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'Engagement' is the Key to the Golden Chest

An exploratory study on Student Engagement and employability quotient

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Abstract

It's time all the post graduate students have joined their colleges and are on the verge of completing their first semester, busy making new friends, contacts, networks, updating their facebook status and finally finding time to explore the library in their campus. First year is considered as very important as the lessons learnt here will have an impact in the future. So everyone is trying their first impression *jadoo*. The interesting element in the entire student's journey is 'Engagement', which is less talked but experienced by everyone.

Existing studies have a narrow focus on antecedents of Student Engagement. Peer group, faculty interaction, curriculum, availability of resources, extracurricular activities, competitive spirit and self-motivation are identified as some of the antecedents which contribute to student engagement. There are no longitudinal studies to confirm the predictors of Student Engagement. Earlier studies have emphasized the role of personal attributes of students, parent's educational level, gender, emotional intelligence and self-efficacy as significant predictors of engagement. In India researchers have made an attempt to study Student Engagement and its predictors, but the study is confined to some elite Business Schools.

This paper is an exploratory study to ascertain the antecedents of student engagement among Business Management graduates in Telangana State. The study reveals the primary elements of student engagement and concludes by avowing the coping strategies for improving the engagement levels. An attempt has been made to find the correlation between engagement and employability quotient. It is proved that the employability quotient of highly engaged students is high compared to students with low engagement levels.

Key words

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Student engagement, Employability quotient, antecedents of engagement, self-motivation.

Introduction:

It's time all the post graduate students have joined their colleges and are on the verge of completing their first semester, busy making new friends, contacts, networks, updating their facebook status and finally find time to explore the library in their campus. First year is considered as very important as the lessons learnt here will have an impact in the future. So everyone is trying their first impression *jadoo*. The interesting element in the entire student's journey is 'Engagement', which is less talked but experienced by everyone.

As a faculty, for the last one decade I have observed students in Management colleges. I could see a change in their perception towards attaining a Master's degree in Management. Earlier, students used to thrive for quality education and made every moment in their college days a learning. As the generation of students shifted from Y-generation to millennials, this perception changed. In some instances, students are not able to write the 'Statement of purpose' at their admission. And now the challenge is to impart Management knowledge and skills among these students. My visits to various Management institutions have made me realize that some 'X' factor is missing in my students. Further explored the area and could identify that 'Engagement' is missing in my students.   My curiosity to understand this difference among students made me to delve into this concept.

Review of literature:

According to Shernoff, 'Student Engagement' is an optimal experience or flow which refers to a state of mind reflected in the form of concentration, interest and enjoyment in the pursuit of studies. It is gaining much importance as students are not able to get a job of their choice and industry is not finding the right candidate. One of the reasons can be related to lack of engagement during their studies.

In countries like US and UK, research is being carried to know the engagement levels of students and various techniques are being developed to enhance the engagement level. In India little research is available on this subject.

 The government is allocating a major pie of its budget for promoting higher education. Now the question is with lot of funding from governments, hopes from parents, aspirations from students and need for talent for the industry, does engagement really matter?

Existing studies has a narrow focus on antecedents of Student Engagement. Peer group, faculty interaction, curriculum, availability of resources, extracurricular activities, competitive spirit and self-motivation are identified as some of the antecedents which contribute to student engagement. There are no longitudinal studies to confirm the predictors of Student Engagement. Earlier studies have emphasized the role of personal attributes of students, parent's educational level, gender, emotional intelligence and self-efficacy as significant predictors of engagement. In India researchers have made an attempt to study Student Engagement and its predictors, but the study is confined to some elite Business Schools.

 Preliminary studies and interactions with the students revealed that there is no common element which can really engage a student. For some it is rapport with the faculty, for some it is scoring more in their internal and external examinations, others claim it to be a welcoming environment at the campus which again includes various dimensions. Engagement is of behavioral, cognitive and emotional. Some studies are available on observable indicators that are related to academic and behavioral engagement. But studies on cognitive and psychological aspects of engagement can be counted on finger tips.

With the proactive and dynamic changes in the political scenario and the initiatives taken by Ministry of Human Resource Development, it is high time to focus on 'Student Engagement'. Whether the student is a normal graduate or post graduate student, research scholar, post-doctoral student or for the matter anyone who wishes to learn can reach the pinnacle only when the magic element 'Engagement' is present.

Can engagement be created and sustained? The answer is yes. Then how can Engagement be created and sustained? Now the answer is difficult to answer. But doesn't mean it is impossible to answer. The answer lies with everyone - the parents, the faculty, the institutions, the policy makers and above all the 'Student', without whom engagement is meaningless.

Research in this area is needed as it answers many questions like career choice, drop outs, suicides (even by the brightest and toppers), reforms in educational sector, intervention mechanism to deal with various issues related to students, training programs for teachers, initiatives to develop a student holistically and

above all engagement will result in persistence. Persistence is related to factors such as locus of control, emotional stability and self-reliability resulting in goal direction and purposeful behavior.

Objectives of the study:

To enhance the behavioral, emotional and cognitive engagement. As diverse group of students are there multiple engagement strategies have to be adopted. Some students do not volunteer, they always take a back step, therefore, making them to involve in class activities is a major challenge. The following are the objectives of the study.

1. To explore the antecedents of 'Student Engagement' among Management graduates in Telangana.
2. To explore 'Student Engagement' strategies
3. To enunciate the relationship between 'Student Engagement' and Employability Quotient.

Scope:

The scope for the study is all the Management graduates (MBA) in Hyderabad, Telangana. The study was carried over for a period 18 months.

Hypotheses:

H1: There is a direct relationship between Future goals and aspirations and Student Engagement.

H2: There is a positive relationship between Teacher –student relationship and Student Engagement.

H3: There is a positive between peer support for learning and Student Engagement.

H4: There is a positive between Family support for learning and Student Engagement.

H5: Student engagement strategies can enhance Engagement levels.

H6: Student Engagement has positive impact on Employability quotient.

Model for the study:

Based on the review of literature, a detailed model has been developed by the researcher for the study.

Antecedents of Student Engagement   Outcome of the study
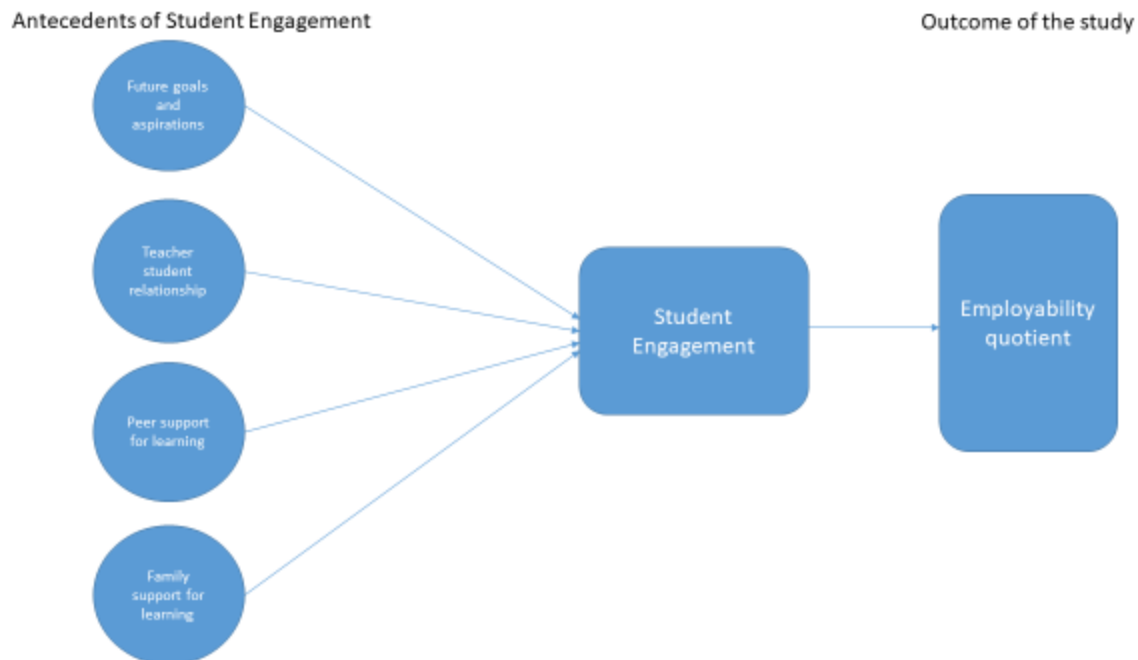
Once the factors are identified, now the challenge is to improve the Engagement levels of the students.

Strategies to build engagement levels among students.

1. Self – assessment tests:

   Self-assessment and self-discovery are vital to engagement. Therefore, faculty have to design some activities which will help the student to discover and assess themselves. Personality assessment tests should also be carried to guide the students in their career aspirations. Once students discover themselves, they know their strengths and weakness. Now they have to make efforts to improve their strengths and minimize their weaknesses. As a faculty, mentor them to identify their strengths and weaknesses and show them the right career path.

2. Management games and Role Plays

   It is time tested that some concepts which cannot capture the attention of students through regular pedagogy, management games can really help the students to understand the concepts as the participation and involvement of students is high.

   Management games are a boon to management teachers and students. For teachers it is an effective tool to explain the concepts through an interactive approach. Students feel involved and it improves their participation level. After completion of the game, the teacher should act as a facilitator to make the students realize what they understand after playing the game. Simple question and answers session and debate can improve the critical thinking of the students. After completing of the session, the students should be asked to submit a report on the learnings and take away from the session. Based on the report further the faculty has to design the future course of management games.

   Role plays: Role plays are an effective way to impart the interpersonal relations among the students. Especially when students come from varied backgrounds role plays help in understanding how the other person perceives the situation and responds. It helps in making an assessment on how the thinking, perception and understanding vary from person to person and situation. A situation need be given to one group of students and they need to play various roles in that situation. The same situation will be given to another group of students. Now, the comparison between these two groups should be done. The whole process should be video graphed. These videos will be shown to all the students and they need to introspect on their behavior, communication and body language. The students will act as anchors to give suggestions for improvement. Therefore, with the help of role plays students feel empowered and their level of participation will be high. Students

get feedback from the peer group. The faculty should try to moderate the situation and give suggestions on how to improve individual role in playing various roles. Role plays will address role conflicts if any. Therefore, role-plays help in improving the engagement levels of the students.

3. Online and blended learning:

    It is observed that students are more interested in blended learning. Digitization of the class activities is also one aspect which the students have recommended. Therefore 'google classroom' has be identified as a tool to implement digitization of assignments. Class tests and assignments can be conducted through google classroom. OER's (Open Educational Resources), blogs, dedicated subject wise websites, exclusive software for student community can be designed to bring life in to classroom through digitization.

Research methodology:

Population: All the Management graduate students (MBA) of Hyderabad

Sample design: 10 colleges offering MBA course were identified. Convenience sampling technique was used to identify these colleges.

Data collection: Questionnaires were designed based on 'The Student Engagement Instrument' (SEI) developed by Appleton et al. (2006). 632 filled in questionnaires were received out of 1000 questionnaires distributed. Out of them 58 questionnaires were incomplete. Therefore, only 574 questionnaires were further tabulated and codified for the study.

After assessing the engagement levels of the students, now the researcher has to find the relationship between Student Engagement and Employability quotient. Student's employability quotient is measured on three sets of skills. General skills (communication, problem solving, self-management and analytical skills), Subject knowledge and Corporate skills. Total nine questions were framed based on the research.

Results and discussion:

SPSS 21 was used to analyze the data. Initially Exploratory factor analysis was used to explore the antecedents of Student Engagement. Factor loading took place for four factors. These are identified as future goals and aspirations, teacher student relationship, peer support for learning and family support for learning. Cronbach Alpha was used to check the internal consistency of the coefficients. Sample adequacy and Bartlett's sphericity test was conducted to check whether the data is suitable for conducting Factor Analysis. KMO sample adequacy coefficients value is 0.812. Therefore, the data was found suitable for EFA. Factor loading score of 0.50 is taken as the criteria by the researcher to identify the loading of the factors. Total four factors were grouped in the study. These factors are future goals and aspirations, teacher student relationship, peer support for learning and family support for learning. The results revealed that there is a perfect correlation between Student Engagement and Employability Quotient. Therefore, all the hypotheses are accepted.

Conclusion:

Student engagement plays a pivotal role in imparting the education. Engagement levels are comparatively low in millennials because of various reasons. For every faculty before imparting knowledge, first he/she should focus on improving the engagement levels which will enhance student participation and reciprocates in his/her behavior in the class. Continuous observation of the students' participation is vital to identify the engagement levels of the students. Therefore, faculty plays a crucial role in identifying and building the engagement levels of the students.

Significance of the study:

This study has significance to four parties:

Teachers: The teachers can assess the Engagement levels of the students and also adopt various strategies to improve the student engagement levels. Classroom participation will improve resulting in the relationships between student and teacher. The 'connect' between them can be established when

engagement levels are high. Therefore, every teacher/faculty should feel that first they should work on improving the engagement levels of the students and then only learning can take place.

Students: every student comes to the college with some objective, in some cases there are students who doesn't have any direction. In such scenario if the engagement levels are improved students can find the direction and also aim for their goals. Confidence levels of engaged students is also very high. Therefore they can channelize their energy towards attaining their goals.

College Management: finally the goal of every institution is to have harmonious relations wth their students/alumni and build a healthy network. Right from day one if the management focuses on improving the engagement levels, the employability quotient will also be high resulting in gaining more campus placements.

Other stakeholders: Government, Skill development centers, capacity building centers, private employers and consultants are other stakeholders of this study. They can explore this study and can implement in their organizations.

Directions for further research: The study is inclusive. Various research questions arise while conducting the study. Therefore the scope is well defined and the unanswered questions are set for further research. Below are the areas for further research of the study.

- Performance of the students at school, inter and degree colleges.
- Family background, like parent's educations, their income and siblings.
- Financial position of the family.
- Which school/college they studied at junior and Degree College.
- Pedagogy

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