

Examining the Predicators of Students' Academic Engagement at the University Level

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Soad Altaher Ahmed Mohammed¹, Turkeya Burka Ali Burka²

1. Abu-Isa Faculty of Education- University of Zawia - Libya
2. College of Arts. - University of Zawia - Libya
soadaltaherm@gmail.com

Abstract

This study investigates the factors that affect students' academic engagement and identifies the relevant factor. Using a sampling approach, the study involved 27 seventh-semester English department students from Abu- Issa Faculty of Education who completed questionnaires and five students who conducted interviews. A convergent parallel design was utilized to gather data through both quantitative methods involving questionnaires and interviews. The data analysis involved utilizing values determining deviations, and performing content analysis, for the interview responses. The study findings showed that factors related to teachers play a significant role in predicting students' academic involvement. Specifically highlighted was the importance of teacher feedback in this aspect. Students also stressed the significance of teacher supportiveness, reliable communication and effective teaching practices. Furthermore, the study noted that peer assistance and parental participation were aspects contributing to engagement. The recommendation for increasing engagement is for educators to concentrate on giving feedback, while families should establish supportive settings for learning.

Keywords: Academic Engagement, predicators of engagement, university level.

دراسة العوامل التي تؤثر على المشاركة الأكاديمية لطلبة الجامعة.

سعاد الطاهر أحمد محمد¹، تركية بركة علي بركة²
1. جامعة الزاوية / كلية التربية ابو عيسى 2. جامعة الزاوية / كلية الآداب.
soadaltaherm@gmail.com

الملخص

تتناول هذه الدراسة العوامل المؤثرة في المشاركة الأكاديمية لطلاب الجامعة وتحدد أكثر العوامل تأثيرا في العملية التعليمية. استخدمت الدراسة منهج نوعي كمي لجمع المعلومات من خلال استبيان ومقابلة طُبقت على طالبات الفصل السابع بقسم اللغة الإنجليزية بكلية التربية ابو عيسى - جامعة الزاوية و تم اختيار العينة من هذا المستوى لإدراكهم واستيعابهم للمعلومات المطلوبة في وسيلتي جمع المعلومات وبذلك تكون نتائج هذه الدراسة خاصة بالعينة المذكورة أعلاه. وأظهرت نتائج الدراسة بعد تحليل البيانات باستخدام برنامج التحليل الإحصائي للعلوم الاجتماعية أن المعلم هو أهم عامل من العوامل المؤثرة في تحصيل الطالبات من خلال دعمهن بأرائه ونقده الإيجابي الذي يشجعهم على التواصل معه وأوضحت الدراسة أيضا تأثير زملاء الفصل الواحد ودعمهم لبعضهم البعض وأكدت الدراسة على أهمية دور الأسرة في دعم وتهيئة الظروف المناسبة لأبنائها وتقديم الحوافز الإيجابية التي تساعد على جودة التحصيل العلمي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: المشاركة الأكاديمية، التنبؤ بالمشاركة، المستوى الجامعي.

1. Introduction

In the years, academic involvement has gained importance in faculties and universities because it is closely tied to students' success and overall happiness. Engagement refers to the dedication students put into tasks that support learning and growth. It plays a role, in performance retention rates and personal development. Universities worldwide are focusing on enhancing student

achievements by exploring what influences involvement—an area of interest, for both researchers and educators.

Many research projects have explored the idea of student involvement in academics discovered a variety of factors that affect how students engage with their learning environment. These predictors can be divided into categories such as aspects, peer relationships, teacher influence, institutional factors and family dynamics. Each of these elements contributes uniquely to shaping a student's drive, participation and overall academic journey. For example, the motivations stemming from within students themselves interactions with peers and feedback from teachers have all been recognized as catalysts for engagement, across educational settings. There is still a lack of clarity, on how these elements impact student involvement, in universities.

The main goal of this research is to investigate what influences student College involvement in academics among those in their 7th semester at Abu -Issa College of Education. By examining the impact of relationships with peers and teachers, as well as the environment within the institution and family dynamics, on academic engagement levels, this study aims to offer valuable insights that could shape initiatives aimed at boosting student participation and achievement in universities, across Libya. Understanding the role that engagement plays in enhancing student performance is essential, for developing educational settings that promote in-depth learning and long-term academic enthusiasm.

Depending on this purpose, the following research questions were developed for the study:

- a. What are the factors influencing the students' academic engagement?
- b. What are the most prominent factors that influence the students' academic engagement?

1.1 . Statement of the problem.

To the best of our knowledge, there are not many studies that look at the factors influencing Faculty students' participation, despite the fact that earlier academics conducted many studies on students'

engagement. Additionally, not much research was done in the Libyan environment, especially when it came to the factors affecting students' participation. Recognizing the importance of participation, this study looks into several important factors that influence students' engagement at university level.

2. Literature review

This section deals with the definition of engagement and the factors influencing the students' academic engagement. In recent years, students' academic engagement has been a goal of higher education due to its direct association with the well-being of students. Various types of definitions have been proposed. For example, Kuh (2009a, 683) has defined students' academic engagement as "the time and effort students devote to activities that are empirically linked to desired outcomes of faculty and what institutions do to induce students to participate in these activities". Academic engagement becomes one of the most important characteristics related to adequate performance and achievement in higher education, or passion for learning (Gute, &Wainman, 2019; Casuso-Holgado et al., 2013; Pike,Smart, & Ethington, 2012; Schaufeliet al, 2002). It has been discovered that engaged students perform better academically and they have an innate desire to learn, attend classes, and engage in study activities (Bakker et al, 2015). Success is significantly predicted by engagement. Students will succeed better if they participate in academic activities more (Harboura, Lauren, Chris & Lindsay, 2015).Given the widespread belief that student engagement is flexible, it is vital to identify the predictors that may be encouraged to positively impact it as well as investigate the most prominent factors of academic engagement. Several elements influence how interested students are with their academics. These factors influence how they engage with the material in class. Among these are peer, family, Faculty, and instructor predictors in addition to personal ones. However, it was discovered that these factors had the biggest effects on students' academic engagement. (Crosnoe, Johnson, & Elder, 2004; Bempecht, 1998; Nepal & Rogerson, 2020; Werang & Leba, 2022;Kurdek & Sinclair, 2000; Hamre&Pianta,

2001; McCoy & Banks, 2012; Li et al. 2010 ; Martin and Dowson 2009; Dukuzumuremyi and Siklander2018; Abdullah *et al.*, 2012). Therefore, the purpose of the present study is to examine these predictors that impact the Libyan students' academic engagement as well as to find out the most frequent factor that influences their engagement.

2.1 Definition of academic engagement

A student's active participation in a learning task is referred to as engagement (Christenson, Reschly, & Wylie, 2012). Reeve and Tseng (2011) state that behavior, emotion, cognition, and agency are the four interdependent components that make up the multidimensional construct of engagement. Depending on the three dimensions of engagement, the notion of engagement has been defined differently. For instance, Newmann, et al. (1992) have defined engagement as the student's psychological investment in, and effort directed toward learning, understanding, or mastering the knowledge, skills., or crafts that academic work is intended to promote. To Kuh (2009: 683), engagement is “the time and effort students devote to activities that are empirically linked to desired outcomes of Faculty and what institutions do to induce students to participate in these activities”. Also, engagement refers to the student psychological process includes attention, interest, application and effort in learning (Yazzie-Mintz, 2010). According to DeVito (2016), engagement refers to commitment to an activity; it is the relationship between people and activities.

2.2. Factors influencing students' academic engagement

Academic engagement involvement in the setting of higher education has been linked to a number of factors. Some of these factors are categorized as the most influential ones. Taylor and Parsons (2011) have proposed five factors as being highly significant in influencing students' learning engagement. These predictors include personal, teacher, peer, Faculty and family factors.

2.2.1 Personal factors

Principally, the review of literature demonstrates that personal factors consist of: (a) motivation, in the following areas: (a) drive,

dedication, and attitude; (b) peer networking and interaction; (c) learning styles; (d) mentality, conviction, awareness, vision, degree of confidence, etc. (Nepal & Rogerson, 2020; Werang&Leba, 2022; Groves, Sellars, Smith, & Barber, 2015; Picton, Kahu& Nelson, 2018; Moul, 2010; Groves, Sellars, Smith, and Barber,2015). For example, Moul (2010) has said that motivation is the most important factor affecting academic engagement. It has an impact on the inspiration for independent thought, the drive to accomplish goals, and the commitment to learning. Also, Groves, Sellars, Smith, and Barber (2015) have a similar opinion, arguing that students would be more driven to learn if they were confident in their ability to learn and could do it on their own.

2.2.2. Peer factors

As scholars have started to notice the possible connection between academic behaviors like school engagement and peer connections, they believe that peers are important people who are vital to students' psychological and intellectual development (Poulin& Chan, 2010). Students who are rejected by their classmates, for example, exhibit less interest in and engagement in school, are more likely to feel alienated and drop out, and this impacts how they interact with their peers (Buhs and Ladd 2001). Additionally, Gilman et al. (2009) thought that one of the best indicators of life happiness in the learning engagement is social support from peers.

2.2.3Teacher factors

The relationship between teachers and students is a crucial lens through which to view students' engagement; interactions between teachers and students tend to be supportive and positive specially when teachers are enthusiastic, well-prepared, approachable, and have positive beliefs and attitudes toward learning (Mearns, Meyer and Bharadwaj, 2007; Umbach&Wawrzynski, 2005). More studies (Guvenc, 2015; Pianta, Hamre, & Allen, 2012) believe that when students feel that their teacher actually cares about their learning, they will be happy, content, and like learning activities without pressure. This claim is supported by Veiga and colleagues (2014) who propose that students learn more efficiently when teachers include them in learning activities by giving them freedom to learn, giving them praise, and giving assignments to groups of students.

2.2.4 School factors.

Institutional factors (school factors) comprise (a) the provision of facilities (tools, labs, software, and basic/advanced equipment). (b) The physical configuration of the classroom, including the lighting and ventilation systems. (c) Ongoing support (loan, guidelines, best-student recognition, etc.) (d) the design of the curriculum and syllabus (learning objectives, results, goals, and assessment); (extracurricular activities (Nepal & Rogerson, 2020; Karafil& Oguz, 2019; Werang& RadjaLeba, 2022; Steen-Utheim& Foldnes, 2018). For instance, extracurricular activities provide students with a genuine chance to develop their social identities and skills. Some of the extracurricular activities include: sports, art music, games, drama clubs etc. These activities provided by schools/faculties done outside schools/ Faculties. As Olson (2008) told that the students who attended school's musical programs had less sentiment of distance, had advanced individual development and a typical bon between home and school. It provides students with an informal organization and an emotionally supportive network that is related to their school (referred to in Darling, Caldwell and Smith et al., in Feldman and Matiasko, 2005).

2.2.5 Family factors

Family is another significant contextual element. This factor is sometimes referred to as academic support and motivation (Bempecht, 1998). The term "parental influence" describes how parents instruct and educate their children both at home and at school. Studies have indicated that parental participation can improve academic performance (Paratore, Melzi, &Krol-Sinclair, 1999). According to some research, some students' academic struggles may stem from a lack of parental participation (Barnard, 2004).

3. Research method

This section outlines the methodology employed in this study, which investigates the predictors of students' academic engagement at university level. The study aims to find out the factors that impact students' academic engagement and which factor is the most prominent of these factors. The design for this study is quantitative

and qualitative. The results of this study will provide general indications applied by the participants of the study only.

3.1 Participants

Twenty-seven students of 7th semester at English department at abu-Issa Faculty of Education were targeted. They are all females and nearly at the same range of age. This sample was purposively selected for their strong academic performance, as they are in their final semester before graduating. Five students of this group were chosen for an interview to support the results obtained from the questionnaire. They are top in class. DeVito (2016) claimed that students with a good background and learning accomplishment could demonstrate their learning engagement. Therefore, the researchers choose the sample from high semesters.

3.2 Data collection

The researchers used a questionnaire and an interview as instruments to collect data. The questionnaire consisted of five parts with twenty-five questions. These parts are entitled personal, peers, teacher, faculty and family, respectively. The data obtained was analyzed for means, standard deviation and rank by using SPSS for reporting the results. The factors predicting learners' engagement were interpreted by using the rating scale proposed by Zepke et al. (2010). 1.00- 1.66 (least importance); 1.67 - 2.33 (some importance or moderate); and 2.34 - 3.00 (high importance). The qualitative data collected from interviews then analyzed according to their content.

4. Findings of the results

The following part provides an analysis of the results of the factors predicting students' academic engagement and which is the prominent factor.

4.1 Personal Factors

It has been demonstrated that personal motivation served as some importance or moderate scoring at 2.16. The data indicates that two items are found to have high importance "having pressure in the classroom" is the most important factor with a mean of 3.12, followed by "being able to answer questions from teachers" at 2.40. "Having goals for learning" received the mean of 2.17. The other two items are noticed to have lower scores than the others.

Table 1 personal factors

Factor	Items	Mean	Standard Deviation	Ranking
Personal	Having goals for learning	2.17	0.51	4
	Being able to understand teachers' instructions	2.33	0.49	3
	Being able to answer questions to teachers	2.40	0.45	2
	Having pressure in classroom	3.12	0.80	1
	Knowing where to ask for advice about learning	2.11	0.82	5
	Total		2.16	520.

4.2 Peer-related Factors

The results showed that scored (1.76) "Classmates' positive feedback and praises" represent the most important factor with a mean of 3.10, followed by "understanding lessons more clearly when classmates help explain" at 2.50.

Table 2 peer –related factor

Factor	Items	Mean	Standard Deviation	Ranking
Peer	Learning and discussing with classmates/peers	2.18	0.50	4
	Understanding lessons more clearly when classmates help explain	2.50	0.55	2
	Classmates' positive words and praises	3.10	0.60	1
	Having fun with classmates in learning	1.76	0.75	4
	Total		2.38	0.61

4.2. Teacher-related Factors Results:

"Teacher comments/feedback" is the most significant factor with a mean of 3.31, indicating the strong impact of effective feedback.

Meanwhile, "teacher's attention and caring" received the lowest mean of 1.44.

Table 3- Teacher related factor

Factor	Items	Mean	Standard Deviation	Ranking
Teacher	Kind, friendly teacher	1.90	0.70	4
	Teacher's attention and caring on student learning	1.44	0.77	5
	Teacher's teaching methods	2.62	0.50	3
	Teacher's encouragement and communication	2.75	0.31	2
	Teacher comments/feedbacks	3.31	0.27	1
	Total		2.40	0.42

4.4 School-related Factors

Results: "Facilities for learning" emerged as the most important factor with a mean of 3.04, followed by "school activities that call for parent participation" at 2.24.

Table 4 -School-related Factors

Factor	Items	Mean	Standard Deviation	Ranking
School	Extra-curriculum activities provided by school	1.63	0.70	6
	School activities that call for parent participation	2.24	0.56	3
	Facilities for learning	3.04	0.35	1
	School library	2.10	0.64	4
	Staff reaction and communication	2.42	0.45	2
	Strict rules and regulations in school	2.13	0.48	5
	Total		2.26	0.46

4.5 Family-related Factors

"Full support by parents" is the most significant factor with a mean of 3.13, while "parents as advisors for learning" received the lowest mean of 1.28.

Table 5- Family-related Factors

Factor	Items	Mean	Standard Deviation	Ranking
Family	Parents giving rewards or offering praise	2.32	0.50	3
	Full support by parents	3.13	0.55	1
	Parents as advisors for learning	1.28	0.65	5
	Close contact with school by parents	2.19	0.75	4
	Having interest and follow up in learning by parents	2.78	0.70	2
	Total		2.34	0.39

Looking at the table below, it is clear that across 5 factors there are two factors personal and Faculty which scored some importance towards learning engagement. The other three factors are found to have high importance. The teacher scored the highest rate (2.40).

Table 6 summary of five factors predicting academic engagement

Factor	Mean	S. D	Rank + interpretation
Personal motivation	2.16	.520	5 / some importance
Peer	2.38	0.61	2 / high importance
Teacher	2.40	0.42	1 / high importance
Faculty	2.26	0.46	4 / some importance
Family	2.34	0.39	3 / high importance

5. Discussion

In this study, the findings revealed that the student participants rate different level in each factor of academic engagement. At the personal level it is noticed that the significant impact of classroom pressure on academic achievement (3.12) calls for effective pressure management. Educators should create a supportive learning

environment that encourages students to set clear educational goals. This result is consistent with a study carried by Gobena (2024) who ensured that academic stress prevents good academic achievement and cause a lot of problems or dropout.

Alternatively, peer factor has the second highest mean (2.38). This reflects the positive influence of peer support and encouragement on academic performance, highlighting the importance of fostering collaboration among students. Activities that enhance positive interactions among peers should be encouraged. This outcome appears to be in line with Gedera, Williams, and Wright (2015). We discover that relationships and cooperative learning among students are strongly influenced by communication and contact with classmates, and that this helps to predict students' motivation and participation in the learning process. Similar findings were made by other researchers (O'Brien, 2015; Murray et al., 2004), who noted that students can support one another by encouraging and praising one another for learning when they collaborate with friends or classmates. Other researches concur that peers play a critical role in determining students' dedication and involvement in learning (Zepk&Leach 2010; Witkowski, &Cornell, 2015).

The teacher is determined to be a highly significant factor (2.40). which makes it the most prominent factor in affecting learners' academic engagement. Teacher's comments / feedbacks underscores the importance of feedback in enhancing students' learning. Teachers should focus on providing constructive feedback to improve students' academic performance. A study carried by Obilor (2019) showed that effective feedback has been demonstrated to do a variety of things, including helping students identify areas in which they are weak in their education and offering recommendations to close those gaps, developing responsive learners, honing teaching techniques, giving teachers and students useful information, inspiring students to learn, and much more. Other studies (DeVito, 2016; Zepke, Leach, & Butler, 2010) have also noticed the importance of teachers' role in learning process. According to research conducted by (Guvenc, 2015; Pianta, Hamre, & Allen, 2012), students who feel that their teachers are willing to

help them learn will be happier and find learning more enjoyable. This study's findings support these findings by showing students that their teachers care about them and are friendly.

Faculty-related factor(Educational facilities), which occupied the third rank among the factors (2.34) plays a vital role in supporting academic success. Schools should strive to provide a conducive learning environment and enhance parental involvement in school activities.

The last factor is family, which occupied the third rank with a mean of (2.34). Parental support is crucial for students' academic success. Families should promote a nurturing environment and provide motivation for learning. This result seems to be consistent with many other researchers.

6. Responses from the interview

The interview data, which was taken from five of the top students in their seventh level, demonstrated that personal, peer, and teacher factors were the most important factors of influence on students' engagement, whereas family and school were the least important factors. As the participants' responses demonstrate, the students motivated themselves by using various activities. These activities included lesson preparation, speaking up, paying attention, taking notes, running dictation, and asking questions. Let's look at the response from P1:

"Sometimes I participate in preparing the lesson, so I have some background on the lesson that gives me the opportunity to participate with the teacher. Sometimes, I participate by giving my own opinions and my point of view on some topics that are up for discussion. I actively listen to the instructor and take notes: Paying attention and taking notes can help me retain the information being presented and stay engaged in the lecture. I ask the instructor questions if I have any uncertainties or need further clarification on a topic. I engage in class discussions by sharing my thoughts, perspectives, and insights on the material being covered."

Peer is as another factor that was further explored with respondents' interview. They claimed that peers or classmates affect their academic engagement. P3 said:

"...socialization with peers make Faculty life easier as we share problems that we face as students. Communication with peers helps me feel more involved and especially with students from previous semesters who help us with their experience, with teachers and subjects...provide us with some useful resources like websites, YouTube channels that help us often with the Study journey".

When examining how participants see the teacher factor, it becomes evident that participants stated that they need supportive teachers to help them in their class engagement. They showed that teachers' support make them safe, satisfied and more energetic. This can be clarified from the following participants' comments:

"Teachers support me and give me energy to go on without any fear result it's like a new soul to me when my teacher caresfor me and thinks how to hold me up"P2.

P1 reported by saying teachers help us:

"facilitating some points in the lesson and answering my questions at the end of the lesson or after the lecture".

She added by saying that supportive teachers give us different types of activities for engaging in the class, these activities include:

"Discussion Prompts: teacher ask open-ended questions to spark conversation and encourage students to share their thoughts"P1.

Family factors were identified in the interview transcript as an additional element. This element influences how engaged students are in their engagement. The participants claimed that their parents assisted them with their schoolwork even if they did not contact with their teachers. This explanation can be understood from quotes bellow:

"My family helps me with homework. They do not communicate with my teachers permanently. They do not take part in faculty's social life P1.

Another participant (P3) commented:

"My parents express interest in my academic achievement by celebrating my success, and offering verbal encouragement in general. They never communicate with my teachers. They help me in my tasks if the tasks require things like printing yes other than that No".

Furthermore, when participants reported that their institution is good but lacks facilities to meet our demands, the Faculty component emerged as a predictor of academic engagement. The following words demonstrate such an opinion:

"I think our faculty is good. There is a lot of good teachers in our Faculty. But the faculty construction is not good enough, and many tools and materials are not available. I am not satisfied with the schedule program. Our university can provide the Internet to students. Also, although we have a library in our faculty but it is not useful, as many books are not available, and books in the library are not organized and classified in a way that helps the student. Furthermore, our Faculty must work to prepare the examination schedule so that it suits the students. Also, the university must listen to the students' problems and demands and try to help them. There are no extracurricular activities in our Faculty" P1.

7. Conclusion

This study aimed to find out the factors that impact students' academic engagement and to identify the most prominent factor that influences the academic engagement. It is found that the teacher-related factor receives the highest rating among the influential factors predicting the academic engagement of the participants, indicating that the teacher has a great predictive power on their academic engagement. It is discovered that the two categories of quantitative and qualitative data are supportive of or well consistent with one another. When considering the qualitative data, the participants stated that they need supportive teachers to help them in their class engagement. They showed that teachers' support makes

them safe, satisfied, and more energetic. The questionnaire revealed that peer support had the second-highest score. This illustrates how peer support and encouragement have a favorable impact on academic achievement. This reflects the positive influence of peer support and encouragement on academic performance. This result is also confirmed by interviewee's responses. While Faculty and family- related factors were found to have high importance in quantitative data, but they have the least importance in qualitative data. Personal – related factors are considered important in qualitative analysis as the participants' responses demonstrate that the students motivated themselves by using various activities. These activities included lesson preparation, speaking up, paying attention, taking notes, running dictation, and asking questions.

8. Recommendation

1. Educators should create a supportive learning environment that encourages students to set clear educational goals
2. Activities that enhance positive interactions among peers should be encouraged.
3. Teachers should focus on providing constructive feedback to improve students' academic performance.
4. Schools should strive to provide a conducive learning environment and enhance parental involvement in school activities.
5. Families should promote a nurturing environment and provide motivation for learning.

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