

Identity Based Engagement and Disengagement in Education: Bridging Gaps Between Students and Systems

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ABSTRACT

Current student engagement literature often overlooks the psychosocial dimensions of learning, especially the process by which students decide to drop out of learning opportunities. In this paper, a model of identity-based engagement and disengagement is proposed to better understand why some students reject educational opportunities. Educational systems in particular, are prone to disengagement because certain learning activities can evoke strong emotional responses or challenge students' sense of identity. Drawing on social identity theory, the paper shows how specific educational tasks can conflict with students' identity elements, creating cognitive dissonance. As a result, students may perform an identity-based risk-reward assessment when deciding whether to engage with or reject learning opportunities (drop-out). By recognizing this disengagement process, educators can more effectively re-engage students in learning. The paper further critiques much of the research on at-risk students, which often focuses on individual students or subgroups, leading to remedial actions that may inadvertently reinforce their alienation and lack of agency. These students become passive recipients of interventions, perpetuating the very systems that initially alienated them. The paper concludes with practical implications of the identity-based disengagement model and suggestions for future research, advocating for a more nuanced approach that considers the psychosocial factors influencing student engagement and disengagement.

Keywords: Education, Dropouts, Student engagement, Disengagement, Educational systems, Motivation, Students at risk, Teaching Practices, Pharmacy Students

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

This research aimed to enhance student engagement, promote effective learning strategies, and improve the overall educational process in pharmaceutical education. Using an action research methodology, the study systematically examined changes in teaching and learning

environments to bring about positive transformations in the classroom. Action research is a powerful tool for gaining insights into educational theories and practices, leading to significant improvements in both teaching and learning. Through this approach, the study identified effective teaching and pedagogical strategies that could

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boost student engagement and motivate students to take their learning more seriously [1].

In the context of pharmacy education, this research was part of a broader effort to assess the future role of pharmacy in healthcare and to provide recommendations for shaping the education of future pharmacists. As the healthcare field evolves, the profession of pharmacy must adapt to meet the changing needs of society. The Commission overseeing this transformation called for significant changes in pharmacy practices, with the primary goal being the delivery of pharmaceutical primary healthcare. This includes ensuring that practitioners are responsible for managing patients' medication needs, preventing drug-related issues, and addressing any drug therapy concerns [2].

In examining student engagement and academic achievement, this research drew on previous studies that highlighted the importance of behavioral engagement in academic success. For example, Rumberger's study found that 8th-grade students who were behaviorally engaged in school were less likely to drop out compared to their disengaged peers [4]. Similarly, Finn and Rock's research focused on 10th-grade minority students from low-income backgrounds, showing that resilient students who remained engaged were more likely to graduate, while those who disengaged were more likely to drop out [5]. These studies underline the importance of student engagement for academic success and highlight the need for strategies to enhance it. By utilizing action research, this study sought to identify and implement effective teaching strategies that could improve engagement and foster a more serious approach to learning. The findings emphasize the value of action research in transforming educational practices and creating positive, lasting changes in the classroom.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

The current study involved a review of existing literature on students' involvement in the higher education system. Maiers [6] refers to student involvement as a prominent topic in higher learning, while Weimer [7] describes it as a widely-used buzzword. Kuh [8] notes that the concept frequently appears in conversations about higher learning strategies, academic reviews, and even mainstream publications. Thomas emphasized that student involvement is critical to student success, highlighting its direct connection to both academic performance and post-graduation opportunities [9]. She emphasized that fostering greater engagement and more effective learning

among all students in higher education significantly enhances their chances of success.

A longitudinal study on pharmacy students' critical-thinking abilities revealed that while students' skills in analysis, synthesis, and evaluation improved over the course of their program, their motivation to engage in critical thinking remained unchanged [10]. This underscores a gap in student engagement, despite improvements in cognitive abilities. Additionally, reflective practice, which is known to support self-directed learning, professional growth, critical evaluation, and problem-solving skills, has shown potential benefits. However, there is a lack of published research on its application in pharmacy education and practice [11]. This study explored the literature surrounding student involvement in higher education, emphasizing its importance for academic success and career outcomes. While involvement is a commonly discussed concept in educational strategies and reviews, research on pharmacy students revealed that although critical-thinking skills improved, their motivation to engage did not. Moreover, despite the potential advantages of reflective practice in pharmacy education, there is limited research on its use in the field.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

The study employed Mixed Methods Grounded Theory (MMGT), combining both qualitative and quantitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research topic [12]. This exploratory and investigative approach began with initial interviews conducted to gather baseline insights from participants [13]. Participants were asked to record their teaching experiences over a 2–3 week period, providing valuable firsthand data. Following this, a second set of interviews was conducted to capture reflections from participants after the diary phase, allowing for deeper insights into their experiences.

The study used purposive sampling to select participants [14], ensuring that the sample was relevant to the research context. The research was carried out within the Telangana state, which involved teachers including instructors, lecturers, assistant professor from pharmaceutical college across the state. A total of ten teachers were invited to participate as shown in Table 1. Participants were representing students in various department of Pharmacy colleges. The participants were explained about the purpose of the study before the interview process. However, no identifiable data is collected from the participants. The objective was the

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research focused on understanding teaching practices and their impact across this department.

Table 1: Demographic background

Gender	Subject	School Year	Years of Study	Mode	Class Size	No of Students	Mins 1	Mins 2	Total Mins
Woman	Pharmacology	Fourth Year	3	Remote	26	4/3	83	45	128
Woman	Pharmaceutical Chemistry	First Year	1	Remote	8	4/3	48	30	78
Woman	Pharmaceuticals	Third Year	2	Remote	9	4/3	57	45	102
Man	Biochemistry, Physics	Second Year	1.5	Hybrid	7	4/3	45	40	85
Woman	Anatomy and Physiology	Third Year	2	Remote	3	3/3	90	35	125
Man	Pathology and Microbiology	First Year	1	Hybrid	16	4/3	75	45	85
Man	Clinical Pharmacy	Fourth Year	3.5	Hybrid	15	4/2	57	40	125
Woman	Medicinal Chemistry	Third Year	2	Distance	8	4/3	68	32	100
Woman	Pharmacy	Second Year	1.5	Distance	6	4/2	48	32	80

an	Practice	nd Year		ce					
Woman	Pharmacology	Fourth Year	3	Distance	13	3/3	77	55	132

The pharmaceutical course was redesigned for 22 associate satellite students across two colleges, shifting from a traditional format to a flipped classroom model. This redesign included 25 pre-recorded lectures that students could watch online before attending class, where time was dedicated to active learning exercises. Additionally, students were required to complete two projects, take three midterms, complete eight quizzes, and sit for a cumulative final exam. The aim of this redesign was to determine whether flipping a traditional basic pharmaceuticals course, delivered synchronously across two campuses, would improve academic performance, student engagement, and perceptions of the course.

Surveys conducted throughout revealed that students appreciated learning content before class and using class time for applied learning ($p=0.01$). They also reported that mastering foundational content in advance greatly enhanced their in-class experience ($p=0.001$). After completing the course, 89.5% of students preferred the flipped format, a significant increase from the 34.6% who favored it before the course. Despite these positive perceptions, course evaluations and final exam scores showed no significant difference between the traditional formats. Qualitative feedback suggested that the flipped classroom promoted student empowerment, development, and engagement. In conclusion, the flipped classroom approach in pharmacy education enhanced satellite students' experiences by incorporating thoughtful course design, fostering more dynamic discussions, and promoting greater student independence [15].

Existing studies have mainly used statistical methods to explore what influences students' participation, focusing on working- and middle-class populations. These studies highlight how motivational factors like interest, value, competence, and mastery goals, along with classroom factors like peer support, teacher-student relationships, and autonomy, contribute to school engagement. On the flip side, disengagement is often linked to low academic performance, poor attendance, disciplinary problems, and demographic factors like race, gender, special education

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needs, and English language status, which can lead to school dropouts.

To analyze interview data, the research team used a mix of methods, including reviewing transcripts to understand students' engagement and experiences. They identified key categories such as peer relationships, teacher interactions, school environment, autonomy, competence, and value, based on both previous research and interview insights. Summaries for each participant were created and verified by the team to ensure consensus on emerging themes. Students reported feeling engaged when they liked their teacher or subject, were in a good mood, and stayed on top of assignments. On the other hand, disengagement was caused by fatigue, lack of interest, difficult content, or personal issues. Teachers generally agreed with students' views of their participation, aligning with school efforts to support both engaged and disengaged students. [16, 17]

4.0 DATA ANALYSIS & FINDINGS

4.1 Factors Contributing to Student's Engagement

The study investigated key factors influencing student engagement, including school enjoyment and study motivation, using advanced statistical methods like confirmatory analysis and structural equation modeling. A significant focus was placed on understanding how these factors vary across gender, grade levels, and age, providing a comprehensive look at the dynamics of student motivation and engagement. The analysis confirmed that both the detailed 11-factor model and a broader higher-order model of motivation and engagement provided a good fit for the data. Multi-group tests further demonstrated that these models were consistent across different groups, showing no significant variation between genders or grade levels in the structure of motivation and engagement. This establishes strong within-network validity, meaning the proposed models are robust and applicable across diverse student populations. For between-network validity, the study found meaningful correlations between motivation and engagement with key outcomes like school enjoyment, class participation, and educational aspirations. These correlations aligned with what would be expected based on theoretical frameworks, strengthening the study's findings. Girls, in particular, displayed more adaptive motivation and engagement patterns compared to boys, suggesting they are better aligned with positive learning behaviors and attitudes. On the other hand, intermediate school students (those in middle school grades) showed less adjustment to the proposed engagement model, indicating a potential area where additional support or tailored strategies might be needed to enhance their motivation.

These findings carry significant implications for educational practices. They highlight the importance of addressing differences in motivation and engagement by gender and grade level, offering educators insights into how to better support students. The study also provides a foundation for further research into the factors that inspire students and promote their long-term commitment to learning. By identifying these patterns and variances, the research paves the way for targeted interventions to improve student outcomes and foster a more engaging learning environment [18]. The table 2 below is the highlights that 85% of engagement among pharmacy students is influenced by student-level factors, such as individual motivation and study habits, while classroom-level factors contribute 10%, and school-level factors account for 5%. These insights underscore the importance of personal and academic support for enhancing engagement.

Table 2: Factors contributing to Engagement

Factor	Frequency %
Student Level Factor	85%
Class room Level Factor	10%
School Level Factor	5%

Source: Developed from study

The table 3 illustrates that math anxiety is a leading factor contributing to disengagement challenges, affecting 40% of students. Socioeconomic factors account for 35%, while classroom status, such as peer relationships or perceived roles, influences 25% of engagement levels.

Table 3: Factors contributing to disengagement

Factor	Frequency %
Math Anxiety	40%
Socio economic	35%
Classroom status	25%

Source: Developed from study

4.1.1 Academic workload and curriculum design: Heavy academic demands, strict curricula, and lack of flexibility can cause students to lose interest and become overwhelmed, leading to burnout. Academic struggles are a major reason why students drop out of school. These challenges are influenced by a mix of educational, social, and economic factors, all of which need careful attention to create better support systems. A key issue is how learning difficulties affect students' performance. Some students who face these challenges need extra help, often relying on their parents. However, many parents struggle to provide this support due to work pressures or lack of resources. If parents didn't receive formal education themselves, helping their children becomes even harder,

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creating a cycle of academic struggles that can lead to students dropping out.

For example, some students shared the following concerns: One student said their lessons were too difficult, and their parents couldn't help because of their busy schedules. Another student stopped attending school because they couldn't study on their own, and their parents found the lessons too challenging to assist with. Some students questioned whether the traditional school system was the right fit for them due to academic difficulties, even though classmates occasionally helped. Additionally, students from remote schools with multi-grade classes struggled to adjust to the more advanced lessons when they transferred to senior high school.

4.1.2 Teaching methods greatly impact student success. When these methods don't match students' diverse learning styles, it can lead to disengagement and frustration, increasing the chances of dropout. This highlights the need for teaching strategies that cater to different learning styles. Additionally, foundational skills are crucial for student retention. Students who lack the basic knowledge and skills for their grade level are at a significant disadvantage. The widening gap between their abilities and academic expectations can cause feelings of inadequacy and pressure to fall behind, making dropping out seem like the only option. In summary, reducing dropout rates due to academic struggles requires a comprehensive approach, including targeted support for students with learning difficulties and providing the resources they need to stay on track.

4.1.3 Parents' influence plays a significant role in students' disengagement, as their beliefs and decisions can strongly affect whether students continue their education or drop out. The data highlights the importance of understanding the role parents play in education. One key aspect is the belief about age and education. Some parents think that if their child is older than the typical age for their grade, continuing education is unnecessary. This misconception often leads to students being pulled out of school, even if they are capable and eager to keep learning. It's important to challenge this belief and emphasize that age should not determine a student's educational path.

4.1.4 Older children to take care giving responsibilities plays as another factor contributing to disengagement is the expectation for older children to take on caregiving responsibilities for younger siblings. In economically disadvantaged households, this can place a heavy burden on older students, often affecting their education. To

address this, support systems need to be established to help families balance caregiving duties with the educational needs of their children. Several student testimonials highlight these challenges. For example, one student shared that their parents discouraged them from continuing their studies because they were considered too old, instead encouraging them to find work or get married. Another student wanted to stay in school but had to drop out to care for younger siblings while their parents were working. Some students, especially girls, face gender-based expectations, with parents often believing that further education is unnecessary because their daughters are expected to marry and become homemakers.

4.1.5 Gender biases deepen the problem, as many parents view education for girls as an unnecessary investment, reinforcing traditional gender roles that see women primarily in domestic roles. This discourages young women from pursuing higher education. To address this, it's essential to promote gender equality in education and empower girls to make informed decisions about their education and career paths. Understanding the role of parental influence in student dropout requires a comprehensive approach. Educational institutions, policymakers, and community organizations need to involve parents in discussions about the value of education. This includes challenging misconceptions about age, gender, and future opportunities and providing resources to help parents make informed choices that support their children's long-term success.

4.1.6 Parental expectations play a significant role in a student's motivation to stay in school. Parents who encourage their child's independence and competence tend to foster intrinsic motivation, helping students stay engaged. On the other hand, disengaged or overly demanding parents may cause stress and lead to disengagement. Other factors contributing to disengagement include financial pressures, teenage pregnancy, academic struggles, bullying, and a lack of motivation. According to Self-Determination Theory (SDT), students who feel controlled or powerless in their education often experience a decline in motivation. Additionally, students who face continuous academic failure may develop low self-esteem, which can lead them to drop out. Therefore, it is crucial to promote students' sense of competence and create an environment where they feel capable, as this can help prevent dropout rates from rising.

4.2 Teaching methods and instructional approaches

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Traditional teacher-centered methods, like lectures, often fail to fully engage modern students, who prefer more interactive and collaborative learning environments. The way teachers instruct and share activities significantly impacts student engagement [19], [20], [21]. Research shows a strong link between teacher behavior, such as providing structure, being involved, and supporting autonomy, and student engagement, including their emotional involvement [22]. However, students with lower engagement often receive less support, as teachers may react negatively to their emotional disengagement.

Teachers vary in how they balance control and autonomy support [23]. A student's mood, achievement, and social emotions can also influence their engagement [24]. Studies have found that teachers respond to disengaged students in different ways—some express frustration and ignore them, while others try to motivate them by increasing the pace [25]. The study showed that teacher behavior can influence whether students engage or disengage. Students might feel emotionally disengaged but still complete tasks, or they might focus on another subject, leading to disengagement in the current one [26] [96].

Though emotions can impact cognitive engagement and agency, the relationship between engagement and disengagement is complex [27]. Engagement is not a fixed state but can shift, and should be viewed as flexible [28]. Research on digital technologies also presents mixed results. While some studies suggest they enhance engagement, [29], [30], others highlight distractions, avoidance behaviors, and mental health issues like depression or burnout [31], [32], [33]. Additionally, teachers may struggle to assess engagement in online settings, as it can be difficult to gauge whether a student is actively participating [34], [35].

Assessment and grading practices, particularly the overemphasis on high-stakes exams and rigid grading systems, can undermine student engagement by making students prioritize grades over learning [36]. The primary issue with using grades as external motivators is that while they do motivate students, they often reduce intrinsic motivation. A meta-analysis by Deci and colleagues found that tangible rewards like grades decrease intrinsic motivation across various tasks [37]. When grades are introduced, a student's internal drive for learning shifts to a focus on obtaining external rewards [38], a phenomenon called the "crowding out" effect, where external rewards displace intrinsic motivation. This shift leads students to prioritize grades over learning, sometimes focusing more

on strategic efforts to gain points rather than truly maximizing their educational outcomes [39].

Another concern with grades is the type of feedback they provide. In traditional education, feedback is often either evaluative (like grades, points, or statements like "try harder" or "good work") or descriptive, which aims to help students improve by explaining specific aspects of their performance [40]. Evaluative feedback compares students to others and summarizes the quality of their work, while descriptive feedback focuses on how students can improve for future tasks. For example, a descriptive comment might advise a student to improve communication skills by asking open-ended questions instead of closed-ended ones [41]. Research shows that grades, as evaluative feedback, can hinder learning. Lipnevich and Smith found that pairing grades with descriptive feedback actually reduced learning performance compared to using descriptive feedback alone [42]. Similarly, Koenka and colleagues found that students who received grades performed worse and were less motivated than those who received written feedback or no feedback at all [43]. Simply telling students their test scores or which questions they missed doesn't enhance their knowledge as effectively as explaining why answers are correct or incorrect.

However, even descriptive feedback can be ineffective if students don't engage with it. Studies show that while students may want feedback, they often don't read, reflect on, or apply it [45]. This issue is worsened when grades are involved, as students tend to focus more on the grade than the feedback itself. Keupper-Tetzel and colleagues found that when grades are given before feedback, students are less likely to engage with the feedback [46]. Conversely, providing feedback before releasing grades leads to better engagement and improved academic performance [47]. For feedback to be effective, students must actively engage with and process it, something that grades alone don't seem to encourage [48].

4.3 Autonomy and self-directed learning:

Giving students choices in their assignments and learning paths fosters a sense of autonomy, which enhances intrinsic motivation and ownership of their education. Productive emotions can serve as indicators of learning behavior, influencing motivation and the use of strategies to control, elaborate, and persist in mastering advanced concepts [49]. Control strategies involve tasks like linking a student's current learning state to their goals, identifying learning gaps, working to address them, and tracking their progress [50]. Elaborative strategies refer to the ability to

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integrate new information with existing knowledge [51], while persistence is the determination to overcome obstacles encountered during learning [52].

According to the broaden-and-build theory, one's mindset and actions can be expanded by fostering a constructive attitude, which enhances both social and analytical resources, leading to positive outcomes such as personal growth [53]. In education, an independent foundation links learning strategies to beneficial outcomes. Despite this, it remains unclear how teachers transition from directing students' learning to supporting their independent growth. Teachers play a key role in learning environments, and their actions significantly influence student success [54]. They promote independence by providing strategies that help students tackle educational challenges on their own [55]. For example, teachers can offer personalized feedback, provide task options, encourage active participation, consider student interests, allow mistakes, and set personalized benchmarks [96].

The study emphasizes a positive relationship between autonomy support and emotions during learning, as well as persistence, elaboration, and control strategies [57], [58]. These findings suggest that individual foundations mediate the link between learning strategies and positive outcomes. However, it is still unclear how emotions, individual foundation, and learning strategies interact in independent versus supervised learning environments [59].

4.4 Collaborative learning environments

Group projects, teamwork, and peer facilitation promote a sense of community and relatedness, which enhances both engagement and ownership of learning. Constructivism plays a significant role in shaping advanced teaching and learning processes, as it emphasizes purposeful education where evaluations are based on students' prior knowledge and experiences [60]. The teaching principles of Piaget and Vygotsky underpin these constructivist approaches [61]. According to constructivism, active learning occurs when students actively create knowledge through participation [62]. The theory also aligns with ideas on innovative learning and developmental constructivism, offering various tools for students to develop their skills and proficiency [63][64]. Structuralism models emphasize understanding learning dynamics and evolving activities by building on existing knowledge and engaging with the community [65].

4.5 Personal motivation and career goals

Students who can link their studies to personal goals and career aspirations are more likely to take ownership of

their education. Engagement is a complex psychological construct that involves various dimensions, including motivation and commitment [66]. According to research, student engagement results from the relationship between the individual and their environment, leading to changes in students' perceptions and levels of engagement [67]. Engaging activities have been shown to positively impact student performance and achievement, as students tend to learn better when using effective analytical methods, making organization a key factor in success [68]. Increased assessments are often linked to higher educational achievement [69]. Collaborative projects, which involve sharing ideas and recognizing diverse perspectives, can also enhance engagement [70]. Moreover, engagement influences the relationship between students and teachers, ultimately affecting overall learning performance. Studies have shown that students' perceptions of their classes may not directly influence their educational activity, but rather, their engagement with the class, which in turn impacts their learning [71]. Active collaborative learning has been found to improve the availability of resources, increase curriculum engagement, and facilitate knowledge transfer [72]. Additionally, tools like clickers have been shown to foster active collaboration, which students perceive as enhancing engagement and improving performance [73].

4.6 Engagement through technology and digital tools:

Interactive platforms, gamification, and online learning tools can make learning more engaging and personalized, boosting student motivation and participation. Social media serves as a platform for sharing information and knowledge between communities and learners. Research [74] suggests that using digital communities for collective training and engagement plays a key role in shaping models of technology usage. Studies [75] have shown that students improve their learning through the increased satisfaction of using social media for education, which leads to better performance. Similarly, [76] found that students' interest increases when they engage in combined education via social media, promoting constructive learning [77]. Technological use in academic settings creates an environment that fosters self-determined and collaborative learning [78]. Social media also enhances creative thinking and collaboration among students, encouraging innovative learning approaches [79]. Social networking functions as a powerful tool that accelerates the development of educational environments by promoting communication and collaboration among students, improving both learning behaviors and academic performance [80].

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5.0 Challenges and Barriers to Engagement

5.1 Socioeconomic, psychological, or institutional challenges:

Factors like socioeconomic background, mental health issues, and institutional barriers can prevent students from fully engaging, negatively impacting their academic performance. This research was conducted at a college that serves as an educational institution for teenagers, using a constructive theory approach. The study employed a mixed-methods approach, gathering data from both students and staff. The research identified key obstacles to student engagement, including challenges with assignments, relationships with teachers and peers, and the overall educational environment. These barriers were found to negatively affect students' behavior and academic confidence.

The study recommends several strategies to improve student engagement, including advising, support from teachers, reducing staff turnover, and addressing absenteeism. It also advocates for the adoption of collaborative educational methods, better teaching strategies, and creating opportunities for further learning. These measures aim to foster group systems and improve students' engagement and academic confidence, particularly for students from marginalized backgrounds, such as those participating in widening participation programs. These changes are expected to minimize barriers to engagement and contribute to improved outcomes, especially in countries like the UK.

Additionally, students with disabilities often face unique challenges that hinder their engagement. Disabilities, particularly invisible ones like learning disabilities, ADHD, psychological conditions, and chronic illnesses, are frequently overlooked or not discussed openly. This lack of acknowledgment can lead to neglect of these students' needs by college officials and faculty. Furthermore, students without disabilities may feel uncomfortable approaching those with visible disabilities, contributing to social isolation. Students with invisible disabilities may fear being labeled as "frauds" or "pretenders," which can discourage them from disclosing their conditions. This fear of rejection and the stress of concealing their disabilities add additional challenges, making it even harder for these students to engage academically and socially. These factors contribute to environments where students with disabilities struggle to fully participate in both academic and social aspects of college life [82].

5.2 Perceived lack of relevance of course content

When students fail to see the immediate relevance of their studies to their personal or professional goals, their engagement tends to decline. Scholar activity, which reflects students' motivation through observable actions, plays a crucial role in educational success. This activity not only fosters learning but also contributes to performance outcomes. When students feel positive about their self-evaluations, particularly as they fulfill their basic needs, they are more likely to engage both analytically and behaviorally in their studies. Therefore, variations in students' self-evaluations are often mirrored by differences in their engagement levels, highlighting the importance of alignment between students' goals and the relevance of their education [83].

The conceptual ambiguity can be broken down into three interrelated issues:

Broad Scope of Scholar Activity and Relevance of Course Content: Pharmacy students may struggle to connect their self-regulation and goal-setting efforts with course content that seems irrelevant to their personal or professional aspirations. When the curriculum does not align with their goals, students may find it challenging to maintain motivation and focus, leading to disengagement. [84]

Simplified Definitions of Engagement and Relevance of Course Content: Simplifying engagement as just motivation, attentiveness, or a sense of belonging might fail to address deeper issues like how course content meets students' needs or interests. For pharmacy students, this can manifest as a lack of connection to real-world applications, reducing their focus and enjoyment in learning. [85]

Unclear Focus in Engagement Research and Relevance of Course Content: The inconsistency in defining engagement makes it harder to address specific issues like relevance. For pharmacy students, this means that while engagement is studied, there's little emphasis on how a mismatch between course content and their career goals impacts their learning. This ambiguity leaves a critical disengagement factor unaddressed in educational strategies. [86]

5.3 Time management and personal responsibilities

Students juggling work, family, and other personal responsibilities often face challenges staying engaged due to time constraints and competing priorities. In recent years, improving student engagement with learning activities has become a focus in higher education, driven by the increasing number of students working temporary jobs and concerns about the quality of their educational experience. A study investigating 126 second-year nursing students in a pathophysiology course found that homework completion was the strongest predictor of academic

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success, followed by lecture attendance. However, study hours did not significantly predict performance. Importantly, part-time work was found to negatively impact academic performance. The study also highlighted that factors such as disinterest, engagement, and demographic variables (generation and nationality) explained differences in academic performance among students. These findings underscore the importance of effective educational activities and offer valuable insights for educators to design strategies that enhance student engagement and academic success [87].

6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Strategies to Improve Engagement and Ownership in Learning:

- i. **Project-Based Learning and Real-World Case Studies:** Incorporating project-based learning, real-world case studies, and collaborative environments promotes active engagement by encouraging students to apply their knowledge in practical contexts. These strategies help students see the relevance of their learning and foster deeper connections with the material. i.
- ii. **Self-Directed Learning:** Providing opportunities for self-directed learning fosters autonomy by allowing students to take control of their educational journey. This approach supports the development of critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and intrinsic motivation.
- iii. **Monitoring and Adjusting Class Activities:** Teachers can monitor student engagement during practical classes, making adjustments to class activities and assessments as needed. This ongoing evaluation helps to ensure that students remain actively engaged and that their needs are met in the learning process. ii.
- iv. **Structured Observation and Assessment of Engagement:** To maintain consistency and objectivity, teachers can implement a structured method for data coding and interpretation. By using the same criteria for assessing student engagement—such as initiative, collaboration, curiosity, and participation in discussions—teachers ensure reliable and valid observations. Peer observation and moderation of assessments across different subjects can further enhance the consistency of evaluations. h.
- v. **Fostering Student Ownership:** Encouraging students to take ownership of their learning can enhance both academic and behavioral outcomes. Teachers can support students in setting goals, tracking their progress, and identifying areas where further improvement is needed. By fostering self-assessment and self-determination, students

are better equipped to take an active role in their educational journey, leading to improved achievement.

By incorporating these strategies, teachers can create an engaging learning environment where students feel empowered, motivated, and responsible for their learning outcomes. This approach aligns with the growing emphasis on student-centered teaching methods and contributes to both academic and personal growth. [88][89]

6.1 Best practices for curriculum design in pharmacy education

To enhance pharmacy education, it is essential to integrate case-based learning, interactive simulations, and mentorship opportunities to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and real-world pharmaceutical practice. These approaches not only deepen students' understanding but also ensure they are better prepared for the complexities of pharmacy practice in clinical settings.

Constructivist and Motivational Theories: Pharmacy programs should design academic content using constructivist and motivational theories, which emphasize the active construction of knowledge and intrinsic motivation. By focusing on knowledge improvement, teaching educational techniques within dispensary procedures, and implementing a fair assessment structure, students are better equipped to engage with and retain complex material. Small-scale teaching discussions, ideally in simulated environments, should complement traditional textbook learning to provide a more interactive educational experience. [90]

Communication Skills Training: Future pharmacists must develop critical communication skills necessary for a patient-centered approach. These include:

- Active listening
- Building rapport
- Non-verbal communication
- Effective questioning (especially open-ended questions)
- Paraphrasing and summarizing
- Presenting information clearly
- Offering advice and addressing concerns
- Structuring conversations appropriately [91]

These skills are essential in fostering meaningful interactions with patients and other healthcare professionals. Training in communication should be integrated early in the program and reinforced throughout, with experiential learning opportunities and practical application in real-world pharmacy settings.

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- iv. Integrating Communication Training with Other Learning Activities: Research suggests that an evidence-based framework should be employed to train pharmacy students in communication skills. This training should be reinforced continuously throughout the program and linked with other learning activities. Additionally, incorporating experiential training within the context of pharmacy practice ensures students not only understand the theoretical aspects but also practice these skills in realistic settings. Assessment methods should be aligned with the objectives of communication training, providing students with constructive feedback that helps them improve their interpersonal skills in professional practice. [92]

The pharmacy programs should combine theoretical knowledge with practical experiences, emphasizing communication skills and patient-centered care. By implementing case-based learning, simulations, mentorship, and consistent communication training, pharmacy education can better prepare students for the challenges they will face in the field.

6.3 Policy changes at the institutional level

To improve student engagement and reduce disengagement, institutions should prioritize creating flexible curricula that cater to the diverse learning styles and backgrounds of students. Personalized mentorship and expanding student support systems can significantly enhance engagement by providing tailored guidance and fostering a sense of belonging and empowerment. The culture within an institution plays a crucial role in shaping the learning environment and influencing student engagement. An institutional culture that reinforces existing beliefs and practices may unintentionally contribute to student resistance. Conversely, institutions that confront issues constructively and create an environment that supports diverse student experiences can help diminish resistance and promote engagement. A significant challenge is the disconnection between faculty and students, often exacerbated by an increased focus on research over teaching, leading to faculty disengagement and, in turn, student disengagement. This dynamic underscores the need for institutions to balance research priorities with the nurturing of engaging learning environments.

To effectively address disengagement and dropout, institutions need to understand these issues from the lived experiences of students, exploring how their identities and personal goals are shaped within the school environment. For many students, the process of identity negotiation

within schools—where they may feel the need to suppress their authentic selves to fit a narrow, institutional definition of success—can be overwhelming. This can result in students feeling disconnected from their education, leading them to view school as irrelevant to their life goals. As students increasingly feel that school does not support their identity or aspirations, they may decide to disengage. It is essential to view school as a space where students can explore and develop their identities, not just as a place to conform to predetermined expectations [93].

Breakdowns in communication between students and teachers, often referred to as "interactive trouble," highlight the challenges that arise from cultural discontinuities within the classroom. Misunderstandings can occur when teachers fail to recognize the cues in students' responses or when students misunderstand the expectations set by teachers. These misunderstandings can contribute to disengagement, as students may feel disconnected from the classroom environment. To address these issues, schools need to adopt more inclusive communication strategies and ensure that teaching practices align with the diverse cultural and personal backgrounds of students. Teachers should be trained to recognize these dynamics and adjust their communication to foster clearer, more inclusive interactions [94].

In conclusion, fostering student engagement requires an understanding of the broader institutional culture and its impact on students' identities and experiences. By implementing flexible curricula, offering personalized support, and addressing communication breakdowns, schools can create an environment that promotes student ownership, reduces resistance, and enhances academic success.

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