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DETERMINANTS OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT- A REVIEW STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Student engagement refers to the time and energy students invest in educationally purposeful activities. Engaged students are involved in their work, persist despite problems and obstacles, and take noticeable delight in completing their work. The present paper is a brief attempt to discuss the concept of student engagement and how it is gaining in importance in education all over the world. The reasons for its growing importance are discussed. The review of literature shows that the extent of student engagement in an educational institute is determined by a multitude of factors which include personal, demographic, environmental as well as institutional. This paper while exploring the multi-faceted nature of student engagement presents a review of the effect of demographic factors such as socio-economic status, age, race and gender on student engagement. In addition it also talks about the environmental factors which include the various relationships that a student has and develops i.e. student-parent, student-teacher and student- peer relationships and the effect that these relationships has on student's involvement with the process of education.

KEYWORDS : Student Engagement , educationally purposeful activities , demographic, environmental .

INTRODUCTION :

The concept of student engagement has been in the educational literature for a very long time, with a constantly evolving definition and meaning. Engagement as a term has its roots in the management and corporate studies where the concepts of productivity and engagement were linked and discussed at length. It has been defined in the past as the behavioural intensity and emotional quality of a person's active involvement during a task.

Student engagement is a multi-dimensional, multifaceted construct that includes affective, behavioural, and cognitive dimensions. The affective dimension consists of students' feelings about

the school, teachers, and/or peers. The behavioural dimension covers students' observable actions or performance, such as participation in extracurricular activities, completion of homework, as well as grades, grade point averages, and scores on achievement tests. The cognitive dimension comprises students' perceptions and beliefs related to self, school, teachers, and other students (Jimerson, Campos & Greif, 2003).

The concept of student engagement has grown over the years. Early studies of student engagement often focused on observable behaviours e.g., behaviours directly related to academic effort and achievement (Johnson, Crosnoe, & Elder, 2001).

Later on the definitions also included the affective component e.g. engagement in school was defined as "…having both a behavioural component, termed participation, and an emotional component, termed identification" (Jimerson, Campos & Greif, 2003).

Engagement is more than involvement or participation – it requires feelings and sense making as well as activity. Acting without feeling engaged is just involvement or even compliance; feeling engaged without acting is dissociation (Harper and Quaye, 2008).

From the above definitions it can be summarized that student engagement is a multifaceted concept. A review of empirical studies suggests that there are various determinants of student engagement both demographic as well as institutional. Engagement is not conceptualized as an attribute of the student only, but rather a state of being that is highly influenced by contextual factors, such as policies and practices of the institute and family or peer interactions as well as the socio-economic background, age and gender of the student.

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT WORLD-OVER

Student engagement is rooted in the philosophy of John Dewey (1897) but it was Alexander Astin (1985, 1993) who was one of the prime developers of college student engagement theories and research. Later on student engagement was measured through The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) which covered US, Canada and New Zealand. AUSSE- Australasian Survey of Student Engagement in 2012 covered over 30 institutions across Australia and New Zealand. HSSSE-High School Survey of Student Engagement has been used to measure the engagement of Indiana secondary students, with more than 400,000 students in over 40 states completing the survey between 2006 and 2013. In addition to this student engagement framework, techniques and programmes find their place on the sites of world class universities like Havard, Yale and Stanford.

IMPORTANCE OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

The importance of student engagement has been emphasized by educationists and researchers. Evidence suggests that engagement is critical in enhancing student achievement (Akey, 2006; Heller, Calderon, & Medrich, 2003; Garcia-Reid, Reid, & Peterson, 2005). It is strongly related to student performance on assessment tasks, especially for students who have been traditionally less advantaged in school settings (Taylor, Kokka, Hammond and Dieckmann, 2010). Student engagement is generally considered to be among the better predictors of learning and personal development. (Kuh, 2003). The very act of being engaged also adds to the foundation of skills and dispositions that is essential to live a productive and satisfying life after college (Carini, Kuh and Klein, 2006) as the students who are involved in educationally productive activities in college are developing habits of the mind and heart that enlarge their capacity for continuous learning and personal development (Shulman, 2002). Student engagement is linked positively to desirable learning outcomes such as critical thinking and grades (Carini, Kuh and Klein, 2006). On the other hand students who fail to engage can become

demotivated, abandon their study and be deterred from future educational opportunities (Kirby & Sharpe, 2001). Poor engagement has consequences for academic institutes as it results in poor retention rates, which have a negative impact on finances, accreditation and reputation (Baruah, 2011).

DEMOGRAPHIC DETERMINANTS OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

Various research studies show the effect of factors such as age, gender and socio-economic status on student engagement. Johnson, Crosnoe and Elder (2001) ; and Amir, Saleha, Jelas, Ahmad and Hutkemri(2014) in their respective studies found younger students to be more attached and engaged than their older counter-parts. Johnson et. al (2001); Frontier (2007); Houston and Jackson (2012): Teoh, Abdullah, Roslan and Daud (2013) and Amir, Saleha, Jelas, Ahmad and Hutkemri(2014) found girls to be more engaged than boys whereas Brint, Cantwell and Hanneman's (2008) study found that men scored higher on student engagement scales indicating the continuing advantages of the dominant gender group with respect to engagement. On the same scale however Harper, Carini, Bridges and Hayek (2004) found men and women to be equally engaged with the educational process. Brint, Cantwell and Hanneman (2008); Jensen (2013) found that students from upper social class backgrounds scored higher, while first-generation college students scored lower, indicating continuing advantages of students from higher socio-economic strata. Houston and Jackson (2012) found that students of color who are in minority on campus have higher levels of academic engagement than that of students who form the majority. Clark (2014) found that while students from urban liberal arts colleges spent more time and effort on their academic coursework, students at rural colleges spent more time in out-of-class interactions with faculty members.

ENVIRONMENTAL DETERMINANTS OF STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

Student's emotional environment is directly influenced by their relationships which in turn has a direct influence on their engagement. Martin and Dowson (2009); Epstein, et al. (2002) showed that high-quality interpersonal relationships in students' lives contributed to their academic motivation, engagement, and achievement.

PARENTS SHAPE ENGAGEMENT

A large number of studies advocate that one pathway through which parenting has an impact on children's performance is by shaping children's classroom engagement, intrinsic motivation, preference for challenge, valuing and commitment to studies, and passion, enjoyment, and interest in schoolwork (Epstein, et al. 2002; Ginsberg & Bronstein, 1993; Gottfried, Fleming, & Gottfried, 1998; Grolnick & Ryan, 1989, 1992; Grolnick, Ryan, & Deci, 1991; Pomerantz, Grolnick, & Price, 2005).

TEACHERS SHAPE ENGAGEMENT

Close and caring relationships with teachers and other adults in school have been shown to be an important predictor of student engagement across race, ethnicity, and class (e.g., Connell, Halpern-Felsher, Clifford, Crichlow, & Usinger, 1995; Connell, Spencer, & Aber, 1994; Garcia-Reid, Reid & Peterson, 2002; Wooley & Bowen, 2007). Zepke, Leach, and Butler (2010); Pianta, Hamre and Allen (2012) found that teachers and institutions have prime influence on engagement. According to them teachers seem to have a stronger influence on student engagement than either motivation or external influences the other two variables in their study. Kuh et al. (2006) too positioned teaching and teachers at the heart of engagement. Bryson and Hand (2007) argued that students are more likely to engage

when they are supported by faculty that establishes welcoming learning environments, demand high standards, challenge, and make themselves generously available to discuss academic queries. Skinner and Belmont (1993); Umbach and Wawrzynski (2005); Wiggan (2008) concurred that the educational environment shaped by teachers' behaviors, beliefs and attitudes had a remarkable effect on student learning and engagement. The results from Kelly (2007) and Wiggan (2008) study showed that teacher practices were the most instrumental effect that affected student outcomes.   Johnson (2008) even went to the extent suggesting that low levels of engagement may not be a "student-problem" but may instead be a "teacher-problem".

PEERS SHAPE ENGAGEMENT

In addition to teachers and parents, peers influence student motivation and engagement (Wentzel, 1998). Although many studies highlight negative developmental influences from peers, in recent years, an increasing number show that children's friendships can also exert positive impact on academic development and engagement (e.g., Altermatt 2012 ; Deci, Koestner & Ryan, 2001 ; Wentzel, McNamara-Barry, & Caldwell, 2004) , especially school motivation and achievement (e.g., Berndt, 1999 ; Berndt & Keefe, 1995) . Moreover school engagement was predicted most strongly by engagement scores of close friends (e.g, Altermatt 2012) and attending school with high ability students has a positive effect on student engagement (e.g., Porter's (2006).

DISCUSSION

The above studies have thus collectively revealed that females on an average show higher engagement than the males due to their proactive attitude towards learning, their working harder to meet teacher expectations and higher academic engagement. Studies on socio-economic status reveal that lower socio-demographic backgrounds of students affected student engagement negatively whereas there are continuing advantages to students from higher socio-economic strata. Racial-ethnic composition does not seem to have a major impact on engagement. Engagement seems to vary with age as younger students were found to be more attached and engaged than their older counter-parts. The environmental determinants under which primarily student- parent, student-teacher and student-peers relationships were discussed showed that teacher involvement was most crucial to student's engagement in learning activities. Students reported higher levels of engagement and learning at institutes where faculty members used active and collaborative learning techniques, engaged students in experiences, emphasized higher-order cognitive activities in the classroom, interacted with students and challenged them academically. Peers exerted a strong effect on students, and getting educated with high ability students affected student engagement. parenting practices set the child's attitudes and mindsets as well as his engagement with education.

IMPLICATIONS

The extent to which demographics affect student engagement scores across age, socio-economic status, age, race and gender implies the importance that needs to be given to these determinants while framing any policy for encouraging student active participation in the educational process.

As teachers and teaching practices have a major influence on student engagement so there is a need to draw up a plan of action with the prime focus on developing teachers and teaching practices so that maximum student involvement can be generated. Parental involvement and positive parenting styles has beneficial implications for children's cognitive, behavioural and psychological engagement.

So it seems appropriate to suggest that parents should be made an active collaborative partner in the student engagement process. Conflicts with peers and the negative effect that it has on children's engagement in classroom brings to focus the importance of maintaining close, comfortable classroom environment across peer groups.

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