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TRANSFORMING INSTITUTIONAL CULTURE: ADDRESSING FACULTY AND STAFF ABSENTEEISM IN HIGHER EDUCATION

**TRANSFORMANDO LA CULTURA INSTITUCIONAL:
ABORDANDO EL AUSENTISMO DEL PERSONAL ACADÉMICO
Y ADMINISTRATIVO EN LA EDUCACIÓN SUPERIOR**

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Transforming Institutional Culture: Addressing Faculty and Staff Absenteeism in Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

Faculty and staff absenteeism continues to threaten institutional stability, academic continuity, and the overall quality of higher education institutions (HEIs). This study provides the first comprehensive empirical examination of absenteeism within Mexican HEIs, focusing on the relationship between organizational culture, leadership engagement, and workforce commitment at the Universidad Autónoma “Benito Juárez” de Oaxaca (UABJO). Employing a mixed-methods design that integrates quantitative survey data with qualitative interviews, the research identifies the institutional and cultural determinants that influence patterns of attendance and engagement. The findings reveal that limited leadership engagement, labor union disputes, inadequate professional incentives, and bureaucratic inefficiencies contribute to disengagement and absenteeism, while participatory governance, transparent communication, and structured recognition systems strengthen institutional commitment. The study reframes absenteeism not as an individual behavioral issue but as an outcome of governance quality and organizational culture. By situating absenteeism within the broader context of institutional reform, this research advances understanding of how leadership practices, incentive systems, and administrative structures can be strategically aligned to enhance accountability, motivation, and participation in higher education. The results offer actionable insights for policymakers and university leaders seeking to cultivate cultures of engagement and organizational trust across academic communities.

Keywords: organizational culture, institutional leadership, absenteeism, higher education performance, university governance



Transformando la Cultura Institucional: Abordando el Ausentismo del Personal Académico y Administrativo en la Educación Superior

RESUMEN

El ausentismo del personal académico y administrativo representa un desafío persistente para la estabilidad, la gobernanza y la calidad académica de las instituciones de educación superior (IES). Este estudio ofrece el primer análisis empírico integral del ausentismo en las IES mexicanas, centrado en la relación entre cultura organizacional, liderazgo y compromiso laboral en la Universidad Autónoma “Benito Juárez” de Oaxaca (UABJO). Mediante un enfoque mixto que combina análisis cuantitativo de encuestas con entrevistas cualitativas, la investigación identifica los factores institucionales y culturales que influyen en los patrones de asistencia y compromiso del personal. Los resultados muestran que el bajo involucramiento del liderazgo, las disputas y desacuerdos de los sindicatos, la falta de incentivos profesionales adecuados y las ineficiencias burocráticas generan desmotivación y ausentismo, mientras que la gobernanza participativa, la comunicación transparente y los sistemas estructurados de reconocimiento fortalecen el compromiso institucional. El estudio replantea el ausentismo no como un problema individual, sino como una consecuencia de la calidad de la gobernanza y de la cultura organizacional. Al situar el ausentismo dentro del contexto más amplio de la reforma institucional, esta investigación amplía la comprensión de cómo las prácticas de liderazgo, los sistemas de incentivos y las estructuras administrativas pueden alinearse estratégicamente para promover la responsabilidad, la motivación y la participación en la educación superior. Los hallazgos ofrecen orientaciones prácticas para responsables de políticas y líderes universitarios interesados en fomentar una cultura de compromiso y confianza organizacional en las comunidades académicas.

Palabras clave: cultura organizativa en la educación superior, liderazgo y transformación institucional, absentismo académico, política educativa y gobernanza, desarrollo institucional

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INTRODUCTION

Absenteeism among faculty and administrative personnel in higher education institutions (HEIs) is a persistent challenge, affecting academic continuity, administrative efficiency, and institutional reputation (de Jong & del Junco, 2024; Rasiah et al., 2020). While absenteeism has been widely studied from a workforce management perspective, its deeper connections to organizational culture, leadership engagement, and institutional governance remain underexplored, particularly in Latin American HEIs (Marchington, 2015). Understanding absenteeism in this broader institutional context is crucial for developing effective, evidence-based interventions that enhance workforce stability and institutional effectiveness (López López et al., 2025).

In Latin American HEIs, absenteeism is often exacerbated by weak institutional policies, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and disengaged leadership (Irazabal, 2023). At the Universidad Autónoma “Benito Juárez” de Oaxaca (UABJO), anecdotal evidence suggests that persistent faculty and administrative staff absenteeism has led to frequent class cancellations, disruptions in service delivery, and diminished institutional performance. However, empirical research addressing the structural and cultural dimensions of absenteeism in Mexican HEIs remains scarce (Sosu et al., 2021). This research seeks to fill that gap by examining the relationship between absenteeism and institutional culture, leadership engagement, and policy effectiveness.

Global Perspectives on Absenteeism in HEIs

International studies have identified multiple factors influencing absenteeism. Research from the United States and the United Kingdom highlights the correlation between absenteeism and job dissatisfaction, workplace stress, and insufficient institutional support (Kocakulah et al., 2016; Martin & Matiaske, 2017). By contrast, Scandinavian HEIs emphasize work-life balance policies, demonstrating the positive impact of flexible schedules and institutional well-being programs in reducing absenteeism (Antai et al., 2015).

Comparative analyses between HEIs in Europe and Latin America underscore significant differences in absenteeism management (Hunter et al., 2023; Teodoro, 2015). European institutions tend to have structured performance monitoring systems and robust faculty development programs, contributing to lower absenteeism rates (European Commission: Directorate-General for Education &



Culture, 2024). In contrast, Latin American HEIs often struggle with governance challenges, financial constraints, and inconsistent policies, making it difficult to implement sustainable absenteeism reduction strategies (OECD/IDB, 2022).

Studies from Brazil and South Africa further demonstrate the role of leadership engagement and faculty motivation in influencing absenteeism rates. A study in a leading Brazilian university found that faculty absenteeism decreased when leadership provided structured feedback and professional development opportunities (Pérez Nebra et al., 2021). Similarly, South African institutions with mentorship programs and clear attendance policies reported lower absenteeism rates (Muresherwa & Bama, 2024). These insights highlight the potential effectiveness of leadership-driven interventions in improving attendance and engagement in HEIs. A comprehensive understanding of absenteeism in HEIs requires an integrated theoretical framework encompassing organizational culture, leadership dynamics, and institutional policies. Organizational culture, defined as the shared values, beliefs, and norms within an institution, plays a fundamental role in shaping faculty and administrative behavior (Panda & Gupta, 2001). A strong, cohesive culture fosters collaboration, accountability, and job satisfaction, reducing absenteeism (Wolor et al., 2022). Conversely, a weak or toxic culture—characterized by unclear expectations, lack of institutional support, and poor communication—leads to disengagement and absenteeism (Ismail et al., 2024).

A study of Mexican public universities found that institutions with clearly defined cultural frameworks had lower absenteeism rates, as faculty and staff reported higher job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Treviño Reyes & Lopez-Perez, 2023). Institutions that actively engaged faculty in decision-making and professional development initiatives demonstrated greater workforce stability and reduced absenteeism rates.

Leadership Engagement and Absenteeism

Leadership plays a pivotal role in shaping institutional culture and workforce engagement (Oladimeji et al., 2023). Transformational leadership, which emphasizes participatory governance, transparent communication, and employee empowerment, has been associated with higher job satisfaction and lower absenteeism rates (Ystaas et al., 2023). Leaders who cultivate an inclusive work environment contribute to employee motivation and organizational commitment (Ly, 2024).



Conversely, authoritarian or passive leadership structures contribute to disengagement and workforce instability (Asim et al., 2021). A study of Mexican HEIs found that institutions with hierarchical leadership models and limited faculty participation in decision-making reported higher absenteeism rates (Arredondo-Soto et al., 2020). Faculty members in these institutions often felt undervalued and disconnected from institutional goals, leading to increased voluntary absenteeism (Khan et al., 2020). Institutional policies, particularly those related to attendance monitoring, employee incentives, and accountability mechanisms, play a decisive role in either mitigating or exacerbating absenteeism (Kearney et al., 2023). Policies that emphasize flexible work arrangements, structured professional development programs, and clear expectations on attendance foster greater employee commitment (Weideman & Hofmeyr, 2020). Conversely, rigid, punitive policies without faculty input can contribute to workplace dissatisfaction and increased absenteeism (Monteiro & Joseph, 2023). Institutions with well-defined accountability frameworks and performance incentives tend to experience lower absenteeism rates (Gaudine & Saks, 2001). Recognition systems that reinforce faculty engagement and institutional loyalty have been shown to significantly reduce absenteeism rates (Abdullah et al., 2016). By implementing strategic interventions focused on leadership development, organizational culture enhancement, and policy reform, HEIs can create a supportive and engaging work environment that minimizes absenteeism and optimizes institutional performance (Hamad et al., 2024).

Conceptual Foundations and Theoretical Logic

This study is anchored in two interrelated theoretical perspectives—Organizational Culture Theory (Nneji & Asikhia, 2021) and the Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) Framework—which together provide a comprehensive explanation of how institutional culture, governance structures, and leadership practices shape absenteeism within HEIs (Lopez-Martin & Topa, 2019).

Organizational Culture Theory

Organizational Culture Theory (Nneji & Asikhia, 2021) posits that the shared values, beliefs, and behavioral norms within an institution constitute the foundation of its identity and influence how members interpret, engage with, and respond to their work environment. In the context of HEIs, organizational culture manifests through leadership styles, communication patterns, and administrative



traditions that define the institutional climate and affect faculty and staff commitment. A culture characterized by trust, collaboration, and participatory governance fosters belonging, engagement, and accountability, whereas hierarchical and bureaucratic cultures tend to generate alienation, demotivation, and absenteeism (Wolor et al., 2022). Thus, organizational culture functions as both a social and structural mechanism shaping the attitudes and behaviors of academic personnel.

The JD–R Framework

The JD–R framework (Lopez-Martin & Topa, 2019) complements the cultural perspective by explaining the psychological and behavioral mechanisms through which institutional conditions affect employee engagement and withdrawal. According to this model, job demands—such as administrative overload, weak leadership engagement, and procedural rigidity—deplete employees’ energy and psychological resources, increasing the likelihood of strain and disengagement. In contrast, job resources—including supportive leadership, transparent incentive systems, and opportunities for professional growth—act as motivational drivers that enhance resilience, satisfaction, and commitment. Within HEIs, the balance between these demands and resources is particularly critical, as academic work involves both intellectual autonomy and institutional dependency. When job demands outweigh available resources, absenteeism becomes a form of adaptive withdrawal, signaling deeper governance and cultural dysfunctions rather than individual neglect.

Integrative Theoretical Logic

Integrating Organizational Culture Theory with the JD–R framework allows this study to conceptualize absenteeism as an institutionally mediated behavioral outcome rather than a purely individual act. The model proposed herein posits that organizational culture and governance quality operate as institutional-level antecedents of absenteeism, mediated by leadership engagement **and** moderated by professional incentives. Weak leadership engagement reduces the availability of social and psychological resources, while ineffective or opaque incentive systems diminish motivation and commitment (Modise, 2024). Conversely, participatory governance, transparent communication, and merit-based recognition act as protective factors that counterbalance institutional demands (Hadziahmetovic & Salihovic, 2022).



This integrative framework positions absenteeism as a systemic response to organizational imbalance, emerging from the interaction between governance structures and workplace culture. By linking cultural values, leadership dynamics, and policy mechanisms, the study advances a multilevel understanding of absenteeism that captures both its psychological and institutional dimensions.

We hypothesize that leadership engagement mediates the relationship between organizational culture and absenteeism, while professional incentives moderate this pathway. Specifically, a participatory and transparent culture enhances leadership engagement, which in turn reduces absenteeism. Conversely, inadequate incentives weaken this mediating effect. Future empirical testing using structural equation modeling (SEM) will allow estimation of both direct and indirect effects, providing a more nuanced understanding of the institutional determinants of absenteeism.

Bridging the Gap: The Contribution of This Study

This study extends existing research by integrating organizational culture theory, leadership frameworks, and institutional policy analysis to provide a holistic examination of absenteeism in higher education, using the UABJO as a case study. While prior studies in Scandinavian contexts have emphasized the role of work–life balance and employee well-being (Antai et al., 2015), and research from Brazil has highlighted the effectiveness of leadership development and professional recognition programs (Pérez Nebra et al., 2021), few have examined how these mechanisms operate within the socio-political and administrative realities of Latin American HEIs.

By situating the analysis within the Mexican higher education system, characterized by limited resources, hierarchical governance, and entrenched bureaucratic procedures, this study identifies context-specific institutional dynamics that influence faculty and staff engagement. It examines how variations in leadership effectiveness, incentive structures, and administrative processes produce distinct absenteeism patterns and explores their implications for academic continuity, organizational efficiency, and institutional trust.

Furthermore, the research proposes evidence-based interventions grounded in empirical findings—specifically, leadership development programs, transparent policy design, and administrative process optimization. These strategies aim to foster participatory governance, enhance recognition, and mitigate structural inefficiencies that contribute to absenteeism.



By addressing these objectives, the study contributes to the global discourse on higher education reform by offering a theoretically grounded and empirically validated model that links organizational culture, governance quality, and workforce engagement. It provides actionable insights for policymakers and institutional leaders seeking to transform bureaucratic systems into cultures of commitment, collaboration, and accountability—essential components of a sustainable and effective higher education environment.

METHODOLOGY

A rigorous and methodologically sound research design is essential for understanding the intricate relationship between organizational culture and absenteeism within HEIs. This study employs a mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative research techniques to achieve a comprehensive and multidimensional analysis of absenteeism at UABJO. Mixed-methods research allows for the triangulation of data, enhancing the reliability and validity of findings by cross-verifying quantitative statistical trends with qualitative insights drawn from participants' experiences (Ahmed et al., 2024). The quantitative component of this study consists of a structured survey administered to 250 respondents, including 150 faculty members and 100 administrative staff. The survey was designed to capture key variables related to absenteeism, organizational culture, leadership engagement, and institutional policies (Zhao, 2024). Questions were structured using Likert-scale measurements, categorical response options, and open-ended fields to facilitate both statistical analysis and nuanced interpretations. The sample was selected through stratified random sampling, ensuring proportional representation of faculty and administrative staff across different departments. This method enhances generalizability and minimizes selection bias (Allen & Seaman, 2007).

Complementing the quantitative analysis, the qualitative component comprises 25 in-depth interviews with 15 faculty members and 10 administrators. These semi-structured interviews were designed to explore participants' perceptions of institutional culture, leadership effectiveness, and absenteeism-related challenges. A purposive sampling strategy was employed to select interviewees with diverse perspectives and varying levels of experience within the institution (Mashuri et al., 2022). This qualitative approach allows for a deeper exploration of the underlying reasons behind absenteeism trends observed in the survey data.



Data collection was conducted over a four-month period, spanning November 2023 to February 2024. Surveys were distributed both electronically and in-person to maximize participation and ensure broad coverage. Interviews were conducted in a confidential setting to encourage candid responses, with participants' consent obtained for audio recordings and subsequent transcription (Nyimbili Phd & Nyimbili, 2024). Ethical considerations, including voluntary participation, anonymity, and data protection, were strictly adhered to in accordance with American Educational Research Association [AERA] ethics guidelines ("AERA Code of Ethics: American Educational Research Association Approved by the AERA Council February 2011," 2011). The analysis of quantitative data was performed using multiple regression modeling, a statistical technique that allows for the identification of key predictors of absenteeism. Regression analysis facilitates the examination of relationships between absenteeism rates and independent variables such as leadership engagement, institutional policies, and organizational culture (Alkhodary, 2023). Descriptive and inferential statistics were computed using SPSS software, ensuring a rigorous statistical foundation for the findings.

For qualitative data analysis, thematic coding was employed using NVivo software, a widely recognized tool for qualitative research (Limna, 2023). Thematic analysis involved systematically identifying patterns and recurring themes within interview transcripts, allowing for an in-depth exploration of institutional culture and leadership dynamics (Braun & Clarke, 2006). By coding responses into predefined and emerging themes, the study captured nuanced insights into participants' experiences and institutional challenges, providing a richer contextual understanding of absenteeism beyond statistical trends. The integration of both quantitative and qualitative data in this study enables a more robust and holistic interpretation of absenteeism in HEIs. Quantitative analysis identifies statistical patterns and correlations, while qualitative findings offer explanatory depth, shedding light on the lived experiences and institutional factors that influence absenteeism rates. The methodological rigor employed in this research ensures that findings are not only statistically valid but also contextually meaningful, contributing valuable insights for the development of targeted interventions aimed at reducing absenteeism and enhancing institutional effectiveness.

Instrument validation was conducted using a pilot test with 30 respondents to ensure clarity and internal consistency.



Reliability analysis yielded Cronbach's α values above 0.80 for all constructs (leadership engagement = 0.87, professional incentives = 0.84, organizational culture = 0.82, absenteeism = 0.88), indicating high internal reliability. Sampling strata were defined by faculty rank and administrative department, and random selection within each stratum ensured proportional representation. Construct validity was examined through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), with factor loadings exceeding 0.60 across all items, confirming unidimensionality of the constructs.

Future work will incorporate a longitudinal component to assess temporal stability of these constructs.

RESULTS

Absenteeism Patterns at UABJO

Survey data indicate that 38% of faculty members and 42% of administrative staff report frequent absenteeism, defined as missing more than five workdays per semester. This trend highlights a pervasive issue that affects not only individual job performance but also institutional efficiency and academic delivery. Comparative analysis with existing research in Latin American HEIs suggests that absenteeism rates at UABJO are significantly higher than those observed in universities with more structured institutional policies and leadership engagement (González Fiegehen et al., 2015). The disparity underscores the necessity for targeted interventions aimed at enhancing faculty commitment, improving working conditions, and fostering a culture of accountability within the institution.

Institutional Factors Influencing Absenteeism

Regression analysis identified three primary institutional factors contributing to absenteeism: weak leadership engagement, lack of professional incentives, and bureaucratic inefficiencies. These variables were found to have statistically significant effects on absenteeism rates, reinforcing the hypothesis that organizational culture plays a decisive role in workforce attendance and institutional commitment (Table 1)

The strongest predictor of absenteeism was weak leadership engagement ($\beta = 0.65$, $p < 0.05$), indicating that employees in departments with limited managerial support, ineffective communication, and low participatory governance were significantly more likely to be absent. Faculty and staff frequently cited poor institutional leaderships a key demotivating factor, leading to disengagement and diminished commitment to professional responsibilities.



These findings align with previous studies emphasizing the role of transformational leadership in reducing absenteeism by fostering workplace motivation and accountability (Khan et al., 2020).

The second key driver of absenteeism was the absence of professional incentives ($\beta = 0.52$, $p < 0.05$).

Both survey and interview data highlighted that faculty and administrative staff frequently cite limited career advancement opportunities, insufficient recognition initiatives, and stagnant salary frameworks as primary reasons for disengagement. HEIs that neglect to establish structured reward systems often face higher absenteeism rates, as employees lack clear motivation to fulfill their responsibilities consistently (Noor et al., 2020). Conversely, institutions with robust incentive structures—such as research funding, merit-based advancement opportunities, and performance-linked bonuses—tend to report lower absenteeism and greater workforce commitment (Condly et al., 2003).

The third significant factor contributing to absenteeism was bureaucratic inefficiencies ($\beta = 0.48$, $p < 0.05$).

Administrative complexity, excessive procedural requirements, and delays in institutional decision-making were frequently cited as sources of frustration among faculty and staff. Many respondents expressed dissatisfaction with overly rigid administrative processes that hinder timely responses to workplace concerns, resulting in decreased morale and increased absenteeism. These inefficiencies disproportionately affect faculty members engaged in research and teaching, as bureaucratic hurdles create additional burdens that discourage institutional engagement (Guillaume & Apodaca, 2020). Addressing these inefficiencies through digital governance solutions, process automation, and decentralization of administrative tasks may contribute to improved workforce efficiency and attendance.

Correlation Between Institutional Culture and Absenteeism

Further statistical modeling revealed that absenteeism rates were significantly lower in departments characterized by collaborative leadership, transparent communication, and structured incentive systems. Departments with strong leadership and participatory governance structures exhibited a 28% lower absenteeism rate compared to those operating under authoritarian or disengaged leadership models. This finding reinforces existing literature that underscores the importance of institutional culture in shaping workforce behavior and commitment (Ardebilpour et al., 2024).



Qualitative interviews reinforced the quantitative results. As one faculty member stated, “When leadership communicates openly and recognizes effort, attendance becomes a matter of pride, not obligation.” Another administrator explained, “Delays in decision-making make us feel invisible — that’s why people stop showing up.” These perspectives illustrate the cultural and emotional mechanisms underpinning absenteeism. Table 2 aligns quantitative predictors with representative qualitative themes to show their convergence.

Faculty vs. Administrative Staff Absenteeism Trends

A comparative analysis of faculty and administrative staff absenteeism revealed notable differences in absenteeism drivers. While faculty absenteeism was more frequently linked to low research incentives, excessive bureaucratic responsibilities, and lack of professional development opportunities, administrative staff absenteeism was primarily influenced by workplace dissatisfaction, inefficient workflow management, and inadequate managerial support. These findings suggest that intervention strategies should be customized for each workforce segment, addressing distinct challenges faced by faculty and administrative personnel (Table 3).

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study reinforce the notion that absenteeism in HEIs is deeply intertwined with organizational culture, leadership practices, and administrative efficiency. A comprehensive approach to addressing absenteeism must focus on enhancing leadership engagement, refining institutional policies, and improving administrative processes to foster a culture of commitment, accountability, and professional responsibility (Solomon & Sandhya, 2024).

Leadership development is the most pressing intervention, as weak leadership engagement was found to be the strongest predictor of absenteeism. Institutions must invest in structured leadership training programs that emphasize participatory governance, transparent communication, and faculty empowerment (Mazzetti & Schaufeli, 2022). Mentorship initiatives can bridge generational gaps in faculty engagement, while feedback mechanisms and performance-based evaluations will ensure accountability and responsiveness in leadership roles. Institutions that successfully cultivate transformational leadership models tend to experience lower absenteeism rates and higher workforce



satisfaction, as faculty and administrative personnel feel more valued and supported in their roles (Jankelova & Joniakova, 2021).

Equally critical is the implementation of clear and structured attendance policies, supported by robust monitoring mechanisms (Hudson et al., 2019). Policies should outline transparent attendance expectations, consequences for noncompliance, and avenues for justified absences. However, enforcement must be complemented by incentive programs that reward professional dedication. The lack of professional incentives was identified as a significant contributor to absenteeism, underscoring the necessity for merit-based promotions, research funding opportunities, and salary increments linked to performance evaluations (Gerhart, 2017). By reinforcing attendance with tangible rewards, institutions can motivate faculty and administrative staff to maintain consistent engagement with their professional responsibilities.

Administrative inefficiencies also emerged as a key absenteeism driver, revealing the need for streamlined operational procedures (Legare et al., 2018). Excessive bureaucracy and slow institutional decision-making processes contribute to frustration, particularly among faculty engaged in research and teaching. Digital governance solutions, including automated workflows, paperless administrative systems, and AI-assisted scheduling tools, should be adopted to minimize bureaucratic obstacles and improve institutional efficiency (Gelashvili, 2020). Institutions that prioritize process optimization and decentralization of administrative tasks will likely see an increase in workforce engagement and a decline in absenteeism.

Furthermore, the study highlights the necessity for department-specific strategies, as absenteeism patterns varied between faculty and administrative staff. While faculty absenteeism was primarily linked to inadequate research incentives and excessive bureaucratic responsibilities, administrative staff absenteeism stemmed from inefficient workflow management and lack of managerial support (Grigore, 2020). HEIs should tailor interventions to address these workforce-specific concerns, ensuring that strategies are relevant and effective for each employment sector within the institution.

By integrating these interventions—leadership development, policy refinement, incentive-based workforce management, and administrative efficiency improvements—HEIs can cultivate a more engaged and committed workforce.



Institutions that successfully implement these strategies will not only reduce absenteeism but also enhance overall institutional performance, ensuring academic continuity, administrative efficiency, and a positive organizational climate. Future research should explore the long-term impact of these interventions, assessing their effectiveness across diverse HEI contexts to further refine absenteeism mitigation strategies. Comparative studies between institutions that implement these interventions and those that do not would provide additional insights into best practices for fostering a stable and committed higher education workforce.

Building upon these findings, three pilot interventions are proposed for future implementation at UABJO: (1) a leadership development workshop to strengthen participatory governance and communication skills; (2) a merit-based incentive program that links recognition and promotion to consistent attendance and productivity; and (3) an administrative digitization initiative to streamline workflows and reduce bureaucratic inefficiencies. Each intervention will be evaluated through pre- and post-measurements of absenteeism rates and employee engagement scores, enabling the institution to assess causal impacts and scalability across departments.

CONCLUSION

This study underscores the pivotal role of organizational culture in shaping absenteeism patterns within HEIs, revealing how weak leadership engagement, lack of professional incentives, and bureaucratic inefficiencies contribute to high absenteeism rates. Addressing these structural issues is essential for fostering a committed, motivated, and accountable workforce. By implementing targeted strategies that enhance leadership effectiveness, refine institutional policies, and streamline administrative processes, HEIs can significantly reduce absenteeism and improve overall workforce engagement. This research contributes to the broader discourse on absenteeism in HEIs by providing empirical evidence supporting the need for institutional reforms that address workforce engagement holistically. Future studies should examine the long-term effects of these strategies, particularly in different institutional and cultural settings, to identify best practices that can be broadly implemented across HEIs. By addressing absenteeism through leadership enhancement, structured policy frameworks, and administrative reforms, HEIs can create a sustainable environment that supports faculty and staff engagement, ultimately strengthening institutional performance and student outcomes.



To ensure practical implementation, these interventions should align with national higher education policies promoted by the Secretaría de Educación Pública (SEP) and follow OECD guidelines on institutional governance. Establishing a cross-functional “Engagement and Attendance Committee” can institutionalize participatory policy review and ensure that reforms are data-driven and iterative. Adopting international frameworks, such as UNESCO’s 2023 Higher Education Transformation Agenda, will further align local initiatives with global standards for academic workforce sustainability.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Author Contributions

VHLL, CECL conceived the data. **VHLL, AJA, VCJ, RVT, AGS, HCS, JRA** analyzed and interpreted the data. All authors were involved in drafting and revising the manuscript.

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ANEXOS

Table 1. Institutional predictors of absenteeism among faculty and administrative staff at UABJO

Institutional Factor	Standardized Coefficient (β)	Significance (p-value)	Direction of Effect	Relative Impact on Absenteeism	Interpretation / Qualitative Insight
Weak Leadership Engagement	0.65	$p < 0.05$	Positive ($\uparrow$ absenteeism)	High	Departments with limited managerial support, ineffective communication, and weak participatory governance report the highest absenteeism. Faculty and staff describe poor leadership as a primary cause of disengagement and low morale.
Lack of Professional Incentives	0.52	$p < 0.05$	Positive ($\uparrow$ absenteeism)	Medium-High	Insufficient recognition, limited promotion pathways, and stagnant salary structures reduce motivation and commitment, particularly among faculty seeking research support or advancement.
Bureaucratic Inefficiencies	0.48	$p < 0.05$	Positive ($\uparrow$ absenteeism)	Medium	Administrative rigidity, excessive paperwork, and delays in decision-making generate frustration and discourage institutional engagement. Respondents describe bureaucracy as “demotivating” and “unresponsive.”
Collaborative Leadership and Participatory Governance	—	—	Negative ($\downarrow$ absenteeism)	High (protective factor)	Departments characterized by participatory decision-making, transparent communication, and structured incentive programs reported approximately 28% lower absenteeism. These environments foster accountability and trust.

Note. Regression model includes leadership engagement, professional incentives, and bureaucratic inefficiencies as independent variables predicting self-reported absenteeism rates among faculty and administrative staff ($N = 250$). All predictors are statistically significant at $p < 0.05$. Qualitative interpretations are based on thematic coding of 25 semi-structured interviews.

Table 2. Integration of quantitative predictors of absenteeism with qualitative themes and representative participant quotations.

Predictor	Qualitative Theme	Representative Quote
Weak Leadership	Disconnection from institutional mission	“Leadership decisions are made without consulting us.”
Lack of Incentives	Perceived inequity	“Effort and absenteeism are treated the same.”



Table 3. Comparative analysis of faculty and administrative staff absenteeism drivers at UABJO

Category	Faculty Members	Administrative Staff	Interpretation and Recommended Interventions
Primary Drivers of Absenteeism	Low research and publication incentives Excessive bureaucratic workload Lack of professional development opportunities	Workplace dissatisfaction and monotony - Inefficient workflow management Limited managerial support and recognition	Faculty absenteeism reflects <i>academic demotivation</i> and <i>structural barriers</i> to research and teaching autonomy. Administrative absenteeism is linked to <i>low engagement</i> and <i>insufficient managerial feedback</i> . Interventions should be role-specific.
Underlying Institutional Factors	Limited access to research funding and sabbaticals - Rigid administrative procedures affecting teaching schedules - Insufficient academic recognition mechanisms	Centralized decision-making - Redundant reporting systems - Lack of performance appraisal feedback loops	Faculty require academic incentives and administrative flexibility. Administrative staff benefit from process streamlining and inclusive management practices.
Impact on Institutional Performance	Class cancellations and reduced instructional continuity - Lower student satisfaction - Decreased research productivity	Delayed administrative operations - Inefficient service delivery - Decline in institutional responsiveness	Both forms of absenteeism undermine institutional trust and operational reliability, affecting the university's academic reputation.
Cultural and Leadership Context	Hierarchical leadership models reduce faculty autonomy - Weak collegial governance culture	Limited participatory decision-making - Poor vertical communication channels	A culture of shared governance and transformational leadership is needed to improve engagement and reduce absenteeism across roles.
Recommended Interventions	Establish research funding and merit-based recognition programs - Introduce academic mentoring and leadership development initiatives - Simplify research and teaching-related administrative processes	Implement workflow optimization and digital management systems - Create clear performance-based incentive schemes - Strengthen middle-management training in communication and engagement	Tailored interventions should address the distinct professional motivations of each group while promoting an integrated institutional culture of accountability and participation.

Note. Comparative results are based on survey responses from 150 faculty and 100 administrative staff, triangulated with 25 semi-structured interviews. Faculty absenteeism was primarily associated with academic demotivation and procedural overload, while administrative absenteeism was linked to job dissatisfaction and lack of managerial engagement.