A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF STUDENT PERCEPTIONS ABOUT THEIR ENGAGEMENT IN CLASSROOMS

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Abstract

As lecturers we often go to classes to present lectures without knowing exactly what our students want, what their problems are, and what academic, social and emotional support they need. One way of getting to know students better is to engage them in various aspects of their academic life. There are different ways of looking at student engagement. Student engagement can be linked to students' enthusiasm and motivation to learn. On the other hand, the lecturers can devise various strategies to stimulate students' enthusiasm in their classrooms. Hence it is important for lecturers to actively engage students in various aspects of their academic life. Engagement can take the form of intellectual, emotional, behavioural, physical, social and cultural engagement. This study is undertaken to examine student teachers' perceptions of their various educational experiences. The target population for the study are second and third-year education students at an institution of higher learning in South Africa. A questionnaire which consists of closed and open-ended questions was used to collect data from the respondents. The questions focused on the course material, teaching methods used by lecturers, assessment strategies, reading and study habits of the students, various forms of support given to students, as well as the skills that the students have acquired by attending this institution. The information obtained from the study will yield valuable information that the lecturers can use to understand their students better and devise strategies that will be suitable and relevant to their needs. Since the respondents are student teachers it is hoped that such information will help them when they deal with their future learners in schools.

Keywords: student engagement, skills, academic activities, academic support.

1. INTRODUCTION

Student engagement has been defined differently by different authors. It has been defined as participation in educationally effective practices both inside and outside the classroom, which leads to a range of measurable outcomes (Trowler, 2010:4). Outcomes of student engagement are linked to success in higher education (Strydom and Mentz, 2010:8). According to Ivala, Gachago, Condy and Chigona (2013:82) it is one of the factors shown empirically to enhance student success. Barkley (2014) argues that learning begins with the student, meaning that, the greater the student's involvement or engagement in academic work, the greater the student's acquisition of knowledge and general cognitive development. She further argues that learning about things does not enable students to acquire the abilities and understanding they will need for

the 21st century. Rather, what is needed are new pedagogies of engagement that will result in resourceful, engaged citizens required (Barkley, 2010:4). As researchers, we argue that it is important for lecturers to understand the needs of their students and one way of achieving this, is through student engagement. Lecturers need to understand that engagement goes beyond involvement or participation. It requires feeling, sense-making as well as activity.

Taking the discussion on student engagement further, Ivala *et al,* (2013:82) maintain that, the term engagement is usually used to represent constructs such as quality of effort and involvement in productive learning activities (Kuh cited in Ivala, Gachago, Condy and Chigona). Student engagement is conceptualised into time and efforts students invest in educational activities that are linked to desired outcomes. It encompasses various factors, such as investment in the academic experience of the higher education institution, interactions with faculty, involvement in co-curricular activities, and interactions with peers. In line with this argument, Dunne and Owen (2013: XIV) further indicate that student engagement does not align well with conceptualisation of passive learners or students viewed as empty vessels to be filled, but with students who are actively and deliberately engaging with their formal and informal learning. They argue that the learners are engaged in their academic learning and how it is delivered and made available to them. They are engaged in their relationship with their teachers and peers in the learning environment. Finally, they are engaged in the quality process of their institutions, or in developing practices and responsibilities within their local communities and beyond (Dunne & Owen, 2013).

Trowler (2010:5) highlights three dimensions of student engagement, that is, behavioural engagement, emotional engagement and cognitive engagement. Students who are behaviourally engaged would typically comply with behavioural norms, such as attendance, involvement and would demonstrate absence of disruptive or negative behaviour. Students who engage emotionally would experience affective reactions such as interest, enjoyment or a sense of belonging. Cognitively engaged students would be interested in their learning and would seek to go beyond the requirements and relish a challenge (Trowler, 2010).

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Engagement theory

O'Shea, Stone and Delahunty (2015: 44) state that the engagement theory was developed by Kearsly and Shneiderman, in response to their own teaching experiences.The basic premise of engagement theory is that students must be engaged in their coursework in order for effective learning to occur. Engagement revolves around three basic principles of promoting student engagement in problem-based collaborative learning activities. These principles are related, create and donate. Relate implies group relationships and the interactions and negotiations necessary to establish a rapport. Create refers to an element of learner control over the choice and development of the task. Donate is about the importance of making a contribution to the wider community, in leaning tasks which are not necessarily academically focused, but provide authenticity to the activity. This then means that student engagement goes beyond the confines of a classroom.

Kuh and Astin in O'Shea, Stone and Delahunty (2015) proposed a student engagement theory, which shows that the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to academic experience or the amount of learning and personal development associated with any educational programme is directly proportional to the quality and quantity of student involvement in that programme. For students' growth to take place, students need to engage in their environment.

This paper is grounded in Pittaway's theory of engagement. This theory is underpinned by four key principles, which state that:

- engaged staff is a prerequisite for engaging students
- respectful and supportive relationships are crucial
- students should be encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning and,
- scaffolded support and clearly communicated expectations enable students to develop knowledge.

Pittaway's framework comprises five elements of engagement, that is, personal element, academic, intellectual element, the social element and profession (O' Shea, Stone and Delahunty, 2015:39).

2.2. Dimensions of students' engagement

Student engagement is multidimensional in nature. These dimensions vary differently depending on the

approaches used in studying student engagement (Ching and Chao, 2011:71). Furthermore, Taylor and Parsons (2011:4) indicate that student engagement is differentiated in terms of the different ways of understanding how students engage such as academic engagement, cognitive engagement, intellectual engagement, behavioural, social engagement, behavioural engagement, emotional engagement and psychological engagement.

Academic and intellectual engagement

This form of engagement is said to include the psychological investments and efforts towards learning, the mastery of skills and craft, and the participation in the different developing tasks. In academic engagement, it is important to determine and understand what motivates students to participate in the required tasks in order to achieve success. Intellectual engagement is said to be the serious emotional and cognitive investment in learning. In order to learn, students need learning environments that are designed for deep intellectual engagement through which they can experience learning (Ching and Chao, 2011:72). According to O'Shea, Stone and Delahunty (2015:50) this type of engagement focused on the content of the subject and is regarded as a means to address subject requirements or extend understanding.

Social engagement

Social engagement is the combination of the student sense of belongingness at school, their feeling of connectedness and acceptance with classmates and peers, quality interaction with faculties, and their feeling of connectedness and acceptance with classmates and peers, and their overall acknowledgement of the concept of schooling. Social engagement is important, because students who feel socially isolated are more likely not to function effectively (Ching and Chao, 2011:72). In a study by O'Shea, Stone and Delahunty (2015:48) students had conflicting views on social engagement. Other students alluded to the fact that they perceived connecting socially with their peers in learning as a need or essential to their learning experience, other students regarded communicating with other students as something that did not contribute to their learning.

Behavioural and emotional engagement

The concept of behavioural engagement comes from the notion of participation. Such participation in academic and social or co-curricular activities, active attendance, assignments and homework completion, are all considered crucial for achieving positive academic outcomes. Behavioural engagement also encompasses adhering to classroom norms, as well as coming to class on time and avoiding unnecessary negative behaviours (Ching and Chao, 2011:72).

Emotional engagement according to Ching and Chao (2011:72) is the combination of the student's sense of belonging, feeling of competence, and motivation towards the concept of schooling. It is also said to include the positive and negative reactions towards peers, teachers and administrators, and the school itself. These factors are said to contribute to the student's willingness to participate.

Cognitive engagement

It consists of psychological investment in learning. Some also mentioned that cognitive engagement is a desire to go beyond the minimum requirements, a preference for challenge.

3. RELATED LITERATURE

3.1 International perspective on student engagement

According to O'Shea, Stone and Delahunty (2015:43), research in engagement of students in their learning in higher education contexts has often focused on what students are doing and the resultant effect on their academic performance. They further argue that student engagement can be manifested in the development of critical thinking skills, higher order and general embracing of learning by taking responsibility and actions to achieve intrinsically motivated goals.

Studies on student engagement have focussed on different aspects of engagement. For example, in a study conducted in Australia, student engagement focused on individual or academic engagement in learning as opposed to engagement with the administration of the university, curriculum development, or co-creation of resources and knowledge (Dunne and Owen, 2013: 46). O'Shea, Stone and Delahunty (2015:44) further argue that this survey of student engagement concludes that learners are central to the concept of engagement.

In the United Kingdom, student engagement appears to be a more inclusive concept, suggesting it is about supporting the interest of the students. In Australia, engagement, has been significantly influenced by introduction of the Australian Survey of Student Engagement measures with quality assurance determination (Dunne and Owen, 2013: 46).

In Taiwan, research on student engagement has pointed out that students learn more by becoming more involved. It has been mentioned that student involvement or engagement have been found to have positively contributed to the students' educational performance. Ching and Chao (2011: 86) conducted research in Taiwan with the aim of designing a Taiwan Student Engagement Model. The findings of the study show that certain activities do help students to develop their general, cognitive and social skills. The study also pointed to the various value-adding activities that the students can participate and engage in non-threatening and motivational activities.

Although different authors view the concept of student engagement differently, they seem to agree that active participation by the students forms the basis of student engagement. Now that we have looked at research done globally on student engagement, we need to give attention to research done in South Africa on student engagement.

3.2 The South African context

Wawrzynki, Heck and Remley (2012:119) conducted a study at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU) to assess the relationship between student co-curricular involvement and students' learning outcomes. They found that NMMU students who lived on campus were more likely to report positive student outcomes and be engaged in co-curricular activities than those who lived off campus. Another finding of this study was that the students who spent more time engaged in co-curricular activities reported greater gains across a number of outcomes. This finding supports those studies that found that student involvement or engagement positively influences their learning outcomes, and consequently, their academic achievement.

In their study on student engagement, Strydom and Mentz (2010: 1) used the South African Student Survey of Student Engagement (SASSE) to collect data. The SASSE instrument measures five benchmarks for effective educational practice, namely: level of academic challenge, active and collaborative learning, student staff interaction, enriching educational explanation and supportive campus interaction. The findings of the study confirmed the value of student engagement in improving the quality of teaching and learning.

The literature consulted stresses the importance of student engagement in learning.

4. AIMS, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND OBJECTIVES

4.1 Aim

The aim of the study was to examine student teachers' perceptions about their engagement or participation in academic related activities at an institution of higher learning, in the Free State Province of South Africa.

4.2 Research questions

- • What are the perceptions of the student teachers about their engagement in academic activities?
- • What are the implications of student perceptions of their engagement for teacher educators?

4.3 Objectives

This study aims to achieve the following objectives:

- • To examine the perceptions of the student teachers about their engagement in academic activities.
- • To determine the implications of student perceptions of their engagement for teacher educators?

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

5.1 Research design

This is an exploratory case study of an institution of higher learning in south Africa.

5.2 Participants

The participants of the study were third and second year Bachelor of Education students at a university of Technology in South Africa.

Table 1 below shows the sample profile.

Table 1 Sample profile (N=202)

	Third Years N=105		Second Years N=97		Total for males	Total for females	Total
Programme	**Males**	**Females**	Males	Females	Males	Females	
Computer Science	3	6	4	8	7	14	21
Economic and Management Science	10	16	14	11	24	27	51
Languages	8	19	2	15	10	34	44
Mathematics	7	8	15	2	22	10	32
Natural Sciences	1	14	12	2	13	16	29
Technology	6	7	6	6	12	13	25
Total	35 (33%)	70 (67%)	53	44	88	114	202

5.3 Data collection

Data on student engagement was collected using a questionnaire. The questionnaire is an adaptation of the National Survey on Student engagement. Students' responses were measured on a four-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1-4. 4=Very often, 3=Often, 2=Sometimes and 1=Never. The median is 2.5. The questions focused on the course material, teaching methods used by lecturers, assessment strategies, reading and study habits of the students, various forms of support given to students, as well as the skills that the students have acquired by attending this particular institution.

5.4 Data analysis

The descriptive statistics were generated from the data.

6. FINDINGS

Table 2 shows the responses of students on the perceptions of their engagement in class activities.

Table 2. Perceptions of students on engagement in student activities (N=202)

STUDENT ACTIVITY												
During the current year, about how often have you done the following?												
	Third Years N=105						Second Years N=97					
Means per programme	CS n=9	EMS n=26	LAN n=27	MAT n=15	NS n=15	TEC n=13	CS n=21	EMS N=51	LAN N=44	M N=32	NS	TECH
1 Asked questions or contributed to course discussion.	2.44	2.69	2.81	2.8	2.33	3.15	2.58	2.32	2.65	2.76	2.29	2.58

2	Prepared two or more drafts of a paper or assignment before submitting them for evaluation.	2.11	2.77	2.96	3.07	2.40	3.00	2.67	2.6	2.71	2.71	2.29	2.67
3	Come to class without completing readings or assignments	2.11	1.96	1.89	1.93	2.07	1.46	1.38	1.6	1.88	1.41	1.36	1.83
4	Asked another student to help you understand course material.	2.56	2.92	3.30	3	3.00	3.15	3.25	3.04	2.65	3.06	3.14	3.25
5	Explained course material to one or more students.	2.67	3.15	3.35	3.27	2.73	3.42	3.25	2.6	2.94	3.24	3.14	3.25
6	Prepared for exams by discussing or working through course material with other students.	3.67	3.38	3.63	3.5	2.80	3.62	3.17	3.36	3.00	3.00	3.53	3.17
7	Worked with other students on course projects or assignments.	3.67	3.58	3.70	3.47	3.67	3.77	3.17	3.56	3.18	3.53	3.64	3.17
8.	Given a course presentation.	2.33	2.80	3.11	2.93	3.2	2.93	2.75	2.88	3.00	2.88	3.43	2.75
Average Mean		**2.69**	**2.91**	**3.09**	**3.00**	**2.77**	**3.08**	**2.78**	**2.75**	**2.75**	**2.82**	**2.85**	**2.83**

The students' responses varied, but ranged from moderate to high. The means per program ranged from 2.78 to 3.31. Of note, students in the Computer Science and Natural Sciences programmes had low means compared to other groups. Students in the Technical programme showed the highest level of participation in class activities. All the means were between 3 and 4. They therefore showed more collaborative engagement in their work than students in other programmes.

Table 3 gives a breakdown of students' perceptions of their engagement in their course work.

Table 3. Perceptions of students on engagement in course work (N=202)

COURSE WORK												
During the current year, how much has your coursework emphasised the following												
		Means per programme **Third Years**						**Second Years**					
Statements		**CS** n=9	**EMS** n=26	**LANG** n=27	**MATH** n=15	**NS** n=15	**TECH** n= 13	**CS**	**EMS**	**LAN**	**MAT**	**NS**	**TECH**
1.	Memorizing course	3.11	3.12	2.93	3.13	3.2	3	3	3.08	2.88	3.18	2.71	3

	material.												
2	Applying facts, theories, or methods to practical problems or new situations.	2.89	3.12	3.22	3.33	3.33	3.15	3.17	3.24	3.12	3.12	3.50	3.17
3.	Analysing facts, theories, or methods to practical problems or new situations.	2.67	2.85	3.23	3.13	3.07	3.15	3.25	3.4	3.12	3.24	3.14	3.25
4.	Evaluating a point of view, decision, or information source.	2.33	3.19	3.48	2.80	2.4	3.23	2.75	3.12	3.29	2.65	3.21	2.75
5	Forming a new idea or understanding from various pieces of information.	2.22	3.19	3.48	2.80	2.4	3.23	2.83	3.12	3.24	3.35	3.14	2.93
Average Mean		**2.64**	**3.09**	**3.20**	**3.01**	**2.96**	**3.14**	**3**	**3.19**	**3.13**	**3.11**	**3.14**	**3.02**

For Coursework the overall means ranged from 2.64. to 2.96. It is only for items 12 that both the Computer Science and Natural Science students had means falling below the median, while students from the Language programme had the highest mean for this particular item. The students in the Language programme had higher means than students in other groups.

Table 4 shows the findings on student engagement per programme. The focus is whether lecturers use teaching methods which ensure learner engagement.

Table 4. Perceptions of students on teaching methods and engagement (N=202)

TEACHING METHODS USED BY LECTURERS												
During the current year, to what extent have your lecturers done the following:												
		Third Years N=105						Second Years N=97					
Statements		CS n=9	EMS n=26	LANG n=27	MATH n=15	NS n=15	TECH n=13	CS	EMS	LAN	MAT	NS	TECH
1	Clearly explained course goals and requirements.	2.89	3.38	3.33	3.2	2.53	3.23	2.67	3.52	2.88	3.12	3.36	2.67

2	Taught course sessions in an organised way.	3.00	3.38	3.48	3.29	3.13	3.08	3.25	3.6	3.24	3.35	3.57	3.25
3	Used examples or illustrations to explain difficult points.	3.00	3.23	3.37	3.2	3.07	3.69	3.08	3.32	2.82	3.24	3.14	3.08
4	Provided feedback on a draft or work in progress.	2.56	3.12	3.11	3.13	2.47	3.38	3.00	3.16	2.35	2.82	3.07	3.00
5	Provided prompt and detailed feedback on tests or completed assignments.	2.78	3.46	3.23	2.93	2.53	3.23	3.58	3.36	2.88	3.12	2.79	3.58
Average mean		**2.84**	**3.32**	**3.31**	**3.15**	**2.75**	**3.32**	**3.12**	**3.9**	**2.83**	**3.13**	**3.19**	**3.12**

The student teachers in the study were positive about the teaching methods used by their lecturers. The overall means ranged from 2.75 to 3.32. All the means are above 2.5 which is the median.

The average means per programme is 3 and above. These findings show that the students perceive that the teaching methods used by teachers promote student engagement.

Table 5 gives a breakdown of students' perceptions regarding their analytical skills.

Table 5 Student behaviour (analytical skills) and engagement (N=202)

STUDENT BEHAVIOURS (Analytical Skills)													
During the current year, about how often have you done the following:													
		Third Years						Second Years					
Statements		CS n=9	EMS n=26	LANG n=27	MATH n=15	NS n=15	TECH n=13	CS	EMS	LAN	MAT	NS	TEC H
1	Reached conclusions based on your own analysis of numerical information (numbers, graphs, statistics etc.	3	2.85	2.63	3.13	2.67	2.69	2.67	2.6	2.94	3.06	2.86	2.67
2	Used numerical information	2.44	2.81	2.67	2.73	2.67	2.77	2.58	2.56	2.53	3.00	2.21	2.58

	(numbers) to examine real world problem or issue (unemployment, climate).											
3	Evaluated what others have concluded from numerical information	1.89	2.62	2.41	2.64	2.60	2.46	2.25	2.4	2.18	3.12	2.21	2.25
Average Mean		**2.44**	**2.76**	**2.57**	**2.84**	**2.64**	**2.64**						

Although the overall means for the programmes ranged from 2.44 to 2.84, there are items (19, 20), whose means fell below the median of 2.5. The students in the Natural Sciences programme had the highest mean of 2.84.

Table 6, shows the student perceptions regarding their involvement in reading.

Table 6 Student behaviour (Reading) and engagement (N=202)

STUDENT BEHAVIOURS (Reading)												
During the current year, about how often have you done the following:												
		Third Years						**Second Years**					
Statements		CS	EMS	LANG	MATHS	NS	TECH	CS	EMS	LANG	MATHS	NS	TECH
1	Identified key information from reading assignments.	3.2	3.19	3.37	3.27	3.2	3.77	3.42	3	3.47	3.18	3.36	3.42
2	Reviewed your notes after class.	2.87	1.12	2.56	3.13	2.87	3.00	3.17	3.16	3.00	3.12	2.86	3.17
3	Summarized what you learned in class or from course marks.	2.67	3.00	3.00	3.40	2.67	3.38	3.08	3.08	3.06	3.06	3.14	3.08
Average Mean		**2.91**	**3.10**	**2.98**	**3.27**	**2.91**	**3.38**	**3.22**	**3.08**	**3.18**	**3.12**	**3.12**	**3.22**

Table 6 indicates positive students' perceptions towards student engagement.

Table 7 shows the results on the perceptions of students on relationships or interactions in the classroom and student engagement.

Table 7 Relationships or interactions with different stakeholders (N=202)

RELATIONSHIPS/INTERACTIONS												
How often do you interact with the following people in your institution?												
		Third Years N=105						Second Years N=97					
Means Per Programme		CS	EMS	LANG	MATH	NS	TECH	CS	EMS	LANG	MATH	NS	TECH
1	Students	3.44	3.58	3.30	3.67	3.27	3.54	3.5	3.44	3.47	3	3.36	3.5
2	Academic advisers	2.33	2.77	2.56	2.87	2.13	2.46	1.33	2.76	2.82	2.18	2.00	1.33
3	Faculty (Deans, HODs, Lecturers)	2.33	2.50	2.78	2.87	2.53	2.69	2.5	2.52	2.71	2.71	2.71	2.5
4	Student services staff (library, career services, housing, etc.	1.78	2.54	2.30	2.73	1.93	2.46	2.5	2.6	2.71	1.94	2.14	2.5
5	Other administrative staff and offices (registrar, financial aid, etc.)	2.11	2.52	2.41	2.93	2.27	2.38	2.75	2.56	2.65	1.65	1.64	2.75
Average mean		**2.40**	**2.78**	**2.67**	**3.01**	**2.43**	**2.71**	**2.52**	**2.78**	**2.87**	**2.30**	**2.37**	**2.52**

The students' perceptions were that their interactions with lecturers do promote engagement of students in learning.

The overall means in different programmes show that the students have a perception that they are given academic and social support at the institution. The means ranged from 2.40 to 2.78.

Table 8 shows the breakdown on academic and social support given to students.

Table 8 Perceptions on academic and social support and student engagement (N=202)

GUIDANCE / SUPPORT													
Means per programme	CS	EMS	LANG	MATH	NS	TECH							
How much does your institution emphasise the following:													
		Third Years N=105						Second Years N=97					
		CS	EMS	LANG	MATH	NS	TECH	CS	EMS	LANG	MATH	NS	TECH
1	Spending significant amounts of time studying your work.	3.33	3.48	3.48	3.4	3.33	3.08	3.5	3.2	3.24	3.12	3.14	3.5
2	Providing support to help students succeed academically.	2.89	3.16	3.30	3.2	3.27	3.00	3.17	2.88	2.76	3.24	2.93	3
3	Using learning support services (tutoring services, writing centre, etc.)	2.67	3.08	3.11	3	2.87	3.31	3	3.04	2.76	3.24	2.93	3
4	Encouraging contact among students from different backgrounds	2.33	3.12	3.19	3.07	2.93	2.85	2.42	2.88	2.53	2.71	2.14	2.42
5	Providing opportunities to be involved socially.	2.44	3	3.00	2.93	2.87	2.92	2.67	2.88	2.53	2.71	2.71	2.67
6	Providing support for your overall well-being	2.56	3.4	3.44	2.8	2.67	3.00	2.83	3.04	3.00	2.76	3.07	2.83
7	Helping you manage your non-academic responsibilities	2.11	2.88	3.00	2.54	2.27	2.62	2.17	2.4	2.47	1.82	2.00	2.17
8	Attending academic activities and events	1.67	3.12	2.56	2.33	2.47	2.77	2.92	2.4	2.65	2.35	2.43	2.92
9	Attending events that address the social, economic and political issues	1.89	3.12	2.70	2.33	2.73	2.85	2.75	2.28	2.82	2.53	2.29	2.75
Average Mean		**2.43**	**3.15**	**3.09**	**2.85**	**2.82**	**2.93**	**2.83**	**2.78**	**2.75**	**2.71**	**2.61**	**2.83**

All the means across programmes are below 3, but higher than 2.5 which is the median. The means ranged from 2.61 to 2.83. This means that the academic and social support students received at the institution is moderate.

Table 9 Perceptions on experience and engagement at the university (N=202)

				Third years N=105							Second Years N=97			
OVERALL EXPERIENCE AT THE UNIVERSITY														

OVERALL EXPERIENCE AT THE UNIVERSITY

How much has your experience at this institution contributed to your knowledge, skills and personal development in the following areas?

Statements		CS	EMS	LANG	MATH	NS	TECH	CS	EMS	LANG	MATH	NS	TECH
1	Writing clearly and effectively.	3.33	3.68	3.48	3.33	3.33	3.38	3.67	3.52	3.12	2.94	3.57	3.67
2	Speaking clearly and effectively.	3.22	3.52	3.56	3.33	3.27	3.23	3.33	3.52	3.12	3.53	3.64	3.42
3	Thinking critically and analytically.	3.11	3.68	3.52	3.60	3.33	3.46	3.42	3.36	3.12	3.53	3.64	3.42
4	Analysing numerical and statistical information.	2.44	3.04	3.00	3.60	2.93	2.85	2.50	2.84	2.88	3.29	2.93	2.50
5	Acquiring job- or work-related knowledge and skills.	2.44	3.4	3.41	3.27	2.80	3.15	3.50	3.28	3.00	2.59	3.43	3.50
6	Working effectively with others.	2.44	3.58	3.63	3.64	3.40	3.15	3.83	3.44	3.24	3.65	3.29	3.83
7	Developing or clarifying a personal code of values and ethics.	3.44	3.38	3.38	3.20	2.93	2.92	3.33	3.08	2.94	2.88	2.79	3.25
8	Understanding people of other backgrounds	2.56	3.62	3.41	3.27	3.13	3.31	3.25	3.44	3.13	3.29	3.07	3.25
9	Solving complex real-world problems.	2.33	3.27	3.30	3.13	3.27	3.08	3.25	3.08	3.18	3.18	2.79	3.25
10	Being informed and active citizen.	2.22	3.35	3.22	2.80	3.00	3.15	3.25	3.12	3.00	2.82	2.71	3.25
Average Mean		**2.84**	**3.45**	**3.39**	**3.32**	**3.14**	**3.17**						

For all programs the average means range from 2.84 to 3.45. This means that the perception of the students is that the experience at the institution promotes engagement.

Table 10 focused on the perceptions of students on their overall experience at the institution.

Table 10 Overall Experience

OVERALL EXPERIENCE													
Means Per Programme		CS	EMS	LANG	MATH	NS	TECH	CS	EMS	LANG	MATH	NS	TECH
1	How would you rate your overall experience at this institution?	3.11	3.5	3.04	3.2	2.87	2.92	3.25	3	3.12	3.06	3.07	3.25

The overall mean ranges between 2.87 and 3.11. Except for students in the Natural Sciences programme all the means are above 3, which indicates high and positive perceptions.

6. DISCUSSION

The study sought to answer the following research questions:

- What are the perceptions of the student teachers regarding their engagement in various academic activities?

- What are the implications of student perceptions of their engagement for teacher educators?

From the literature that was consulted it is clear that student engagement is multidimensional in nature. These dimensions vary differently depending on the approaches used in studying student engagement (Ching and Chao, 2011:71). Taylor and Parsons (2011:4) lists different ways of engaging students namely, academic engagement, cognitive engagement, intellectual engagement, behavioural, social engagement, behavioural engagement, emotional engagement and psychological engagement. The questionnaire used in this study touched on a number of aspects of student engagement such as engaging students in classroom activities, course material, teaching strategies, student behaviours (reading and analytical skills), interactions with various stakeholders, academic and social support as well as their overall experience at the institution. In a way, the study touched on cognitive support and intellectual support, emotional support, academic and social support perceived to be the different dimensions of student engagement advocated by Taylor and Parsons (2011). The findings of the study showed on the whole moderate to high levels of student engagement as can be seen from Tables 2 to 10. This is commendable. There are of course few instances where the overall mean for a category fell below 2.5 which is the median for the four-point Likert scale that was used.

As O'Shea, Stone and Delahunty (2015:43) have observed that learners, students in this case, are central to their engagement. In this particular study perceptions of students regarding their engagement in various classroom activities were investigated. On the whole the student teachers across the departments, were positive about their engagement. There are, however, concerns about students' analytical skills and interaction between lecturers and students in the Computer Science and Natural Sciences programmes. This needs further investigation.

Strydom and Mentz (2010: 1) investigated, among others, the importance of active and collaborative learning, student staff interaction, enriching educational explanation and supportive campus interaction in engaging students. The findings of the study confirmed the value of student engagement in improving the quality of teaching and learning. In this study the means were high on student activity as seen from Table 2.

It is interesting and encouraging to note that the lecturers try by all means to engage student teachers in their classes. Since these are student teachers it is hoped that they will transfer the skills of engaging students to their own classes as practising teachers.

A further study is needed as not all students participated in the study. We therefore, can neither generalise the findings to the university as a whole nor to other universities.

7. CONCLUSIONS

Student engagement leads to success in learning. It is therefore, important for lecturers to come up with ways of engaging their students effectively in learning.

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