

A Review Paper on Teacher Autonomy Support, Student Engagement, and Self-Efficacy

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Abstract: This review paper examines the relationships among teacher autonomy support, self-efficacy, and the five factors of student engagement (affective engagement: liking for learning and liking for school; behavioral engagement: effort and persistence, and extracurricular activities; and cognitive engagement), with a focus on first-year undergraduate students. Findings suggest that autonomy-supportive teaching practices enhance student engagement across these dimensions. Despite strong evidence linking these constructs, limited research has examined the mechanisms underlying this relationship, particularly in the Philippine setting and especially among first-year undergraduate students transitioning from high school to higher education. Studies consistently show that self-efficacy beliefs also promote student engagement. This review highlights the necessity of integrative research to examine the mediating role of self-efficacy in the relationship between teacher autonomy support and the five factors of student engagement. Such insights may inform institutional policies and instructional practices aimed at promoting student engagement and academic success in higher education.

Keywords: Affective Engagement, Behavioral Engagement, Cognitive Engagement, First-Year Undergraduate Students, Teacher Autonomy Support, Self-efficacy.

1. Introduction

Student engagement is a cornerstone of personal growth, institutional retention, and academic success in higher education. Engagement consists of affective, behavioral, and cognitive involvement of students in their academic journey [1]. First-year students navigate a crucial transition from high school to college as they face developmental, social, and academic challenges [2]. These challenges have been further intensified by the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, which disrupted educational routines essential for developing academic habits, resilience, and social networks [3] [4] [5]. During this period, promoting engagement plays a vital role in academic adaptation and success [6].

While student engagement is frequently studied as a broad multidimensional construct, it is often conceptualized as comprising three dimensions: affective, behavioral, and cognitive [1]. Affective engagement reflects students' emotional responses to learning, such as a sense of belonging and enjoyment. The behavioral dimension involves effort, participation, and perseverance, while the cognitive dimension reflects students' strategic and reflective learning processes. This review focuses on five distinct factors within these dimensions—liking for learning, liking for school, effort and persistence, extracurricular involvement, and cognitive engagement—which provide a more nuanced understanding of how contextual and personal factors shape students' experiences in higher education.

One factor that has emerged as a significant predictor of engagement and motivation is teacher autonomy support. This concept refers to the extent to which teachers nurture students' sense of agency and volition by offering meaningful choices and encouraging self-initiation [7]. Autonomy-supportive teachers foster environments where students feel capable, empowered, and connected, rather than constrained by controlling strategies. Extant studies consistently show that autonomy-supportive environments enhance intrinsic

motivation, promote deeper learning, and sustain academic engagement [8] [9].

Self-efficacy also plays a central role in the relationship between teacher autonomy support and student engagement. Rooted in Bandura's social cognitive theory, self-efficacy refers to one's belief in the ability to succeed. It influences persistence, emotional regulation, and goal-setting in educational contexts. Students with high academic self-efficacy are more motivated, exert greater effort, and persist longer when faced with challenges. They also tend to adopt more effective learning strategies and regulate their emotions more efficiently under academic pressure [10]. Self-efficacy is shaped by both social and educational experiences. Autonomy-supportive teachers strengthen students' confidence by recognizing their strengths, providing opportunities for success, and posing appropriately challenging tasks [7] [11].

While engagement is often treated as a broad construct, examining its multiple dimensions offers a clearer understanding of students' emotional, behavioral, and cognitive connections with learning. Breaking it down into specific facets—liking for learning, liking for school, effort and persistence, extracurricular involvement, and cognitive engagement—provides richer insights into how learners interact with academic environments. Moreover, teacher autonomy support has consistently emerged as a powerful contextual factor influencing student engagement. However, limited research has examined the mechanisms that explain how and why these constructs are related, particularly in the Philippine context. By synthesizing existing literature, this paper aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the interplay between teacher practices and student beliefs, highlighting implications for fostering student engagement and academic success.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Five Factors of Student Engagement

Student engagement is a multidimensional construct widely regarded as crucial for both personal development and academic success in higher education [1] [12]. It is typically categorized into affective, behavioral, and cognitive components. Affective engagement captures students' emotional responses—such as enjoyment, anxiety, and interest—toward learning, teachers, peers, and school. Behavioral engagement reflects effort, participation, persistence, and appropriate conduct in both academic and extracurricular activities. Cognitive engagement involves students' psychological investment, commitment, and self-regulation in mastering complex skills and concepts [1] [13] [14] [15] [16] [17]. However, in this review, engagement is examined through five distinct dimensions—liking for learning, liking for school, effort and persistence, extracurricular involvement, and cognitive engagement—offering a more nuanced understanding of the construct.

Liking for learning refers to students' intrinsic inclination toward learning, manifested in their curiosity, enjoyment, and intellectual interest. This dimension fosters deeper academic engagement, intrinsic motivation, and persistence, thereby enhancing attention and comprehension of academic content [18] [19]. Liking for school emphasizes students' sense of belonging and emotional connection with their school. When students feel valued by teachers and peers, their engagement is reinforced, supporting both social integration and academic achievement [20]. Effort and persistence encompass the behavioral indicators of students' investment in their studies, including sustained focus and resilience in the face of challenges. Effort reflects consistent concentration, while persistence highlights determination over time—both essential for academic retention and success [21]. Extracurricular involvement pertains to participation in student organizations, service-learning, leadership roles, and other co-curricular activities. Such involvement promotes social and personal development and is frequently associated with improved academic performance and retention, particularly among first-year undergraduates [22]. Finally, cognitive engagement encompasses students' deliberate application of learning strategies, such as self-monitoring, critical thinking, and metacognitive regulation. These strategies enhance learning outcomes and are central to self-regulated learning across diverse learning modalities [23] [24].

2.2. Teacher Autonomy Support

Teacher autonomy support is a pedagogical approach that fosters student agency by recognizing students' perspectives, providing meaningful choices, and encouraging volitional participation in learning. In contrast, controlling teaching methods rely on pressure and extrinsic motivators [7] [25] [26]. Studies have shown that autonomy-supportive teaching practices promote student engagement.

2.3. Teacher Autonomy Support and Affective Engagement

2.3.1. Liking for Learning

Teacher autonomy support strengthens students' emotional connection to learning by fostering enjoyment and intrinsic motivation. Strategies such as acknowledging student perspectives, providing choices, and encouraging

participation enhance students' liking for learning [27] [28]. Empirical studies demonstrate that autonomy support is associated with academic enjoyment, which improves achievement [29], as well as greater motivation and satisfaction in online courses [30]. Moreover, autonomy-supportive interventions lead to higher positive affect [31]. Longitudinal evidence further indicates that autonomy support sustains engagement and reduces boredom, thereby maintaining students' interest over time [32] [33].

2.3.2. Liking for School

Beyond individual learning activities, teacher autonomy support contributes to students' overall satisfaction and enjoyment of school. Perceived autonomy support predicts higher well-being and engagement, with changes in support corresponding to changes in school enjoyment [34]. By fulfilling psychological needs, autonomy support enhances academic involvement and emotional engagement [35], improves peer relationships that foster belonging and well-being [36] [37], and strengthens engagement while reducing anxiety and depression [38].

2.4. Teacher Autonomy Support and Behavioral Engagement

2.4.1. Effort and Persistence

Autonomy-supportive teaching strengthens students' willingness to exert effort and persist in the face of challenges. Students who perceive autonomy support are more likely to stay engaged despite academic difficulties [39]. It also predicts deep learning [40], enhances intrinsic motivation and effort [41], and fosters sustained engagement and creativity [42]. Strong positive effects of autonomy support on motivation, self-beliefs, and engagement, underscoring its critical role in promoting long-term academic effort [43].

2.4.2. Extracurricular Activities

Although research directly linking autonomy support to extracurricular participation is limited, related studies suggest that supportive environments encourage broader involvement. Autonomy support has been shown to increase academic involvement [35] and extend motivation into leisure contexts such as physical activity [44]. These findings highlight the transferable influence of autonomy support beyond the classroom.

2.5. Teacher Autonomy Support and Cognitive Engagement

Autonomy support enhances cognitive engagement by encouraging choice, fostering curiosity, and providing meaningful rationales. These practices promote critical thinking, deeper understanding, and metacognitive strategy use [27] [28]. Studies show positive associations between autonomy support, deep learning [40], autonomous motivation, and flow [45]. Similarly, when students' autonomy needs are met, they adopt deeper learning approaches and employ more complex cognitive and metacognitive strategies [46].

2.6. Teacher Autonomy Support and Self-Efficacy

Findings consistently link autonomy support to higher levels of student self-efficacy [47] [48] [49] [50]. When teachers offer meaningful choices, clarify task value, and encourage decision-making, they empower students to take ownership of their learning [51]. Perceived autonomy

enhances both self-efficacy and self-regulation [47], while timely feedback and encouragement further reinforce confidence [50]. Self-efficacy is also shaped by social relationships [52]. Teacher and parental support strengthen students' self-efficacy [53] [54] [55], whereas lack of support has been associated with psychological difficulties [56]. Autonomy-supportive contexts therefore play a central role in building students' confidence, motivation, and resilience [57].

2.7. Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their capability to accomplish specific tasks. Higher levels of self-efficacy are associated with greater effort, resilience, and the pursuit of challenging goals [58]. This construct is particularly crucial in higher education, especially among first-year students who face heightened academic demands. Students with strong self-efficacy are more likely to employ strategic thinking, regulate their motivation, and persist in the face of challenges [59].

Research demonstrates that self-efficacy is closely linked to the five factors of student engagement. Students who believe in their academic abilities are more likely to enjoy learning and school, persist through difficulties, participate in extracurricular activities, and develop higher-order cognitive skills. In this regard, self-efficacy functions as a key mechanism that bridges teacher autonomy support and student engagement.

2.8. Self-efficacy and Affective Engagement

2.8.1. Liking for Learning

Students' belief in their capabilities plays a central role in shaping their enjoyment of learning. High self-efficacy is associated with stronger interest, enjoyment, and willingness to engage with academic tasks [60]. In online settings, self-efficacy reduced boredom and sustained attention [61], while in gamified learning environments, it predicted persistence and active participation [62]. These findings indicate that self-efficacy not only enhances motivation but also buffers against disengagement in less stimulating contexts. Beyond immediate enjoyment, self-efficacy fosters autonomous motivation [63], which has been shown to predict both achievement and sustained interest in learning [64] [65].

2.8.2. Liking for School

Self-efficacy also extends to students' emotional attachment to their school environment. Learners with strong self-beliefs report higher satisfaction, belongingness, and commitment to their academic community [66] [67]. These affective bonds are crucial for retention and engagement. Evidence from remote learning contexts suggests similar patterns: students with higher self-efficacy adapted more successfully to online instruction [68] and developed stronger emotional ties to the school community [69]. Taken together, these studies suggest that self-efficacy fosters not only enjoyment of learning but also a broader sense of connection to the educational environment.

2.9. Self-efficacy and Behavioral Engagement

2.9.1. Effort and Persistence

Self-efficacy is a strong determinant of effort and perseverance. Students with high self-efficacy tend to invest greater effort in their tasks and persist despite setbacks [70] [71] [72]. Unlike low self-efficacy learners, who often withdraw or reduce effort, self-efficacious students interpret challenges as opportunities to improve and attribute failure to

insufficient effort rather than lack of ability [73]. Intervention studies further confirm this link, showing that training in self-efficacy enhances persistence and goal setting [74]. This effect is evident across both traditional and online learning contexts, where high self-efficacy predicts concentration, diligence, and deep engagement [75] [76].

2.9.2. Extracurricular Involvement

Although less studied, emerging evidence suggests that self-efficacy also predicts participation beyond the classroom. Students with higher academic and social self-efficacy are more likely to engage in extracurricular activities and volunteer work, demonstrating greater motivation and commitment [77] [78]. This highlights the broader role of self-efficacy in promoting holistic student involvement.

2.10. Self-efficacy and Cognitive Engagement

Self-efficacy is equally important in maintaining the cognitive dimension of engagement. Students who believe in their abilities are more likely to employ deep learning strategies and avoid surface-level approaches [79]. Confidence in one's academic ability strengthens self-regulated learning skills such as goal setting, monitoring, and help-seeking [80], as well as metacognitive awareness, including planning and evaluating one's progress [81] [82]. These cognitive processes not only improve achievement but also sustain long-term engagement.

Beyond strategy use, self-efficacy influences broader psychological resources. It is associated with optimism, perseverance, and dedication in the face of challenges [83] [84] [85], while also predicting vitality and reflective thinking [86]. Collectively, these findings suggest that self-efficacy equips students with both the skills and the mindset necessary for sustained cognitive engagement.

3. Conclusion

This review has underscored the interconnections among teacher autonomy support, self-efficacy, and the five factors of student engagement—liking for learning, liking for school, effort and persistence, extracurricular involvement, and cognitive engagement—in shaping students' academic success and retention. Evidence highlights the central role of autonomy-supportive teaching practices in fostering engagement, with self-efficacy serving as a key mechanism that transforms perceived external support into active and sustained learning behaviors.

Despite these advances, important gaps remain. Much of the existing literature continues to conceptualize student engagement as a broad, composite construct rather than investigating the effects of its distinct dimensions. Limited attention has been given to how specific aspects—such as enjoyment of learning and school, or particular behavioral and cognitive strategies—are differentially influenced by contextual factors like teacher autonomy support and personal beliefs such as self-efficacy. Furthermore, relatively few studies have examined first-year students, who are particularly vulnerable to adjustment difficulties and academic attrition.

In the Philippine post-pandemic context, these gaps are even more pressing. The delayed transition back to face-to-face learning compared to other countries has significantly reshaped student-teacher interactions and modes of engagement. Understanding how autonomy-supportive teaching approaches interact with students' self-efficacy to

influence the nuanced dimensions of engagement is thus critical. Addressing these gaps will provide deeper insight into how targeted pedagogical strategies and student capacities can work together to strengthen engagement and promote academic success in higher education.

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