



## Exploring Teachers' lived Experiences towards Students' Engagement in Classroom: A Qualitative Approach

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### Abstract

Engagement of students in classroom is of vital importance and has been used to predict student achievement for quite some time. There is growing concern among educators about the impact of disengagement of students which is manifested in early dropouts, regular absence from class and poor behavior, ultimately leading to low levels of academic achievement. The purpose of this study is to explore the phenomenon of students' engagement as experienced by the teaching faculty in the classrooms of different educational institutions of Uttar Pradesh. Qualitative approach was used to highlight the shared experiences of the participants which led to the emergence of four themes. The results of this study reveals that there is a lack of consensus among respondents on a specific definition with regards to Student Engagement. Furthermore, student interaction is fundamental to Student Engagement. In addition, Student Engagement has a positive impact on Teacher Motivation and last but not the least, Teacher's Self-Efficacy has a positive impact of Student Engagement. This study is an effort to build a shared understanding about the concept of student engagement among the teaching fraternity, department heads, college and university administrators and other stakeholders in the context of educational institutions of Uttar Pradesh and this may help them to prepare a blueprint for tackling the issue student disengagement in classroom.

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### Introduction

Engagement is of importance especially for students who are apathetic and discouraged (Singh, 2021) <sup>[30]</sup> and those who stand a high risk of dropping out, but there is a universal appeal of engagement as it is relevant for all students. One can put to use the various indicators of engagement that help us screen and detect early sign of disengagement. Detection at an early stage may help us to intervene the target groups and reengage them in classroom and with learning. When we think of student engagement in classroom there are some basic questions that pop up in our minds like: What is student engagement? Why is it important for students to be engaged in classroom? What are the outcomes of engaged students? What is the relationship between engagement, learning and achievement? What can be done to re-engage students who are no longer ready to invest in learning or school? Questions such as these have captured the interest and curiosity of educators and researchers worldwide, for the past two decades. Educators throughout India are continuously seeking a better learning environment with academic success of all students in mind. The significance of this study with regards to teacher's perception of engagement of students in classroom might assist teachers in planning effective instruction material. In addition, engaged students are more likely to be motivated and research has shown that it has a positive impact on student achievement.

The main purpose of this study is to explore the phenomenon of student engagement as experienced by the teaching faculty in the classrooms of educational institutions of Uttar Pradesh. The subject will be explored by conducting in-depth interviews. Qualitative approach has been used to highlight the shared experiences of the participants. Furthermore this study contributes to the body of knowledge needed to address the issue of student engagement in classroom. The underline influence of such research study will broaden the outlook of stakeholders who acknowledge that student engagement plays a role in increasing or decreasing the achievement levels of students all across the nation. Consequently professional development programs has been designed for teachers with regards to incorporating various student engagement techniques.

### Literature Review

Research on student engagement has been vigorously pursued in the past 25 years. It all began with the seminal article in 1985 by Mosher and McGowan which talks about assessing student engagement in secondary schools. Over the course of time a general consensus has developed regarding various aspects of engagement theory and research, such as: when students are engaged they do more than attend or perform academically; they also put more effort, persist and preserve, self-regulate their behavior toward goal attainment, challenge themselves, and enjoy the process of learning (Klem & Connell, 2004) <sup>[15]</sup> National Research Council and the Institute of Medicine (“Engaging Schools: Fostering High School Students’ Motivation to Learn,” 2004).

Student engagement, is generally associated positively with desired academic, social, and emotional learning outcomes irrespective of the specificity of the definition (Klem & Connell, 2004) <sup>[15]</sup>. Student’s engagement in classroom has been used to predict student achievement for quite some time and the research on it is extensive. When we think of Engagement the image which comes to our mind is an active one, which is characterized by effortful learning through interaction with the teacher and the learning opportunities presented in the classroom. Student engagement is considered an organizing framework by some which tends to bind areas such as behavioral participation, motivation, and self-efficacy, school connectedness (Fredricks *et al.*, 2004) <sup>[8]</sup>. While others believe that engagement must have clearly defined boundaries (Banks & Smyth, 2021) <sup>[3]</sup>.

A number of definitions of the terms of engagement, student engagement, school engagement, academic engagement have been put forward. Reaching a common ground has been difficult as these differ along a number of dimension such as, emotions, motivations, action, participation, behavior etc. (Appleton *et al.*, 2008) <sup>[2]</sup>. Engagement has been considered a process to other desired outcomes while others argue that it is merely an outcome. (Appleton *et al.*, 2008) <sup>[2]</sup> (E. Skinner *et al.*, 2008) <sup>[33]</sup>.

While it is generally agreed that student engagement produces positive outcomes, defining the concept has its own complexity as there is no agreement on to what counts as student engagement. During the 1970s and 1980s, the emphasis was on time- on-task and participation (McKinney *et al.*, 1975) <sup>[20]</sup> (Smyth, 1980) <sup>[34]</sup>. Other models were one-dimensional and the focus was on psychological or cognitive dimensions of engagement (Ainley, 1993) <sup>[1]</sup> (Miller *et al.*, 1996) <sup>[21]</sup>.

Some argue the case that the phenomenon of student engagement in one dimensional where as there are many academics who say that it has multiple dimensions. (Fredricks *et al.*, 2004) <sup>[8]</sup> based on their analysis of 44 studies on student engagement say that it can be classified into three categories namely, behavioral, emotional, and cognitive. Student’s participation in academic, social, and extracurricular activities is categorized as Behavioral Engagement. When students exhibit positive attitudes and feelings towards school, teachers, learning, and peers, it is termed as Emotional Engagement. When students take control of their learning, are focused and self-regulating it is called Cognitive Engagement. (Fredricks *et al.*, 2004) <sup>[8]</sup> is of the opinion Behavioral, emotional and cognitive engagement are important corner stones of engagement but there is need to conduct more multidimensional research in this area. In their opinion all the three dimensions are equally important. Quantitative researches conducted using this mode points to the fact that all three types of engagement cover different aspects of the student experience which play an important role in succeeding in school and in their own personal development (“School Engagement of Inner-City Students During Middle Childhood,” 2021) <sup>[27]</sup>.

The fruitfulness to the various models of engagement have been questioned by many. Some question the usefulness of behavioral engagement and ask if learning outcomes are possible by merely participating in many common school tasks and activities (Newmann *et al.*, 1992) <sup>[22]</sup>. It has been found in qualitative studies that many students are good at pretending and they appear to be engaged and involved in class work but in reality they are involved in some other off-task activities (Knobel & Lankshear, 2005) <sup>[16]</sup>; being physically involved is no guaranteed that the student is also mentally involved in the activity. According to (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2003) <sup>[18]</sup> “Simple attention in terms of the students having their eyes on the teacher and not talking to peers may not be enough for learning . . . learning should not just be ‘hands on’ but also ‘minds on.’”

Emotional engagement is also has its critics. (E. A. Skinner & Belmont, 1993) <sup>[31]</sup> point out that “Educators have plausibly wondered whether it is likely that students who feel good about school may nevertheless fail to learn anything”. The danger is if it is only about making the students feel successful at school then they may not be assigned challenging tasks as the focus is on concepts which the students can master easily thus leaving them vulnerable when faced with difficult and challenging activities.

The category of student engagement that is strongly associated with learning is Cognitive engagement. Research points out that behavioral and psychological engagement may act as a catalyst and facilitate it, but it is cognitive engagement which sits at the top of the hierarchy and is considered the most important kind of engagement (Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991) <sup>[23]</sup>. Having said that more research needs to be done to investigate the relationship between various types of engagement.

### Contextual Setting of the Research

The research was conducted at different educational institutions of Uttar Pradesh, India.

### Research Question

The overall guiding question of this qualitative study is: *What is the meaning and essence of student engagement, as lived*

**and experienced by teachers at educational institutions of Uttar Pradesh?** The study will explore the shared experiences and observation of the teaching faculty about students' engagement.

### Assumptions

Only one assumption has been made with regards to this study. i.e., all participants' (teachers) will be honest in all their responses.

### Research Methodology

The main purpose of the study was to understand the phenomena of student engagement as it unfolds in the classrooms of educational institutions of Uttar Pradesh and is experienced by its teaching faculty. This research uses a qualitative phenomenological case study approach to collect and analyze data. Phenomenology is different from other qualitative approaches as the focus is on the collective understandings of the group and does not make claims about the beliefs held by individual participants. The intent is to understand the different perspectives within the group of respondents based on the lived experience of the participants. Case study is quite compatible with phenomenology as it is "a descriptive, exploratory, or explanatory analysis of a person, group, or event" (Thomas, 2011) <sup>[35]</sup>. One of the advantages of using case study related to this study is the uniqueness of each case and the subjective description of each faculty with regards to the case (Jing *et al.*, 2023) <sup>[13]</sup>. These two styles emphasize on the unique experiences of teachers and how it provides a basis to understand the "essence" of the particular phenomena by determining how people make sense of, connect with and engage with the phenomena. Finally it leads to the understanding that phenomenological case study is "a description that presents the essence of a phenomenon so the reader has a strong sense of how I understand what it is like to have experienced that particular phenomenon" (Vagle, 2016) <sup>[37]</sup>.

Data for this study was collected by conducting individual interviews. All the respondents were teaching faculty at educational institutions of Uttar Pradesh and had at least 5 years of teaching experience. A request was made to 15 people for the interview, 2 of them politely denied, 3 agreed but for their own reasons could not take part in the interview and one of them left the interview midway as he got overwhelmed with the questions. 9 of them were able to complete the interview and provided their understanding and valuable insights. Each teacher participated in a forty-five to sixty minute interview and these were transcribed verbatim. Then a cross-case analysis was done which led to the emergence of a narrative "*the essence that all persons experience about a phenomenon*" (Creswell *et al.*, 2007) <sup>[4]</sup>. Case study supports this approach as it, focuses on the detailed description of the case within a defined context (Tight, 2022) <sup>[36]</sup>.

### Research Findings

The inputs from the 9 respondents who participated in the study provide us with valuable insights based on their teaching experience in their educational institution of Uttar Pradesh. These inputs will go a long way in helping us understand the phenomenon of student engagement. The insight provided by the respondents will be presented in the form of their personal definition of student's engagement and their lived experience about student engagement. Once a

certain amount of clarity is developed on the definition and lived experience of individual respondents in relation to student engagement, a cross-case analysis will be conducted to develop various themes about the phenomenon under study.

### Respondent 1

Respondent 1 has a Ph.D in Marketing and has been working in one of the educational institutions of Uttar Pradesh for the last 9 years.

**Personal Definition of Students' Engagement:** In the words of Respondent 1 "*Student engagement is a process whereby student invests his energy actively in trying to understand the material being taught* ..... " **Respondent 1** talks about student engagement as process where the student takes control of his learning. The student sees learning as something which is important and he is willing to make an effort in the pursuit of learning. The student seems to be excited and enthusiastic about learning. In other words student takes a proactive approach which is apparently visible in his behavior in the classroom.

### Lived Experience with regards to Student Engagement:

Respondent 1's lived experience with student engagement highlights his active role in fostering an interactive and dynamic learning environment in a marketing class. Respondent 1 highlighted how crucial it is that students fully understand the fundamentals of marketing after reflecting on a group exercise in which they were exposed to need, demand, product, market, exchange, and transaction. He clarified that the solid grasp of these ideas will act as a basis for the subsequent, more intricate division. The class activity was carefully planned to increase comprehension and engagement. **Respondent 1** began by explaining these fundamental principles using real-world examples. To help students internalize the subject, they were given the duty of writing down the definitions individually. Once done, individual were asked to describe these concepts to one another in order to measure their understanding. In the following lesson, the same themes were reviewed, and students were separated into groups to discuss them further. As **Respondent 1** recalled: "*I was going around the classroom keeping a close eye on each group, ensuring that the activity was going in the correct direction, while at the same time encouraging the quieter group members to actively get involved in the whole process.*" His responsibility was more than merely to observe; he actively guided group conversations, ensuring that every student get involved. This meticulous direction not only created a "positive buzz" in the room, but also encouraged a high level of involvement where students were "*excited and full of energy, discussing among themselves, interacting with each other, learning, and enjoying the activity at the same time.*"

**Respondent 1's** observations highlight that students were engaged on multiple levels: behaviorally, emotionally and cognitively. The process of forming groups was particularly insightful, as students were allowed to choose their own groups, which made them feel empowered through the experience of choice. Within these groups, a few students, who has a better understanding of the subjects took advantage of the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge by assisting their classmates. This resulted in a collaborative learning atmosphere in which stronger student felt a sense of accomplishment while assisting others and seeking to

impress the teacher. This peer connection created an inclusive environment in which most students felt engaged and supported.

**Respondent 1** noted a marked improvement in the quality of learning stating: *“students who had understood the concept were able to explain it to their weaker classmates, and the majority of students go engaged and felt included.”* He expressed his personal satisfaction with the process, which provided him with a sense of progress and accomplishment. In his words, *“As a teacher, my role was that of a catalyst. I was an ‘Active Participant’ who was fully engaged in the process.”* Creating interest is the key to student involvement. He believes that if students are genuinely interested in the topic, they become more engaged.

**Respondent 1** concluded that students engaged for a variety of reasons - some are motivated by a real interest in learning and clear academic goals, while others engage because they have the required abilities and find the content tough but manageable. There are other students that participate physically by following instructions but are intellectually separated from the learning process. As **Respondent 1** remarks: *“As a teacher, one needs to be vigilant in the classroom with regards to the pedagogy one is using to deliver the content, and if it is not working, then one needs to try something else.”*

This lived experience demonstrated that how **Respondent 1** actively checks, modifies, and responds to his students' engagement level, using a range of tactics to ensure meaningful participation and deeper learning.

#### **Respondent 2**

Respondent 2 holds a PhD in Management and has been teaching in another educational institution of Uttar Pradesh for the last 10 years.

**Personal Definition of Students' Engagement:** According to **Respondent 2** Student Engagement is *“When the student is participating actively, listening attentively, reading and writing and questioning the teacher regarding any doubts he has related to the topic being taught”*. In his definition he focusses on the various activities which the student performs and engages in order to understand the topic being taught in the classroom. Interestingly he highlights the importance of the four fundamental skills which the student makes use of in the process of understanding the subject, namely - listening, reading, writing and speaking.

#### **Lived Experience with regards to Student Engagement:**

**Respondent 2** defined an engaged student as one who is alert, disciplined and focused. He considered the ability of a student to react to questions made during class discussions to be a clear measure of participation. As he explained, *“I randomly select someone in the class and ask a question about a topic being taught. If they can respond satisfactorily, they are engaged.”* Aside from that, he mentioned that maintaining eye contact and nodding along with the lesson can also indicated engagement, though he warned that appearances can be misleading. As a result, he makes it a point to ask random questions to ensure that the students are cognitively engaged and understanding the lecture.

**Respondent 2** underlined the necessity of developing a trusting relationship with students in order to increase engagement. *“My first goal is to establish trust with my students. I aim to provide a safe environment in which students may express themselves with fear.”* He feels that making students feel at ease increases their willingness to participate and express themselves. To support this,

**Respondent 2** aims to convey ideas in a way that students can easily relate to, using basic, accessible language and fostering student-teacher interaction. He observed that, *“students engage when they are enjoying themselves and having fun”*, so he makes an effort to capture their attention and to create a dynamic, participatory environment in class. He observed that his students find him approachable and helpful, which contributes to their comfort and willingness to engage.

When asked to describe an actual situation where he felt students were engaged, **Respondent 2** recounted a group activity centered on the AIDAS (Attention, Interest, Desire, Action & Satisfaction) theory of selling. After introducing the theory and confirming that the students understood the steps, he paired them up for a role-playing exercise. One student functioned as a seller, the other as the customer, and they later exchanged positions. Their job was to devise a product and sell it to a consumer while employing the AIDAS model. He observed a positive atmosphere in the classroom, where cooperation and healthy competition were evident. Students were seen helping one another during a role-playing exercise as they experienced a selling process first hand from both the buyer's and seller's perspectives. He described his role in the activity as that of a mentor, offering guidance and motivating throughout the exercise to keep students engaged.

Through this lived experience, **Respondent 2** demonstrated a deep understanding of students' engagement, balancing structure with flexibility, motivation and focusing on building trust in the classroom.

#### **Respondent 3**

Respondent 3 has a Ph.D in English and has been teaching in state government educational institution of Uttar Pradesh for the last 6 years.

**Personal Definition of Students' Engagement :** The words of **Respondent 3** *“Student Engagement is, when students are eager to learn, motivated and interested in learning the topic being taught in the class on a given day.”* This definition puts emphasis on eagerness, motivation and interest being displayed on the part of the students in terms of learning.

#### **Lived Experience with regards to Student Engagement:**

Respondent 3 describes an engaged student as aware, interested, timely and prepared. He feels that regular attendance and involvement are important markers of engagement, but stresses that lessons, particularly for boys must well-planned and exciting in order to keep interest. *“Monotonous lessons bore them. You actually need to format the lessons in a way that keeps their interest.”* Regardless of the effort required, **Respondent 3** believes it is worthwhile to keep students engaged.

For Respondent 3, cultivating a good rapport with students is crucial. With a smile, he calls each student by name at the start of each lesson, saying, *“Once you build rapport with the students, things becomes much easier.”* He makes sure that classes are well-prepared, frequently utilizing Powerpoint slides, which he finds to be quite useful in maintaining students' attention. He also promotes involvement and rewards accurate responses. But not every student is interested by nature. **Respondent 3** employs proximity to get their attention back or strikes up a casual discussion to get them back on track when he observes disengagement in the body language and facial expressions. This approach keeps students' attention and fosters a relationship with them.

**Respondent 3** expressed considerable delight with the classroom's evident collaboration and participation. He

refers to his position as a “*binder*,” creating an atmosphere that promotes involvement and education, and he was pleased with the entire undertaking.

#### **Respondent 4**

Respondent 4 has a Ph.D in Tourism and has been teaching in Central government educational institution of Uttar Pradesh for past 9 years.

#### **Personal Definition of Students’ Engagement:**

**Respondent 4** defines Student Engagement as “*Active participation of students in class that leads to high quality learning from the student’s perspective.*” **Respondent 4** tends to focus on active participation. Learning is directly proportional to the intensity and level of participation of students in the classroom. In other words the key to quality learning is the level and intensity of interaction the student has in the context of learning in the classroom.

#### **Lived Experience with regards to Student Engagement:**

A student who pays attention, takes notes, write down word meanings, and asks questions is considered engaged, according to **Respondent 4**. He thinks that when he uses straightforward language that student can grasp, engagement level rises. In his own words, “*They began show interest once they begin to make some sense of the text.*” He added that some students are motivated by “*inspiring students to pursue their interest and dreams,*” campaign since they understand that obtaining a credential can result in job chances.

**Respondent 4** employs a number of tactics to increase student involvement, including encouraging them to take their studies seriously and providing examples from real-world situations. He places a strong emphasis on interactive teaching strategies that assist students become more confident, such as role-plays, storytelling, mock interviews, and Q&A sessions. He cites an instance in which three overseas-travelling students said they wanted to get better at English. **Respondent 4** provided them with helpful advice, urging them to read the headlines of English newspapers, acquire five new words every day, and utilize a dictionary to increase their vocabulary. Additionally, he suggested that they speak English with pals.

**Respondent 4** frequently improvises throughout the presentation to adapt his teaching methods to dynamics of the classroom. He recounted an unforgettable moment when students in a Tourism management course inquired about employment opportunities in the airline sector. He noted that students’ enthusiasm and attention as he described the many departments and their roles, adding that the lesson inspired them to pursue new chances. After giving this some thought, **Respondent 4** stated that he felt satisfied when he saw the students involved and saw himself as a mentor who helps and encourages them.

#### **Respondent 5**

Respondent 5 holds a Ph.D in Accounting and has been teaching in Central government educational institutions of Uttar Pradesh for the past 9 years.

**Personal Definition of Students’ Engagement:** In the words of **Respondent 5** “*Student Engagement is a formal interaction between the teacher and the student related with the subject being taught and discussed in the class.*”

**Respondent 5** holds a very narrow view of Student Engagement. He emphasizes on formal interaction that too between the teacher and the students only. He overlooks the fact that interaction does takes place between students. It can be one-on-one or in a group setting or it can even be solo where the student’s interaction with the text, while reading to

himself or while doing a written assignment is important.

#### **Lived Experience with regards to Student Engagement:**

According to **Respondent 5**, engaged students are disciplined, focused, curious, and attentive. They routinely attend lessons, follow directions, and ask and respond to questions. He employs bilingual education to keep his students interested by using straightforward language relatable real-world experiences. He creates a welcoming, encouraging environment where students feel free to ask questions and offers Hindi explanations for challenging terms. **Respondent 5** lists a number of elements, including students’ understanding of employment options, as contributing to student engagement. He adjusts his tactics according to the circumstances rather than depending on present methods. He frequently incorporates conversation and verbal tests into his classes to make them engaging. When teaching about assets, for instance, he encourage students to categorize buildings as either current or fixed assets and to explain their classification. In similar vein, he ask them to distinguish between various kinds of vouchers while talking about banking.

As an illustration of students’ involvement, **Respondent 5** cites a course on creating a trial balance statement. Due to the complexity of the subject, he did not write transactions in a specific order. After he describes how to classify assets, expenses and liabilities, the students quickly saw when they had previously had trouble finding these in the books, students started talking among themselves and supporting one another as the session went on. **Respondent 5** noted that the higher-quality output and better comprehension resulted from this interactive method.

The students’ involvement inspired him, and he created related exercises for upcoming classes. He was pleased with the experience, stating that his job was to mentor and inspire students to engage without worrying about making errors.

#### **Respondent 6**

Respondent 6 holds a Ph.D in English and has been teaching in private educational institution of Uttar Pradesh for the past 5 years.

**Personal Definition of Students’ Engagement:** In the words of **Respondent 6**, “*Student Engagement is the act of getting students involved in learning by influencing their behavior and generating interest among students in the topic being taught in the class.*” This definition of student engagement sees the teacher as the driver of engagement. It is the teacher who is seen to be proactive. It is he who gets the students involved in the process of learning by influencing their behavior and makes them interested in the lesson.

#### **Lived Experience with regards to Student Engagement:**

According to **Respondent 6**, engaged students are cooperative with their colleagues, consistently show up for class, and maintain their attention to their studies without becoming easily sidetracked. To get students’ undivided attention, he stresses developing a close relationship with them. “*I give them a space where they can freely express their feelings and concerns,*” he said. While **Respondent 6** thinks that encouraging students’ interaction by reducing his own speech is important, some students are self-motivated and eager to learn. Using straightforward language, he encourages students to work through issues on their own while providing support when required. He walks around the classroom to reassure the students that he is available to assist them. He occasionally adds the enjoyable moments to break

up the routine and helps students refocus.

**Respondent 6** remembers a particular incident from a nouns grammar course in English. Following his explanation of the idea, he invited the class to highlight nouns in the section and provide evidence for their selections. They were allowed to select their own members and were split up into groups of four. Although, there was some disturbance in the class first, then the group talks quickly turned into fruitful conversations. He saw group dynamics where students confidently explain the topic to their peers after they had mastered it. There was a spirit of compensation as groups tried to beat one another.

Respondent 6 remarked on the students' confidence and excitement during the class. When the learning objectives were met, he felt a sense of accomplishment. He explained his position as a facilitator, assisting and motivating the students to meet the lesson's objectives. He felt content and inspired for more courses after the class's effective participation.

#### **Respondent 7**

Respondents 7 holds a PhD in Retail Management and has been teaching in private educational institution of Uttar Pradesh for past 9 years

**Personal Definition of Students' Engagement:** According to **Respondent 7** "*Student Engagement is the process whereby the students are focusing on purpose, are curious, asking questions in order to understand the content being taught in the classroom.*" This definition tends to focus on the students. Going by this definition the responsibility to engage in classroom rests with the students.

**Lived Experience with regards to Student Engagement:** According to **Respondent 7**, his class's engaged students are active, attentive, and inquisitive. They follow directions, show up on time, and actively participated in class activities. He continues, "*I encourage students to participate in various activities and make the lessons relatable by using examples they are familiar with, such as football, clubs, cars, mobile phone and service providers.*" He occasionally breaks the boredom with comedy to keep them interested. **Respondent 7** emphasizes that maintaining the interest of the entire class is crucial, even though some students are sincerely curious and aim for higher scores. Otherwise, students could become sidetracked and lose concentration.

**Respondent 7** cites instructing students in the Principles of Management concept of planning as an example of student engagement. After outlining the idea, he split the class up into groups and asked them to organize a celebration of a National holiday or Birthday. Outlining the goal, generating ideas, organizing those ideas, and selecting the initial stage of execution were all part of the task. The activity started out noisy and chaotic, but eventually the groups calmed down and leaders appeared. Members of the group began to work well together, while some spoke more than others.

**Respondent 7** noted that the student participation rose and the caliber of their improved as the activity went on. "*The students were experiencing the process of planning by actively participating in it,*" he stated. When he thought back on the session, he said that their participation had inspired and motivated him. His job as a mentor was to keep a close eye on the groups and provide assistance and direction when needed to keep them on course and finish the assignment.

#### **Respondent 8**

Respondent 8 holds a PhD in Marketing and has been teaching in government educational institution of Uttar

Pradesh for the past 10 years.

**Personal Definition of Students' Engagement:** In the words of **Respondent 8** "*Student Engagement is the commitment that we look for from our students towards academic learning and it is reflected in their behavior such as attending classes regularly, paying attention, interest, curiosity, passion and participation in the classroom.*"

#### **Lived Experience with regards to Student Engagement:**

**Respondent 8** highlights how crucial it is to establish trust with students in order to promote involvement. According to him, learning gets simpler for students when they have faith in their instructor and feel encouraged. He encouraged students to engage in class activities and reassures them that making errors is the natural part of learning in order to foster a pleasant learning environment. "*I explain things in simple language and provide relevant examples,*" he states. According to **Respondent 8**, engaged students takes notes, complete their assignments, pay close attention in class, ask questions, and work in groups. They also express excitement, acknowledge their errors, and seek assistance when necessary.

**Respondent 8** employs strategies including fostering a nice classroom environment, discouraging misbehavior, praising student involvement, and promoting collaboration and presentations to keep students interested. In order to encourage learning, he frequently assigns assignments. In one case, students were given a real-world task to start a new cricket team with a hypothetical budget of INR 5,000,000 during a marketing session. They were split into two groups and tasked with choosing a club name, creating a logo, hiring a manager, assigning players to positions, and controlling the budget. The students were enthusiastic and self-assured because the task had to do with cricket, which they were familiar with. Members of the groups automatically divided the tasks according to their skills, fostering collaborative work. Students who had previously been disengaged became fully involved.

Surprisingly, the lesson went over its allotted fifty minutes, and nobody wanted to leave. Respondent 8 was thrilled that the level of participation was so high that a student even inquired about the managers and players' contract durations. When he thought back on his position, he saw that he was actively involved watching and assisting students all along the way. This experience strengthened his conviction that in order to maintain students' engagement, teachers must create activities that are specific to their interests.

#### **Respondent 9**

Respondent 9 holds a PhD in English Literature and has been teaching in one of the prestigious Central government educational institution of Uttar Pradesh for the past 10 years.

**Personal Definition of Students' Engagement:** "*Student engagement is the process of motivating students to get ready for learning the topic which is going to be taught on a given day and encouraging them to participate in classroom activities.*" The personal definition put forward by **Respondent 9** put the onus of engaging the student on the teacher. According to him it is the teacher's responsibility to motivate and encourage students so that they participate in class activities.

#### **Lived Experience with regards to Student Engagement:**

**Respondent 9** highlights that students who are actively involved in class pay attention, obey directions, take part in debates and activities, and are willing to learn new things. He encourages students to be competitive by posing questions

and rewarding thoughtful responses. In order to clear up any confusion, he also urges students to ask questions. **Respondent 9** uses real examples and straightforward wordings to ensure understanding.

**Respondent 9** recounts instructing a class on drafting congratulations messages as an example of a wonderful moment of student involvement. He asked students to share situations where they would congratulate family or friends or loved ones. In response, students enthusiastically gave instances, such as getting married, graduating, buying a new automobile, and having a child. The students were discussing their personal experiences and the session was lively and upbeat. According to **Respondent 9**, this interaction improved learning quality and increased the lesson's effectiveness. He was responsible for maintaining the students' motivation throughout the class by providing guidance and examples as needed. He used topic-related questions to gauge their comprehension as he wrapped up the session.

**Respondent 9** was reaffirmed by the experience how crucial it is to sustain student motivation and involvement in order to improve learning results.

### Analysis

An in-depth analysis was undertaken which led to the emergence of two major themes. These themes will be discussed in the light of existing literature on student engagement. The analysis will conclude by suggesting opportunities for future research and the limitations of this study.

### Cross-Case Analysis

A cross-case analysis was conducted keeping in mind the number of times a similar idea was expressed by the respondents during the interviews and lived experience and they were analyzed using the whole-part-whole method developed by (Vagle, 2016) [37] where we need to look for the

meaning in a given context in relation to the whole i.e. the broader context (Vagle, 2016) [37]. In this method each case is analyzed individually and then the individual pieces are put together to provide a context specific understanding and in this case the essence of student engagement experience as lived by the teaching faculty at different educational institutions of Uttar Pradesh.

Theme 1: Lack of consensus among respondents on a specific definition with regards to Student Engagement

One of the issues in understanding student engagement, collectively is the lack of consensus on a specific definition. (Fredricks *et al.*, 2004) [8] (Reschly & Christenson, 2012) [25]. Since the inception in the early 1980s there has been an effort to develop a collective meaning with regards to student engagement which is understood with reference to its various features namely emotional, behavioral, cognitive, agentic, affective etc. and it is all contextual (Reschly & Christenson, 2012) [25]. The differences are quite evident in the finding of this study too which is evident in **Table-1** where the respondents have defined student engagement in their own words.

The various definitions put forwards by the respondents talk about the students being motivated, interested, actively involved, curious, focused, questioning, committed, eager to learn, collaborating with fellow students. These definitions do not match with Appleton's which talks about emotional, cognitive, and behavioral engagement (Appleton *et al.*, 2008) [2].

The fact of the matter is that the definitions put forward by the Respondents are also quite different from each other. It highlights the fact that each of them have their own understanding as far as the phenomenon of student engagement is concerned. The conclusions drawn from student engagement studies may be limited and at times frustrating as it means different things to different people (Reschly & Christenson, 2012) [25].

**Table 1:** Respondents' Definitions of Student Engagement

Respondents	Respondents' Definitions of Student Engagement
Respondent 1	"Student engagement is a process whereby student invests his energy actively in trying to understand the material being taught in the class in order to make a sense of it. He gets involved in the process, is motivated and excited about learning".
Respondent 2	"Student Engagement is when the student is participating actively, listening attentively, reading and writing and questioning the teacher regarding any doubts he has related to the topic being taught".
Respondent 3	"Student Engagement is, when students are eager to learn, motivated and interested in learning the topic being taught in the class on a given day."
Respondent 4	"Active participation of students in class that leads to high quality learning from the student's perspective."
Respondent 5	"Student Engagement is a formal interaction between the teacher and the student related with the subject being taught and discussed in the class."
Respondent 6	"Student Engagement is the act of getting students involved in learning by influencing their behavior and generating interest among students in the topic being taught in the class."
Respondent 7	"Student Engagement is the process whereby the students are focusing on purpose, are curious, asking questions in order to understand the content being taught in the classroom."
Respondent 8	" Student Engagement is the commitment that we look for from our students towards academic learning and it is reflected in their behavior such as attending classes regularly, paying attention, interest, curiosity, passion and participation in the classroom."
Respondent 9	"Student engagement is the process of motivating students to get ready for learning the topic which is going to be taught on a given day and encouraging them to participate in classroom activities."

Theme 2: Student interaction is fundamental to student engagement

The Respondents were asked to describe what student engagement looked like in their classroom and most of the respondents described it in similar ways. There was a lot more commonality and their descriptions more aligned with each other as compared to their personal definition of student

engagement. **Table-2** provides the summary of the same in the own words of the respondents. The description provided by the respondents provided great insights and goes a long way in helping understand the phenomenon of student engagement.

The lived experiences of the respondents do support the argument that student interaction is fundamental to student

engagement. **Table-2** provides the description of what engagement looks like in the classroom of the different respondents. They have highlighted the importance of social interaction in the significance of cooperative learning (Johnson & Johnson, 2014) <sup>[14]</sup> and basic needs theory (Schüler *et al.*, 2019) <sup>[28]</sup> has emerged.

As described by the respondents in their lived experience students were driven by intrinsic motivation in terms of autonomy, competence and relatedness as was evident in the various group activities described by the respondents and these findings are in tune with basic needs theory (Schüler *et al.*, 2019) <sup>[28]</sup>. Students were willingly taking part and getting involved in activities as is reflect in the account provided by the respondents. In the group activities students were seen choosing their own partners or becoming a member of a group developing new relationships which is driven by the perceived sense of choice in relation to the learning activity (Reeve *et al.*, 2003) <sup>[24]</sup>.

During the group activities the students were seen working with their partners or group members exhibiting skills and competencies, Knowledge and understanding in dealing with

the task in hand. This is consistent with the need for being competent (Schüler *et al.*, 2019) <sup>[28]</sup>. During the group tasks students were seen interaction with each other in a manner which was never seen before in the class. They were seen developing new emotional bonds and connections with their peers. They were observed responding to the needs of the group members to accomplish the task in hand which corresponds to relatedness (Schüler *et al.*, 2019) <sup>[28]</sup>. It is well documented in the lived experience of the respondents that the students' were seen working in pairs, or groups in ways in which they were seen showing real concern and care for each other (Ryan, 1992) <sup>[26]</sup>.

Student's engagement can be understood with reference to the basic needs theory as it provides teachers the explanation to why students actively engage in some situation and not so well in others (E. A. Skinner & Pitzer, 2012) <sup>[32]</sup>. When teachers provide students the opportunity to learn in novel and challenging ways, teachers are providing opportunities for students to meet their basic needs through social interaction during learning tasks.

**Table 2:** Respondents' Descriptions of what Student Engagement looks like in their classroom

Respondents	What Student Engagement looks like in their classroom
Respondent 1	To me an engaged student is interested in learning, motivated, enjoying, having fun, energetic, actively participates in class discussion, follows instruction, comes prepared for class, comes on time, is regular, helps his fellow students in the classroom, is focused.
Respondent 2	Looks very attentive, much disciplined, and cautious of minute details. All of sudden I ask a question, with a certain element of surprise regarding the topic being taught in the class and he is able to answer it. Actively participates in class, makes eye to eye contact.
Respondent 3	An engaged student looks alert, interested, is punctual, brings proper books according to the timetable, regularly attends classes, asks question, participates in class activities.
Respondent 4	An engaged student in my classroom pays attention to what I am teaching. Takes notes, writes down to the word meanings, asks questions, interacts with fellow students in relation to a given tasks, shows interest.
Respondent 5	When students are engaged during a class, they are found to be confident and optimistic. Since they are engaged, they often answer questions, follow my instructions and try to be discipline. They also attend classes on time and avoid any kind of disruption during lecture.
Respondent 6	They look to be cooperating with their peers and, at the same time, helping the poor section of the students to come forward. They are less distracted and more concentrated on their learning, while focusing well on the teacher's instructions to understand and follow exactly what they are supposed to do.
Respondent 7	Engaged students look energetic, participate in the class, and are focused, curious, make eye contact.
Respondent 8	Engaged students take notes, do homework, listen carefully, posing questions, participating in class activity, paying attentions, and following teacher's request. In addition, they find their own mistakes, show more excitement and ask for help in learning.
Respondent 9	When students are engaged then they are ready to learn the new lesson and listen to the teacher and follow the instructions of the teacher. They participate in the class discussion and class activities, are interested to learning new things.

The respondents were also asked to describe a time when the thought that the students were engaged and the majority of the respondents described the situation where the students were either working in groups or pairs and there was collaboration, active participation, discussion among the peers to accomplish the learning objective (Johnson & Johnson, 2014) <sup>[14]</sup> (Sharan, 2014) <sup>[29]</sup>. **Table-3** provides us insights about the structure dimensions with regards to

student engagement in words of the respondents themselves. By looking at it we get a clear picture about structure of the phenomenon of student engagement and one can safely say that it works best when student are working in groups instead of working alone and helps students meet their very basic needs. Thus endorsing the fact that the essence of student engagement is interaction.

**Table 3:** Respondents' description of their Lived Experience based on the case narrated by them

Respondents	Description of their Lived Experience based on the case narrated by each Respondent
Respondent 1	"It was a group activity in the marketing class where students were being introduces to the basic concepts marketing like, need, want, product, market, exchange, transaction."
Respondent 2	"I was teaching the selling process based on AIDAS theory, the students were explained the various steps involved in this process. Once the students said that they have understood the various steps, they were divided in groups of two and were involved in a role-play."
Respondent 3	"Once when I gave a work sheet to be solved on Preposition. They all said they understood the topic and now it was time to test their understanding. They were divided into groups and group which wins would get a round of applause. They

	<i>really put their head into it to get it right."</i>
Respondent 4	<i>"Once I was taking a lecture in tourism management, and the students asked me to describe the different departments and functions related to airlines industry and I explained them in simple words the different departments, their functions and the job prospects the airlines industry offered. As it was something they were interested in, the majority looked engaged."</i>
Respondent 5	<i>"In one of the units I was supposed to make them learn how to prepare trial balance statement. The topics was complex, so I took the marker and wrote all the transaction on to white board in no particular sequence. Students started turning the pages of their book and to their surprisingly they said that said that they could not find it in the book. In a trial balance, if one can figure out what is asset, income, liabilities, equity and expense then it becomes very easy to understand and prepare trial balance. So I asked the students to put all asset and expenses on the debit side and the rest on the credit side and subtotal both sides. Once they were able figure this out, I asked them to put the same the Trial balance format and they were able to prepare the Trial and Balance Statement."</i>
Respondent 6	<i>"In his own words "It was an English Grammar lesson about nouns. The students were asked to form groups of four and they were free to close or be part of any group and each group."</i>
Respondent 7	Students were made to sit in two groups.
Respondent 8	Students were given a practical assignment where they were supposed to form a new football club. It was class of eleven students and they were divided into two groups.
Respondent 9	I was teaching students how to write a short note on congratulating someone on their achievement. I asked my students in which circumstances we congratulate our friends and family members.

### Theme 3: Student Engagement has a positive impact on Teacher Motivation

The respondents were asked to describe a time when they felt that the students were engaged in their classroom and in relation to that they were also so asked the described how they felt during and after the activate and if at tall it had an impact

on them. It was found in the study that all the nine respondents were effected in one way or the other. They expressed their feeling in different ways. Some said that they had a sense of making progress, others felt satisfied, happy, excited, energized, had a feeling of contentment.

**Table 4:** Description of feelings of each of Respondents during the class and after the class

<b>Respondent</b>	<b>Description of feelings of each of Respondents</b>
Respondent 1	I really enjoyed the process. It provided a sense of making progress and accomplishment which was motivational.
Respondent 2	I felt really nice during the class when I saw the students engaged in the learning the task in hand. After the class I felt satisfied with the day's work as I was able to achieve the learning objective set for the class and it had a positive impact on me as the effort was rewarded.
Respondent 3	For me it was a moment of great pleasure during the class. I felt happy about the whole process after the class.
Respondent 4	It was a great feeling when I was able to connect to my students. I felt very happy as I was able to explain the students about the prospects in airline industry.
Respondent 5	I felt energized and motivate when I saw the students engaged and interaction among themselves to complete the task. I had a sense of achievement after the class
Respondent 6	Seeing the students engaged and self-driven was a great feeling. It energized me and in sense motivated me to make additional efforts to engage students
Respondent 7	With the students engaged and contributing to the task at hand, I felt energized and motivated.
Respondent 8	It is a feeling of joy when you see you students engaged in a productive way. One can very well make out from their expressions and behavior that they are enjoying the whole process and feeling of contentment. Seeing the students engaged in the classroom I felt energetic and excited and I left the class feeling content.
Respondent 9	In the classroom I felt excited and had a positive most of the students were interested and they were ready to learn and it made me deliver the lesson in an organized way with much more energy and enthusiasm. After the class I had a feeling of accomplishment as the learning objective if the lesson was achieved.

Based on the analysis of this research one can safely conclude that the essence of student engagement is student interaction and it works best in group situation, when student are working together, cooperating with each other. Structured social interaction is the key to student engagement is reflected in the description of the lived experience of the respondents. Social interaction, be it in the form of peer learning, group tasks or activities, is of great importance as it leads to enhance student achievement at the present moment is reflected throughout the academic career of the student.

### Theme 4: Teachers Self-Efficacy has a positive impact of Student Engagement

It was evident in the responses' of the all the 9 Respondents that they cared about learning achievement of their students and believed that they can make a difference in the lives of the students based on their knowledge and experience, which is in line with the definition put forward by Gunkey & Passaro with regards to Teacher Efficacy. (Guskey &

Passaro, 1994) <sup>[11]</sup> define Teacher Efficacy as *"the belief or persuasion of teachers that they can influence the quality of students' learning, even of those who are considered as problematic cases or lacking motivation."* In the words of (Guidetti *et al.*, 2018) <sup>[9]</sup> Teacher Self-Efficacy is the belief that teachers possess in their collective capabilities to influence the lives of their students. Teacher Self Efficacy play an important role in determining the learning outcomes of students. Higher levels of belief in efficacy lead to greater efforts on the part of the teachers, which in turn lead to better performances. The positive feedback reflected in the learning outcomes of students further consolidates the formation of higher beliefs of efficacy (Malinen *et al.*, 2012) <sup>[19]</sup>. Research by (Gurung *et al.*, 2012) <sup>[10]</sup>, highlights the fact that instructors play an important role in how much a student engages with the material. Teacher Self Efficacy displayed by the instructor is vital in engaging students in the material and controlling the classroom environment (Handelsman *et*

al., 2005) [12]. Thus, an instructor with high Teacher Self Efficacy would display great ability in engaging students with the material, pedagogical practice, and control of the classroom environment, which in line with definition (Guidetti *et al.*, 2018) [9]. Teachers who come into the profession with higher Self Efficacy are more confident and

display greater affective orientations towards students, who then, in turn, demonstrate greater motivation and engagement within classrooms, thereby creating a classroom climate that positively influences learning outcomes (Konstantopoulos, 2009) [17].

**Table 5:** Influencing students' learning based knowledge and experience

Respondents	Do you believe that you can influence the learning of your students based on your knowledge and experience?
Respondent 1	"I am of the opinion that a teacher played a critical role if learning is to take place in the classroom as it is he who sets the tone of the classroom. As a teacher I believe that I have the ability to influence the learning of students and therefore I am proactive and find ways and means to engage my students which in turn is reflected in their grades."
Respondent 2	"Yes, I firmly believe that I have the ability to influence the learning of my students and I do it by motivating and engaging them in the classroom. I provide them opportunities to interact with me as well as their fellow students in relation to learning."
Respondent 3	"For me teacher self-efficacy is important as lot depends on the teacher's believe i.e. if he is in a position to influence the learning of his students. If I can motivate them then I can engage them and ones the students are engaged they are ready to learn."
Respondent 4	"Based on my professional qualification in Tourism and Hotel management and work experience in the industry I firmly believe that I can influence the learning of my students."
Respondent 5	"I think that as a teacher I have limited ability to influence the learning of students. Learning will depend solely on the efforts of the students. When the students show interest and they get engaged then learning takes place. "
Respondent 6	"I believe that I am the reason why students learn in my classroom. I make learning happen. I try to motivate and inspire my students irrespective of their IQ."
Respondent 7	"As a teacher I do have leverage over my students and I believe that I am able influence my students and get them engaged. For me interaction is important for engagement. What I have noticed over the years is that the students who are keen to interact in the class have done relatively well as compared to the ones who were reluctant to engage."
Respondent 8	"The teacher has the ability to influence the learning of his students. For me belief is of vital importance. Based on mi belief I take concrete action to ensure learning happens in my classroom."
Respondent 9	"The belief of the teacher that he influence the learning of his students based on his knowledge skill and experience is critical. As a teacher I make a sincere effort on my parts to motivate my students to engage in the classroom irrespective to the quality of students to whom I am teaching."

### Scope for further research

The finding of this research opens new pathways for further research in the pursuit of understanding the phenomenon of Student Engagement. Some of the areas which can be explored further are as follows:

**Firstly**, in this study it was observed that student engagement led to positive feeling among the instructors and had an impact on the motivational levels of the respective instructors. This aspect with regards to teacher motivation needs to be explored further in order to cement the connection. **Secondly**, there needs to be further research to establish a clear relationship between the various factors such as teachers, peers, parent, and community with regards to their impact on each other, if any and whether they contribute to student engagement. **Thirdly**, does a campus-wide focus on Student Engagement through challenging and meaningful learning experiences impact student achievement over time? Can it be used to predict how successful a student will be in life? **Finally**, do factors such as families, homes, cultures, and neighborhood dynamics in any way shape Student Engagement in classroom?

### Limitations of the Study

Like all other research studies, this research study also has its limitations and noting those limitations highlights the understanding of that reality (Flick, 2012) [6]. One of the limitations of this study could be the limited scope of this research as the data was gathered from one state i.e., Uttar Pradesh, India only, and therefore the finding can be applicable only to similar colleges operating in similar socio-economic and cultural environments. Some scholars may be of the opinion that the participants being of a single state and

that in itself is a limitation. Considering the fact that it is a phenomenological research and the main purpose was to understand phenomenon from the perspective of the participants and that too in great depth (Flick, 2012) [6]. By conducting this study in a specified boundary helped to develop a context-specific and context-dependent understanding of student engagement that led to a method of learning that potentially enriched the practice of the participants (Flyvbjerg & Flyvbjerg, 2016) [7].

The other limitation was the self-reporting nature of the interviews and the lived experience narration provided by the participating faculty. There are chance of social desirability bias creeping in when a researcher is very passionate about the issue of student engagement. Every effort was made to conduct a forthright and judgment-free interview. The lived experience description by respondents failed to generate rich and detailed narratives as anticipated. This could perhaps because of respondents' self-imposed time limitations or at times their inability to express their thoughts clearly.

### Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the phenomenon of students' engagement as manifested in the classrooms of public or private educational institutions of Uttar Pradesh, as well as to explore the understanding of teaching faculty with regards to students' engagement, through their personal lived experiences. Through analysis of interviews and lived experience descriptions provided by the respondents led to the emergence of four themes. **Firstly**, this study concludes that there is a lack of consensus among respondents on a specific definition with regards to Students' Engagement. **Secondly**, students' interaction is fundamental to Students'

Engagement. **Thirdly**, Student Engagement has a positive impact on Teacher Motivation and finally, Teacher's Self-Efficacy has a positive impact of Students' Engagement. This study is an effort to build a shared understanding about the concept of students' engagement among the teaching fraternity, department heads, college and university administrators and other stakeholders in the context of educational institutions of Uttar Pradesh. This could help them prepare a blueprint for the future with regards to students' engagement.

When teachers proactively foster students' engagement in classrooms through pedagogical decision making, it is small yet powerful step in the direction of knowledge. As teachers, when we inculcate student engagement into our classrooms through our pedagogical decision making, we are taking small, but powerful, steps towards the equitable and just responsibility we owe our communities and society as a whole.

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