ARTICLE TITLE	LECTURE ABSENTEEISM IN ALGERIAN HIGHER EDUCATION: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR MULTI-LEVEL ANALYSIS IN THE POST-PANDEMIC ERA (2020–2024)
DOI	https://doi.org/10.31435/ijitss.3(47).2025.4381
RECEIVED	10 March 2025
ACCEPTED	02 May 2025
PUBLISHED	29 August 2025
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LECTURE ABSENTEEISM IN ALGERIAN HIGHER EDUCATION: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR MULTI-LEVEL ANALYSIS IN THE POST-PANDEMIC ERA (2020–2024)

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ABSTRACT

Chronic lecture absenteeism has emerged as a persistent challenge in Algerian higher education, particularly after the COVID-19 pandemic. This theoretical article synthesizes the scholarship to construct an integrated, multilevel framework for understanding the drivers of non-attendance. Moving beyond an individual deficit view, it posits that attendance decisions result from interactions across five nested systems: the micro-system of the student's immediate environment, the meso-system of connections between micro-level components, the exo-system of broader institutional structures, the macro-system of societal forces, and the chrono-system of temporal influences. Key factors include the uneven digitalization of learning systems, linguistic friction in instruction, assessment misalignments, and labor market signals. The analysis shows that the shift to distance learning has devalued physical presence for many students, while exposing disparities in digital access and academic literacy. Consequently, a pattern of disengagement has emerged, characterized by minimizing strategic efforts and a weakened scholarly identity. To counter these trends, this study presents multilevel intervention propositions, emphasizing the need to restore attendance value through participatory pedagogy, formative assessment, and quality assurance mechanisms. It argues for a systemic approach addressing micro-level behavioral norms, meso-level instructional designs, exo-level institutional processes, and macro-level policy frameworks. The article concludes with a call for empirical testing of these propositions to guide evidence-based reforms.

Introduction

Algeria's universities operate within the LMD (Licence-Master-Doctorat) framework and shoulder three core missions: producing scientific knowledge, training the next generation of professionals, and shaping engaged citizens. They are tasked with preparing students for a constantly evolving economy while simultaneously navigating the intense pressures of globalization in higher education (Rabah & Raouti, 2021; Schoelen, 2024).

The 2020–2024 Digitalization Context

The COVID-19 pandemic was a seismic shock to the healthcare system. Between 2020 and 2024, a slow and steady digital transformation suddenly accelerated into a frantic sprint. In March 2020, in-person instruction across the country was abruptly halted. The university gates were locked. The lecture halls fell silent. In this unprecedented crisis, institutions scrambled to shift everything online. Platforms such as Moodle, which were once supplementary tools for a few, became essential lifelines overnight.

This rapid transition has produced a complex and often contradictory reality. On the one hand, learning management systems (LMS) have spread widely, and hybrid delivery models have become common. However, this progress has highlighted deep-seated inequalities into sharp relief. A student in a major city with high-speed internet and a personal laptop experienced the shift very differently from a student in a rural area struggling to find a stable signal on a shared family smart phone. Digital skills varied enormously among students and faculty. The capacity of institutions to manage these new digital ecosystems has remained profoundly uneven throughout the period (Digitization and Higher Education in Algeria, 2023; Schoelen, 2024).

Campuses eventually reopened, but the university to which students returned was not the one they had left. The digital tools adopted during the emergency persisted. Hybrid formats now coexist with traditional lecture formats. Online course materials are often systematically available to students. This new reality has created a fundamental shift in student calculus. Why endure a long commute and sit in a crowded lecture hall when all slides are available for download? For many, the perceived value of physical attendance has plummeted. Meanwhile, the digital divide continues to shape who can fully and meaningfully participate in online components of their education.

Attendance patterns shifted. Learning habits evolved. Institutional practices were permanently altered. Through all these changes, one lesson from quality assurance debates became undeniable: to keep students engaged, teaching methods and assessment practices must align with their actual lived circumstances. Without this alignment, engagement collapses (Benhacine, 2023).

A New Way of Thinking About Absenteeism

The way researchers understand absenteeism has also undergone a significant change. The old approach blamed individual students. They were labeled as lazy, unmotivated, or irresponsible. This deficit-based framing has given way to a more sophisticated and powerful socio-contextual framework. This new perspective recognizes that attendance decisions are not simple individual choices made in vacuums. They are complex outcomes of interactions across multiple nested levels of a student's environment.

What do a student's friends think about attending class? What is the atmosphere like in a lecture hall? These micro-level factors are important. How strong are the relationships between students and professors? What is the quality of academic advising? These meso-level structures shape the choices. What are the university's official attendance policies? How well-designed is an LMS platform? How reliable is the public transport to the campus? These exo-level arrangements create the practical conditions for attendance. What is the state of the national economy? What are the official language policies regarding instruction? These macro-level forces exert powerful and often invisible pressures. Finally, major historical events, such as the pandemic, disrupt the entire system, creating chronosystem effects that compound all other factors (Renn & Smith, 2023; David, 2024).

Language policy should also be considered. It functions as a macro-level structure with real classroom consequences. Depending on the language of instruction, some students face a much higher cognitive cost to learn, making attendance feel overwhelming (Djebbari, 2020). Alternatively, quality assurance routines can be implemented. These function as exo-level leverages. A strong QA system that ensures teaching is engaging and assessment is fair directly shapes how much value students place on showing up (Benhacine, 2023).

This article is a theoretical and conceptual contribution. It does not present new empirical data. Instead, it synthesizes existing scholarship to build an integrated analytical framework. While the framework is grounded in the specific context of Algerian higher education, its primary goal is to theorize the mechanisms that drive this phenomenon. We aim to identify key determinants across ecological levels and to specify a series of testable propositions that can guide future empirical research in Algeria and beyond.

1. Problem Statement

Universities are critical sites for professional training and ethical development. Algeria's youth represent the nation's most vital human resource, and their development is a national priority. However, the country's higher education system faces a persistent and worsening obstacle: chronic lecture absenteeism. This long-standing issue intensified dramatically after the COVID-19 pandemic.

While the emergency measures of distance learning were necessary for pedagogical continuity, they created a deep rupture in the relationship between students and the physical campus. The effects of this disconnection remain profoundly visible today. A new set of student norms has been established. Many students now exhibit passive dependency on pre-packaged lecture notes, whether digital or printed. Their

primary expectation is that instructors will delimit the exact content that will appear on the final exam. In this new environment, chronic absence is no longer the exception; for many, it has become the default behavior.

Official sanctions for non-attendance are rare and inconsistently enforced. Students can typically miss the vast majority of their tutorials and practical sessions and still be permitted to sit for the final exam. As a result, tutorials, which should be interactive and collaborative, often devolve into smaller optional lectures. The only exceptions occur when individual instructors deploy their own strategies, such as surprise oral quizzes or mandatory presentations, to make attendance functionally necessary.

This normalization of absenteeism incurs severe costs. At the individual level, students miss out on the rich formative experiences that define a quality university education. They fail to acquire the complex knowledge, practical skills, and professional dispositions required in their future careers. The crucial opportunities for dialogue and mentorship with faculty members vanish. At the societal level, chronic absenteeism directly impedes human capital formation, weakens the workforce, and slows national progress across all sectors.

To find meaningful solutions, we must look beyond the choices made by individual students. Universities are institutions embedded within society, reflecting broader social conditions. Students are social actors shaped by the cultural and economic currents around them. To effectively intervene, we must first understand both the immediate triggers and deep structural drivers that have allowed absenteeism to become a pervasive norm.

2. Research Questions and Objectives

This conceptual article addresses four key research questions through a synthesis of the existing literature.

1. What are the primary factors driving lecture absenteeism in Algerian higher education, and how do these factors interact across the individual, instructional, and institutional levels?

2. Which student-related factors are theorized in the literature to predict patterns of non-attendance?

3. Which instructor-related factors are consistently associated with absenteeism?

4. Which curriculum- and scheduling-related factors influence attendance decisions?

To answer these questions, we pursued three core objectives. First, we aimed to map these determinants within an integrated ecological framework. Second, we sought to conceptualize the cascading consequences of chronic non-attendance on instructional quality and program effectiveness. Third, we derive a set of evidence-based intervention propositions that align with Algeria's ongoing digitization and quality assurance reforms.

3. Significance of the Study

Understanding the complex roots of absenteeism is essential for designing effective interventions that can preserve program quality and improve graduate outcomes. This conceptual article aims to contribute to this effort in three ways. First, by framing absenteeism as a systemic issue rather than an individual failing, it aligns with contemporary student-centered pedagogical frameworks. Second, by grounding its analysis in the documented realities of Algerian classrooms, it provides a contextually relevant synthesis of the causal mechanisms. Third, it offers actionable conceptual guidance for faculty, academic advisors, and institutional policymakers seeking to design targeted remedial strategies.

4. Theoretical Framework
4.1. Conceptualizing Absenteeism

For this framework, we offer an operational definition of absenteeism grounded in the Algerian LMD context: missing 20% or more of the scheduled contact sessions (lectures, tutorials, and practicals) per module. In the complex post-pandemic landscape, this definition must distinguish between physical non-attendance and online disengagement. A student is considered"present" if they either attend a session in person or demonstrate active, synchronous participation in an online session via the LMS. A passive connection without documented interaction constitutes functional absence. This dual-modality definition explicitly acknowledges the reality of the digital divide. For policy utility, any attendance measurement should be embedded within internal QA cycles and supported by disaggregated, program-level analytics (Benhacine, 2023; Kearney & Childs, 2023).

4.2. The Multi-Level Determinants Framework

This article adopts an ecological, multi-level framework to move beyond an individual-deficit view of absenteeism. This model posits that attendance decisions are not isolated choices but the product of complex interactions across five nested and interconnected systems:

1. Microsystem: This is the student's immediate environment. It includes peer norms regarding attendance, the social and intellectual climate of the classroom, and constraints originating from the family context.

2. Meso-system: This level involves connections between the different parts of the micro-system. It includes the quality of student-faculty relationships, the effectiveness of academic advising networks, and the design of the course timetable.

3. Exo-system: This layer consists of broader social structures that indirectly affect students. It includes institutional policies on attendance and assessment, the governance and functionality of the university's LMS, and the state of public transport infrastructure.

4. The Macro-system: This is the outermost layer, encompassing broad societal and cultural forces. These include national economic pressures, official language-of-instruction policies, and the signals sent by the labor market about the value of different degrees.

5. Chrono-system: This dimension cuts across all other levels and represents the influence of time and historical events. The disruptions of the pandemic and the subsequent adjustments in the post-pandemic era are prime examples of chronosystem effects (Renn & Smith, 2023).

4.3. Sociocultural and Peer-Norm Mechanisms

From a sociocultural perspective, attendance is a learned and socially reinforced practice. The peer norms and local culture of a campus profoundly shape it. When non-attendance becomes normalized within a student cohort, powerful imitation mechanisms can exacerbate the problem. Conversely, interventions targeting these social dynamics can effectively recalibrate expectations, especially when they are clearly aligned with course assessment (Jadallah & Ballard, 2021).

4.4. Disengagement Pathways and Identity Processes

Contextual stressors can translate into lower attendance through behavioral disengagement. The Phenomenological Variant of Ecological Systems Theory (PVEST) helps explain this. PVEST specifies that students possess coping resources and can receive identity-affirming support that buffers them against such stressors. When these protective resources are absent or depleted, the risk of absenteeism increases significantly. In the Algerian context, this highlights first-generation students and those from linguistically disadvantaged backgrounds as particularly high-risk subgroups who require targeted identity-affirming advising (Hershberg et al., 2025).

4.5. Transition Ecologies and Critical Windows

The transition from the highly structured environment of secondary school to the relative freedom of university is notoriously fragile. It is a critical window during which attendance habits are often permanently established. An integrative, multi-theory approach shows that targeted support during this phase can be highly effective in averting disengagement. In the current Algerian context, with ongoing LMD reforms and the rise of a private sector, interventions like bridge modules, learning communities, and structured first-year orientations can play a crucial role in stabilizing attendance patterns from the very beginning (Johnson & Levitan, 2023).

5. The University as a Product of Its Social Environment

Algerian universities do not exist in a vacuum; they are profoundly shaped by the political, economic, and cultural environments in which they operate. Pressures from massification, a predominantly public funding model, and significant regional infrastructure heterogeneity all mediate how students perceive the value of attending in-person learning (Rabah & Raouti, 2021).

5.1. Digitalization, LMS, and Attendance Incentives

The 2020–2024 period saw a massive expansion in distance education tools. However, their adoption and effectiveness have been highly uneven, limited by persistent gaps in connectivity, device access and digital readiness. A critical issue has emerged: when lecture materials are systematically posted online without any aligned requirement for active, graded participation, the incentive structure for students shifts dramatically. The perceived marginal benefit of physical presence declines, and exam-only participation becomes a rational strategy for students. This effect is compounded by local constraints, such as unreliable public transport or inflexible timetables, which further increase the opportunity cost of attending in person (Renn & Smith, 2023). To counteract this, QA proposals emphasize the need to realign LMS posting practices with participation-linked formative assessments, thereby restoring the value of presence in the learning process.

5.2. Core Functions and QA Operationalization

The university's core functions of teaching, research, and community service are operationalized through QA cycle. In Algeria, these cycles increasingly emphasize the constructive alignment of learning outcomes with in-class activities that carry a real assessment weight. There is a growing consensus that the traditional, professor-centered model of knowledge transmission is a major driver of student passivity and, consequently, disengagement. Consequently, QA proposals explicitly target a shift toward more student-engaging pedagogy. This includes recommending the widespread adoption of low-stakes, in-class activities that carry credit and have been strongly associated with reduced absenteeism in comparable international settings (Escriche-Escuder et al., 2020; Jaftha et al., 2022).

5.3. Heterogeneous Student Needs and Multi-Level Supports

The student body is not monolithic; it has highly heterogeneous needs. Curricula must be modern and aligned with labor market demands. The instructions must be clear, structured, and responsive. Assessment practices should be designed to reward ongoing participation rather than relying solely on high-stakes final exams. From a sociocultural perspective, this also means recognizing that peer norms are powerful forces. This implies that classroom- and cohort-level interventions, such as peer mentoring and collaborative learning structures, are legitimate and necessary levers for strengthening attendance (Jadallah & Ballard, 2021).

5.4. Sectoral Change and Comparative Dynamics

The emergence of a private higher education sector alongside the public university system introduces new meso- and macro-level influences. Private institutions often send strong signals about program quality, language of instruction, and employability, which can influence how students in the public system perceive the value of their courses and where they choose to invest their time and effort. While direct causal effects require local measurements, comparative monitoring across the two sectors can reveal important differences in the engagement climates and service processes that shape student presence (Bedaida et al., 2022).

6. Students' Aversion to Reading

A significant challenge compounding absenteeism is the widespread aversion to deep, sustained academic reading. For many students, reading ranks low on their list of priorities. They rarely consult primary, paper-based sources for their assignments, instead relying on easily accessible Internet summaries, downloadable PDFs, and recycled materials from previous student cohorts. This trend intensified in the post-pandemic context. The systematic online posting of lecture slides and summaries, when not paired with participation-linked tasks that require deeper reading, has reinforced the substitution of short-form materials for primary sources.

This issue is particularly acute in multilingual tracks. The friction between Arabic, French, and English as languages of instruction raises the cognitive cost of sustained academic reading, especially for first-year students. This linguistic challenge makes short summaries a more attractive option unless instructors provide discipline-specific scaffolds, such as glossaries, guided reading prompts, or academic language workshops, to ease the burden (Djebbari, 2020).

From a sociocultural perspective, reading practices are socially situated. When a cohort normalizes a"summary-only" approach to preparation, imitation dynamics spread these low-reading norms. This, in turn, depresses the perceived value of attending discussion-based classes, where deeper knowledge is expected. Evidence from engagement-oriented interventions shows a clear path forward. Low-stakes, in-class checks directly tied to required readings are strongly associated with lower absenteeism. When these activities carry credit, they effectively realign student incentives toward pre-class reading, making it a visible and necessary component of the course rather than an optional add-on (Benhacine, 2023; Escriche-Escuder et al., 2020).

7. Examination Integrity in the Digital Era (2020–2024)

Academic dishonesty has become a widely discussed issue in Algerian universities. Common methods include the use of paper slips, mobile phones, and in-room collusion by the participants. The primary drivers of this behavior are often weak learning, reliance on rote memorization, and inadequate mastery of course content, which leaves students feeling unable to formulate independent answers. The rapid expansion of distance learning during the pandemic exposed new and significant assessment integrity vulnerabilities, particularly in unproctored online contexts. This transition also revealed critical assessment-literacy gaps among faculty who were required to design and grade online assessments at a rapid pace (Hadi, 2024).

The available sources describe three main categories of integrity challenges. First, conventional in-person cheating remains a risk. Second, e-exams present new vulnerabilities, including the use of unauthorized resources and concerns about identity verification. Third, pedagogical and governance gaps, such as inconsistent rules and a lack of standardization, weaken the enforcement of integrity policies (Benhacine, 2023).

Addressing these challenges requires a multi-level approach. This includes targeted professional development for instructors on how to design more secure and authentic online assessments. It also requires strengthening internal QA and governance structures to ensure that policies are clear, consistent, and enforced systematically. Finally, institutions should move beyond simple risk descriptions and conduct rigorous empirical research, including prevalence studies and evaluations of specific interventions, to build an evidence base for effective integrity reforms.

8. Prioritization Among Courses (Modules)

Students often exhibit highly selective attendance patterns. They tend to prioritize what they perceive as"hard" or high-stakes subjects, such as technical courses or those taught in a foreign language, such as French. They attend these lectures, often motivated more by fear of failure than by a desire for knowledge. In contrast, they frequently accord less importance to humanities or social science courses, treating them as secondary or as a means to boost their overall average.

This selective attendance pattern maps onto two powerful macro-level drivers in the Algerian context: the dynamics of the language of instruction (LOI) and the signals sent by the labor market (LM). Debates around LOI shape both students' ability to access disciplinary content and their expectations of future employability, especially in a globalized context where English proficiency is often seen as a key to STEM fields (Djebbari, 2020; Rabah & Raouti, 2021). When the cognitive cost of comprehension is high in a given LOI and adequate linguistic scaffolds are not provided, students will naturally cluster their attendance around courses they perceive as essential gatekeepers to mobility or employment.

To counter these selective patterns, institutions can deploy a range of design and QA levers. These include providing robust LOI scaffolding in the early semesters of all programs, embedding formative, participation-linked micro-tasks across the entire curriculum to ensure that all courses are perceived as consequential, and publishing transparent program-level outcomes dashboards that can recalibrate student perceptions about the"return on investment" of different fields of study.

9. Effects of Earlier Educational Stages on University Absenteeism

The roots of university absenteeism often extend back to a student's prior schooling. Weak preparation in the secondary system frequently manifests at the university level as inadequate training in the core skills of research, critical reading and inquiry. An instructional culture centered on memorization discourages the development of analytical abilities and, in doing so, lowers the perceived value of attending interactive lectures. The habits and norms internalized in schools are often carried directly into the university environment (Renn & Smith, 2023).

Five distinct pathways connect these experiences to university absenteeism. The"skill pathway" links lower academic literacy to a higher cognitive load in lectures, which rationalizes non-attendance. The"norm pathway" involves the importation of high school absenteeism habits. The"motivation pathway" connects a performance-oriented mindset to the adoption of exam-only strategies. The"fit/identity pathway" links a misalignment between a student's identity and their program of study to disengagement. Finally, the"transition stressors pathway" highlights how an unbuffered transition from secondary school to university can reduce students' sense of belonging and lower their attendance.

10. Working Students: Exosystem Constraints on Attendance

A significant number of students work during their studies, and they often face difficult trade-offs between employment and class attendance. Financial pressures compel many students to take on jobs, which can hinder their ability to attend lectures, complete assignments, and keep up with their coursework, ultimately lowering their academic performance. In the ecological framework, student employment is a powerful exosystem constraint. However, its effects on attendance are moderated by meso-level factors, such as the flexibility of university scheduling and the availability of micro-level support, such as academic advising and peer study groups (Johnson & Levitan, 2023).

International literature confirms that work-study schedule conflicts are frequent and powerful determinants of non-attendance. In the digital era, tools such as synchronous streaming and asynchronous access to recordings can help students reconcile work and study, but their effectiveness depends on the quality of their implementation (Cacault et al., 2021; Nkomo & Daniel, 2021). Two moderating levers are particularly important. First, providing greater timetable flexibility and reliable online access can modestly reduce the opportunity cost of attendance for employed students. Second, strengthened academic advising and other QA-supported services can act as organizational buffers that support engagement despite the employment demands.

11. The Erosion of Scholarly Identity: From Procedural Compliance to Active Disengagement

Beyond the structural and logistical drivers of absenteeism lies a more profound challenge: the apparent erosion of a core scholarly identity among a growing number of students. This phenomenon is not merely about poor study habits; it represents a fundamental shift in how students perceive their role, purpose, and relationship with the university. A traditional scholarly identity is built on the pillars of intellectual curiosity, academic integrity, active engagement in learning, and commitment to mastering a field of knowledge. The evidence synthesized in this article suggests that these pillars are weakening and being replaced by an instrumentalist mindset focused on achieving the minimum requirements for a credential.

This disengagement manifests in various observable behaviors. Students increasingly rely on unverified, surface-level online sources and demonstrate a weakened ability to distinguish credible information from misinformation. Linguistic proficiency in both Arabic and foreign languages is declining, limiting students' capacity for nuanced expression and critical analysis. In the classroom, many students lack the analytical capacity to move beyond repeating an instructor's words, showing little evidence of comprehension or independent thought. For this segment of the student population, the university is not a site for intellectual formation but rather a bureaucratic hurdle to be cleared. They may be physically present but mentally absent or may disengage entirely for long periods, feeling little need to compensate for missed content. This erosion of identity is not an isolated issue; it is a nexus where the effects of digitalization, reading disengagement, and assessment integrity challenges converge and are amplified by each other.

11.1 The Digitalization Paradox: How Access Can Undermine Inquiry

The post-pandemic digital environment has created a significant paradox in education. While providing unprecedented access to information, it may simultaneously undermine the development of an active and inquisitive scholarly identity. Student reports from to 2020-2024 period indicate highly heterogeneous experiences with online and hybrid learning. When online components are well-designed, interactive, and scaffolded by engaged instructors, they can foster autonomy and deepen learning. However, when they are experienced as purely transactional—a one-way repository for lecture slides and recorded videos—they can encourage what might be termed"procedural survival" behaviors (Bakhtaoui & Hachem, 2024).

In this mode, the students' goal shifts from understanding to acquisition. The primary activities have become downloading files, searching for summaries, and extracting keywords for exam preparation rather than engaging in a sustained process of inquiry. Lecture recordings, for example, can be a valuable tool for access and revision. However, without an intentional pedagogical design that links them to active tasks, they can reorient learners toward a strategic, post-hoc consumption of content. This passive"catch-up" culture can directly substitute for active class participation, weakening the routines and social interactions that build and sustain a scholarly identity (Nkomo & Daniel, 2021). The ease of access to information paradoxically reduces the perceived need for difficult, effortful scholarly work: questioning, debating, synthesizing, and creating new knowledge.

11.2 Credentialism and Labor-Market Disillusionment

A student's academic identity is profoundly shaped by their perception of the future value of their education. When students believe that their degree will lead to meaningful employment and social mobility, they are more likely to invest in their identity as dedicated scholars. However, when the connection between effort and reward appears to be broken, this investment wanes. In the Algerian context, macro-level factors, such as youth unemployment and a perceived mismatch between university curricula and labor market demands, can lead to widespread disillusionment.

This fosters a culture of"credentialism, " where the diploma itself, rather than the knowledge it represents, becomes the sole objective of education. Universities are no longer seen as formative experiences but as necessary, if inefficient, gateways to a piece of paper. This instrumentalist view directly undermines the intrinsic motivation required for scholarly engagement. Why spend hours in the library reading a text deeply if the perceived return on that investment in the job market is low? Why engage in classroom debates if the ultimate goal is to pass an exam? This macro-level pressure encourages students to adopt a cost-benefit analysis that logically favors minimal effort in credential attainment. This calculation is fundamentally at odds with the values of scholarly identity.

11.3 Assessment Regimes and the Shaping of Academic Identity

Nothing shapes student behavior and identity more powerfully than assessment systems. Assessment regimes that reward deep understanding, critical thinking, and intellectual integrity cultivate a scholarly identity. Conversely, when they reward surface memorization and strategic test-taking, they actively discourage it. The persistent reliance on high-stakes, end-of-term examinations in many programs creates an environment in which academic identity is subordinated to performance identity.

The focus on a single, high-stakes event encourages cramming and rote learning, behaviors that are antithetical to the slow, cumulative process of genuine scholarship. Furthermore, the integrity challenges exposed during the digital transition have complicated this picture. When assessment norms and procedures are unclear or when academic dishonesty is perceived as widespread and inconsequential, it sends a powerful message that the process of learning is less important than the final grade. Opportunistic disengagement becomes a rational response in systems where the rules of meaningful participation appear arbitrary or unenforced (Hadi, 2024). Therefore, a robust internal QA system that promotes authentic, formative, and secure assessment is not just a technical requirement; it is an essential institutional framework for stabilizing expectations and fostering an environment where a genuine scholarly identity can thrive (Benhacine, 2023).

11.4 Propositions for Future Empirical Research

To move beyond these narrative accounts and systematically investigate the erosion of scholarly identity, institutions should adopt a multi-method approach to research. This would involve tracking behavioral indicators that can serve as proxies for identity strength (such as attendance rates, timely submission of assignments, and active participation in online forums) and combining them with validated survey constructs that measure psychological variables (such as academic self-efficacy, a sense of scholarly purpose, and perceived integrity norms). The use of multi-level, granular analytics would be appropriate to identify at-risk student clusters and program-level risk factors (Kearney & Childs, 2023).

From this expanded analysis, four testable propositions emerge for future research:

1. (P1) Academic identity strength (as measured by a composite of self-efficacy, scholarly purpose, and integrity norms) will positively predict lecture attendance, even after controlling for demographic and academic background variables (Ullah et al., 2024; Jaftha et al., 2022).

2. (P2) Language proficiency has an independent and significant association with both academic identity and attendance and should be included as a key covariate in any predictive model (Djebbari, 2020).

3. (P3) The positive association between academic identity and attendance will be stronger in courses that feature well-designed, interactive digital support than in courses with minimally designed, transactional online components (Nkomo & Daniel, 2021; Bakhtaoui & Hachem, 2024).

4. (P4) Courses embedded in academic programs with stronger and more consistently implemented internal QA mechanisms (particularly concerning assessment) exhibit weaker evidence of identity erosion and higher average rates of attendance (Benhacine, 2023; Hadi, 2024).

12. Overcrowding

In high-enrollment programs, severe overcrowding in lecture halls makes it nearly impossible for instructors to verify attendance or reliably monitor student progress. Mid-session departures are common even with electronic check-in systems. This overcrowding operates as an exo-level constraint that degrades the quality of micro-level interactions in the classroom and weakens attendance norms. Large lecture formats can foster a sense of anonymity that makes skipping classes feel consequence-free.

As a pragmatic response to this challenge, flexible pedagogical designs, particularly flipped classrooms, have been discussed as promising levers. The flipped model moves direct instruction out of the crowded lecture hall (through pre-class videos and readings) and dedicates scarce in-person time to active and interactive tasks such as problem-solving and debates. This rebalancing can make attendance more purposeful and engaging, even in large cohorts. However, sustaining engagement at scale in institutional processes, including effective timetable engineering and strong QA models, is necessary to ensure consistent delivery (Benhacine, 2023; Guessabi, 2021).

13. Conclusion

This article has examined the complex phenomenon of lecture absenteeism in Algerian higher education through a multi-level, socio-contextual framework. The literature synthesis reveals that absenteeism in the 2020–2024 period is not a reflection of individual deficits but rather a product of systemic interactions between digitalization trajectories, language-of-instruction policies, quality assurance capacity, assessment design, and labor market signals.

Three core propositions emerged from this study. First, the expansion of LMS platforms, when decoupled from participation-linked assessment, reconfigures student incentives in ways that devalue students' physical presence. Second, unresolved language-of-instruction friction elevates the cognitive costs for specific student cohorts, driving selective attendance patterns. Third, the absence of robust internal quality assurance mechanisms permits a normative drift toward chronic non-attendance within cohorts.

The ecological framework makes it clear that sustainable interventions must be implemented simultaneously across multiple levels. As Algeria continues its LMD reforms and navigates the expansion of private provisions, student attendance increasingly reflects a comparative assessment of instructional value. Therefore, addressing absenteeism requires not punitive policies but a systematic reinvestment in the marginal value of in-person time through active pedagogy, formative assessment, linguistic accessibility, and responsive academic support. These propositions warrant rigorous empirical testing.

14. Recommendations

These theoretical insights inform the following multi-level intervention recommendations:

1. Student-Level Interventions

1. Cultivate academic responsibility and disciplined study habits through structured first-year orientations and cohort-based learning communities.

2. Develop students' critical information literacy to help them distinguish verified sources from unverified online content, especially in the age of generative AI.

3. Strengthen language proficiency through targeted academic-literacy workshops that are directly aligned with the specific LOI of a student's program.

2. Instructor-Level Interventions

1. Emphasize the formative purpose of university study and clarify the societal importance of each specialization to foster a sense of purpose.

2. Embed low-stakes, participation-linked micro-assessments throughout all modules to make regular attendance consequential for students' final grades.

3. Strategically pair the online posting of materials with synchronous or in-person checkpoints to preserve the unique value of live presence in the classroom.

4. Regular professional development on assessment literacy for hybrid formats, constructive alignment, and flipped-classroom design should be provided for faculty members.

3. Curriculum and Program-Level Interventions

1. Optimize timetables to avoid placing cognitively demanding modules in high-fatigue slots and to reduce peak congestion that strains campus infrastructure.

2. Formalize clear and consistent LMS governance rules within internal QA cycles, specifying policies on posting timing and participation requirements.

3. Institutionalize program-level analytics dashboards to monitor attendance and engagement patterns in a disaggregated manner, allowing early risk detection.

4. Implement structured transition support (e.g., bridge modules, peer mentoring) targeting first-year and linguistically disadvantaged students.

4. Policy and Governance-Level Interventions

1. Align language-of-instruction scaffolds (e.g., glossaries and co-taught sessions) with the actual linguistic distribution of students in each program.

2. Strengthen internal quality assurance capacity by focusing on the systematic alignment of learning outcomes, teaching strategies, and formative assessment.

3. Monitor public/private sector dynamics and labor-market signals to ensure that public provision remains competitive and valuable in the eyes of students.

4. Fund digital infrastructure (connectivity, devices, platform training) equitably across all regions to eliminate access-based barriers to participation.

5. Pilot and rigorously evaluate all intervention packages using quasi-experimental designs before considering a large-scale rollout.

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