higher academic achievement (Lee & Smith, 1995; Stipek, 2002). Students showing cognitive engagement characterized by an overall investment in learning (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004) have higher grades and test scores and are less likely to be disruptive, truant, or drop out (Klem & Connell, 2004).

Sbrocco (2009) in a study on 831 students of eighth class across the schools in America found that behavioral engagement shows the strongest relationship with all forms of academic achievement (grades, state criterion referenced tests, and a criterion referenced test used by the district). Also, there was a positive relation between emotional engagement and academic achievement and cognitive engagement and academic achievement. She further mentions that it is clear that students who are disengaged (i.e. Have nothing to be proud of in school, don't feel as if they have much control over their grades) are more likely to score lower on indicators of achievement. Disengagement and academic achievement are both significantly and negatively correlated. Students who feel disconnected from their school and teachers are also disconnected from their academic work and concluded on the basis of her research and previous researches that disengagement is a serious condition that can inhibit students from reaching their full academic potential. Student engagement has been identified as a decisive requirement for student achievement and diligence in many studies (Appleton, Christenson, & Furlong 2008; Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004; Libbey, 2004).

We strongly promote the ideas of Gilbert (2007) when she purports that present day students live in a world that engages them differently than what their parents experienced. Things have changed at a very fast pace in last twenty years with a more technology rich society and undeniable change in upbringing the engagement patterns of students have also changed drastically. Parsons and Taylor (2011) opined that students have changed over the last twenty years; perhaps as a result of a technology rich upbringing, they appear to have “different” needs, goals, and learning preferences than students in the past and suggest that we must better understand these youth to determine how to best engage them in learning. Carlson (2005) quotes Prof. Baron as “Administrators push professors to use technology in the classroom because they believe that is what today students want is, says Ms. Baron. And faculty members feel pressured to shorten lectures, increase group-discussion time, and ignore the “multitasking” student who is e-mailing his friends in the back of the room - all to attract and satisfy a generation that doesn't have the discipline of its predecessors. ‘We think that the students will come if we teach in a way that meets the expectations we have of what the students want. At some point, what we are doing is killing higher education (Carlson, 2005, p. 2).’ A great issue might be that students leave school incapable of or unprepared for a productive and healthy life in the “Knowledge Society” in which they will live and lead (Gilbert, 2007). The negative consequences of this deficit of engagement in learning would ripple across industry and society for generations (Willms, 2003; Robinson, 2009; Tapscott, 1998; Prensky, 2005, Gilbert, 2007).

One of the prime ingredients of this deficit of engagement is lack of affective commitment of students towards their own learning. If it is so, then we are producing students who are not capable and employable. This would ripple down into a society with more superficial knowledge and shallow wisdom. As teachers it is our responsibility to place a check on this and take corrective measures to prepare the appropriate future of the nation by generating affective commitment in students towards their own learning.

With this premise we prepared a questionnaire to measure the commitment of students to attend classes on three types of commitment (Adapted from Mayer and Allen, 1991)

- a) Normative Commitment- Attending classes to comply with the rules
- b) Affective Commitment- Attending classes to learn and make the most out of it.
- c) Continuance Commitment- Attending classes to avoid negative outcomes and because there is nothing better to do.

This questionnaire was then used in the present study to understand the type of commitment students' use in attending classes and what implications does it lead to.

### *1.1 Objective*

The main objective of this study was to understand the type of commitment used by working professionals doing MBA and non working MBA students in attending classes.

## **2. Research Methodology**

The study undertaken was an endeavor to identify commitment of students to attend classes amongst post graduate management students (male vs. female, working professionals vs. non working MBA students). For this study the Meyer and Allen's (1991) Three Component Model of Commitment was adapted to measure student's commitment to attend classes (three type of commitment i.e. Normative Commitment, Affective Commitment and Continuance Commitment) and finally the commitment of students was mapped who are working executives and non working students perusing full time post graduate management studies . To check the validity of the questionnaire it was subjected to review by experts. Reliability of the same was computed to be Cronbach Alpha 0.76.

### *2.1 Sample*

Our universe comprises higher education institutions in and around Delhi NCR. The technique of multi stage sampling has been adopted where in at the first stage the sampling was purposive wherein MBA institutes running management courses for both working and nonworking MBA students in and around Delhi NCR were considered for the study. The working MBA graduates may be defined for the scope of the study, as candidates pursuing their higher education in management while in job .The study was conducted on 371 MBA students out of which 171 were working professionals and 200 were non working MBA students. The male/female composition of the sample was 223/148 respectively. In the light of the above discussion, and literature review the following hypotheses have been formulated.

### *2.2 Hypotheses*

H<sub>01</sub>. There is no significant difference in levels of commitment in attending classes of working and nonworking MBAs

H<sub>02</sub>. There is no significant difference in levels of commitment in attending classes of male and female respondents

H<sub>03</sub>. There is no significant difference in levels of commitment in attending classes of working male and female respondents

H<sub>04</sub>. There is no significant difference in levels of commitment in attending classes of nonworking male and female respondents

### 3. Data Analysis and Interpretation

The data was subjected to multiple analysis of variance wherein the three types of commitment were taken as the dependent variable. The main effects were studied in terms of the employment status (A) and gender (B). Interactive effect (AXB) on the dependent variable i.e. the effect of employment\_status X gender on the level of commitment in attending classes was also computed (Table 1). Wilks' lambda test statistic was used in multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) to test whether there are differences between the means of identified groups of subjects (A ( employment status ) and B (gender)) on a combination of dependent variables of three types of commitment students have in terms of attending classes. Wilks' lambda performs, in the multivariate setting, with a combination of dependent variables, the same role as the F-test performs in one-way analysis of variance. Wilks' lambda helped to record the direct measure of the proportion of variance in the combination of dependent variables that is unaccounted for by the independent variable (the grouping variable or factor). The MANOVA (Table 2) depicts that there exists a significant impact of employment status on variance contributed to three types of commitment students have in terms of attending classes (Wilks' Lambda =.959, F= 5.248, p<.01 ).Also there exists no impact of gender on preference of different teacher leadership styles. However significant impact was visible in case of interactive effect of employment status X gender, on the level of commitment in attending classes (Wilks' Lambda =.980, F= 5.517, p<.05).

Table 1. Reference table for analysis of variance

Employment Status (A)	Working MBA students and NON working MBA students
Gender(B)	Male and Female

Table 2. Summary of multivariate tests for the dimensions of commitment according to the gender and employment status of students

Effect		Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.
Intercept	Wilks' Lambda	.032	3.694E3	3	365	.000
<b>Emp status</b>	<b>Wilks' Lambda</b>	<b>.959</b>	<b>5.248</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>365</b>	<b>.001</b>
Gender	Wilks' Lambda	.996	.491	3	365	.688
<b>Emp status * gender</b>	<b>Wilks' Lambda</b>	<b>.980</b>	<b>2.517</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>365</b>	<b>.058</b>



The main effects of employment status (A) of respondents on perception of students in terms of level of normative commitment in attending classes were found to be non significant. The F ratio was non significant for employment status and hence it can be said that there was no difference between working MBA students and NON working MBA students in terms of their normative commitment in attending classes. In other words both working and nonworking students did not differ in terms of their perception of attending classes in their institution to discharge a sense of obligation towards the institution. They attended classes as it was the right thing to do or in other words perceived it to be an acceptable norm. The mean scores reported were average for both working ( $m=3.14$ ) and non working ( $m=3.14$ ) students thereby reflecting that students perceive attending classes more to be a rule which has to be followed in light of their admission to a particular course. There exists no difference even in terms of male and female students regarding their perception of attending classes because they think it to be a rule or norm. The mean score is average for both male ( $m=3.198$ ) and female ( $m=3.093$ ) students. Hence hypothesis  $H_{01}$  and  $H_{02}$  are both accepted for perception of students for attending classes because of normative commitment. Interestingly the interactive effect (AXB) was also found to be significant in case of perception of students in terms of attending classes due to normative commitment (Table 3). The F ratio is significant ( $F=6.66$ ,  $p<.05$ ) which highlights that there exists a significant difference in terms of working male and nonworking male students in terms of their perception for attending classes owing to normative commitment. The mean scores reflect that the non working male students are more governed by the idea of attending classes to fulfill the norms or comply by rules ( $m=3.318$ ) whereas the working males are more practical in their approach and due to corporate and job pressure have a take it easy attitude in terms of attending classes just because it is supposed to be the right thing to do. Moreover they sometimes need to trade off job requirements and class attendance. ( $m=3.077$ ) Table 6. There also exists a significant difference between female students who are working and non working female students in terms of their perception of normative commitment as a reason for attending classes. Surprisingly means for working women students attending classes due to norms or normative commitment are recorded higher ( $m=3.220$ ) than mean perception of nonworking female students ( $m=2.966$ ). This may be attributed to the fact that nonworking females are still in the immature stage and looking forward to college life and so attending classes due to the righteousness attitude does not lure them enough. However for the working female students the acceptance of the fact that they have to balance work with job and higher education brings lot of impetus to doing things as they are required to be done in terms of norms. They believe that they need to be attending classes out of moral and ethical obligation of mere admission to the institute. Hence for them fulfillment of requirements of degree completion is pertinent and hence the impetus on attending classes so as to abide by the prescribed norm. Hence the Hypotheses  $H_{03}$  and  $H_{04}$  stand rejected for normative commitment.



Table 3. Summary of analysis of variance for three types of commitment according to the gender of the students and employment status of students

Source	Dependent Variable	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Emp status	Normative commitment	.004	1	.004	.005	.946
	Affective commitment	1.512	1	1.512	2.881	.090
	<b>Continuance commitment</b>	<b>4.471</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4.471</b>	<b>6.302</b>	<b>.012</b>
gender	Normative commitment	.948	1	.948	1.189	.276
	Affective commitment	.069	1	.069	.132	.717
	Continuance commitment	.873	1	.873	1.231	.268
gender * empstatus	<b>Normative commitment</b>	<b>5.312</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>5.312</b>	<b>6.666</b>	<b>.010</b>
	Affective commitment	1.214	1	1.214	2.314	.129
	Continuance commitment	1.711	1	1.711	2.412	.121

The main effects of employment status (A) of respondents on perception of students in terms of level of affective commitment in attending classes were found to be non significant. The F ratio was non significant for employment status and hence it can be said that there was no difference between working MBA students and non working MBA students in terms of their perception of affective commitment in attending classes. In other words in case of both working and nonworking students there existed no difference in terms of their perception of attending classes in their institution attributed to the love for the institution. Both working and non working students could equally identify with the organizational values. Though the means recorded were average for both working students ( $m=3.523$ ) and non working students ( $m=3.391$ ). No difference existed in terms of perceptions of male and female students for attending classes because they genuinely wanted to be there. The F ratio was non significant for gender and hence it can be highlighted that both male and female respondents shared similar views regarding their love for the institution to be a reason for their attending classes. Average mean scores were recorded for both male ( $m=3.471$ ) and female ( $m=3.443$ ) respondents regarding affective commitment as a reason for attendance. Hence hypothesis  $H_{01}$  and  $H_{02}$  both are accepted for perception of students for attending classes because of affective commitment. Interestingly the interactive effect (AXB) was also found to be non significant in case of perception of students in terms of attending classes due to affective commitment (Table 3). Hence the hypotheses  $H_{03}$  and  $H_{04}$  stand accepted for affective commitment as a reason for attendance in institutions. Within the group of working and nonworking students, the perception for alignment of self with institution and desire to be at the place of learning was similar though the means recorded were average.

Table 4. Summary of mean scores of employment status (working and non working students) for perception of levels of commitment

Dependent variable	Working executive doing MBA	NON working MBA student
Normative commitment	3.149	3.142
Affective commitment	3.523	3.391
Continuance commitment	3.315	3.542

Table 5. Summary of mean scores of gender for perception of level of commitment

Dependent variable	Males	Females
Normative commitment	3.198	3.093
Affective commitment	3.471	3.443
Continuance commitment	3.478	3.378

The main effects of employment status (A) of respondents on perception of students in terms of level of continuance commitment in attending classes were found to be significant. The F ratio was significant for employment status ( $F=6.302$ ,  $p<.05$ ) and hence it can be said that there existed a significant difference between working MBA students and non working MBA students in terms of their perception of continuance commitment as a reason for attending classes. In other words, in case of nonworking students the perception of attending classes in the institution was guided by the analysis and understanding that there was nothing better to do and hence they attended classes ( $m=3.542$ ). This can be attributed to the fact that in most of the developing countries including India, management education appears to be a buzz word and hence students flock to take admissions. The indecisive non working student tends to follow a herd mentality and takes admission to the course as there is nothing else to do. Attendance is also due to the fact that the students feel inclined to come to college for social obligations, friends etc. The more professionally attuned working student tends to join the course for accentuating the required management skill set as desired by the dynamic corporate environment. They however take this course as a planned and thought over decision and thus their perception of attending classes is not governed by the premise that there was nothing else to do. Hence their mean scores recorded are lower than the non working students ( $m=3.315$ ) No difference existed in terms of perceptions of male and female students for attending classes because they had nothing better to do. The F ratio was non significant for gender and hence it can be highlighted that both male and female respondents shared similar views regarding their perception for continuance commitment as a reason for attending the classes. Average mean scores were recorded for both male ( $m=3.4$ ) and female ( $m=3.3$ ) respondents regarding continuance commitment as a reason for attendance. Hence hypothesis  $H_{01}$  is rejected for continuance commitment hypothesis  $H_{02}$  is accepted for continuance commitment as there exists no difference perception of male and female students for

attending classes because of this type of commitment. The interactive effect (AXB) was also found to be non significant in case of perception of students in terms of attending classes due to continuance commitment (Table 3). Hence the hypotheses H<sub>03</sub> and H<sub>04</sub> stand accepted for continuance commitment as a reason for attendance in institutions. Within the group of working and nonworking students, male and female students perceptions are recorded to be similar.

Table 6. Summary of mean scores of interactive effect (AXB) of employment status X gender on three types of commitment

Dependent Variable		Working executive doing MBA	NON working MBA student
Normative commitment	Male	3.077	3.318
	Female	3.220	2.966
Affective commitment	Male	3.478	3.464
	Female	3.568	3.317
Continuance commitment	Male	3.295	3.662
	Female	3.335	3.421

#### 4. Conclusions and Implications

Declining student attendance is an illness that has been spreading for years nationwide. Research indicates a strong link between attendance and student achievement. Institutions of higher learning are concerned about the dropping rate of students. Universities exist to provide education and to produce knowledge. On many campuses, however, education and research are a byproduct. The students who are fresh graduates are unable to take correct decisions of courses that they would like to pursue. As a result of this most of the students who are seen on campuses wander either because they have nothing better to do or because they feel they are complying by the societal norm of pursuing higher education. Management education, particularly has become a fad and is on the priority list of every graduate passing out of college. In order to feed the growing demand the entire country has witnessed upsurge of management institutions that try and cater to not so sure and indecisive student. The situation has now actually boomeranged wherein the number of institutes offering management education has exceeded the requirement due to which many of such institutions are on the verge of closing down. Students tend to attend classes not for the love of the subject or their inclination towards it, but because they try to abide by the rules set by the society at large. The situation worsens when they tend to attribute their attendance at colleges in lieu of the argument that they had nothing better to do. However, there appears to be a silver lining to this dark cloud wherein working executives enrolling as students in

management programs are still focused and join the course for accentuation of skills and because they genuinely want to be there.

The study has implications for entrepreneurs and policy makers of higher education in general and management education in particular. The commitment of the student in terms of attending classes should be driven by the value addition one derives out the course. Entrepreneurs and top management at university levels need to inculcate innovative pedagogical tools, and align theoretical inputs with practical insights. Care should be taken to map student's perception so as to ensure and raise the levels of affective commitment rather than otherwise prevalent normative and continuance commitment. The time has come to revitalize and rejuvenate management education by applying and practicing management principles of innovation, strategic alliances and sustainable excellence in saving the ship to sink in the dirty waters of competition and ruthless treatment, thereby ensuring a favorable learning environment for beneficiaries of higher management education.

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