

# Student engagement in higher education: Lecturers' perspectives

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## Abstract

This article, a stepping stone for further research, explored lecturers' perspectives on student engagement at a higher education institution (HEI). This qualitative case study was based on an interpretivist paradigm and Schindler's conceptual framework on behavioural, emotional and cognitive indicators. A purposive sampling technique was applied to select eight lecturer-participants presently teaching compulsory modules in the initial year of the teacher education programme at a HEI in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. A narrative interview, discursive informed conversations, and an open-ended questionnaire were used to generate data from all the participants. A thematic data analysis technique was employed. According to the findings, lecturers at the HEI understand student engagement as participation, which entails being interactively and meaningfully involved during lectures. This includes collaboration, co-construction, interaction, and metacognition. Considering the conclusion and the results, this study paves the way for further research that explores active participation through digital pedagogy. Such research is recommended to provide further insights into student engagement and inspire more contributions in this area.

**Keywords:** *active participation, collaboration, co-construction, interaction, metacognition*

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## 1. Introduction

Student engagement, a topic of constant evolution, is a widely researched area in education due to its association with success and achievement. It has become integral to teaching and learning, which should be prioritised in higher education (Alli & Hassan, 2018). Since active student engagement is crucial for enhanced student academic performance in the twenty-first century (Witowski & Cornell, 2015), one needs to consider that student engagement is also evolving with the changing times and the rapid advancement of technology. This dynamic nature of student engagement presents an intriguing challenge, necessitating ongoing research to explore the current trends for engaging students meaningfully to attain successful outcomes. According to Quaye et al. (2019), the concept of student engagement has travelled across the landscape of higher education for many decades, and institutional leaders and policymakers have prioritised it as the main driver for college academic success. Although it is evident that active student engagement plays a significant role in academic success, it has since become redefined, given the changing landscapes in education.

In the past, student engagement dealt mainly with participation and involvement, but emerging research reveals that it has become multi-dimensional, multifaceted, and complex. Accordingly, student engagement has now become conceptualised in multiple ways across diverse research fields and disciplines (Gurcan et al., 2023). In support, Du Vivier et al. (2018) claim that engagement has continually been redefined in current studies to make student engagement more understandable. In the past, student engagement has been defined as “*students’ willingness, need and desire to participate in and be successful in the learning process*” (Gray & DiLoreto, 2016, p. 2). Furthermore, Mathews et al. (2016) state that student engagement is explained according to the constructivist perspective, which states that the individual's active participation influences learning in educational activities. Thus, it is evident that past definitions use the terms *involvement* and *participation* interchangeably. However, recent literature affirms that student engagement is complex, multifaceted, and multidimensional (Wu & Ouyang, 2024). For example, it is argued that student engagement is multi-dimensional, fluctuating, context-dependent, and interactive (Heflin et al., 2017). Comparing the past and present definitions, student engagement has become more complex over time. Hence, the current complexity of the concept of student engagement has demonstrated a need for ongoing research as this is an evolving phenomenon.

The problem this study addresses is the need to understand how lecturers perceive and interpret student engagement within higher education institutions (HEIs), specifically focusing on the initial year of teacher education programs. Given the crucial role of student engagement in academic success and the evolving dynamics of higher education, there is a gap in knowledge regarding lecturers' perspectives on engagement and how these perceptions can inform and enhance teaching practices. Additionally, with the increasing integration of digital pedagogy, there is a necessity to explore how active student participation can be fostered through digital means. Thus, this article argues that student engagement is complex, multifaceted and challenging to measure because of the variety of dimensions and indicators. This article evaluated how the lecturers in the initial year of teacher education programs at a higher education institution in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, perceive student engagement. In addition, it identified the key indicators of student engagement based on Schindler's conceptual framework on behavioural, emotional, and cognitive indicators as well as the teaching strategies employed to enhance student engagement. The study aims to fill the gap regarding a comprehensive understanding of lecturers' perspectives on student engagement and identify effective strategies for fostering engagement through both traditional and digital pedagogical approaches.

## **2. Literature Review**

According to Angelle (2018, p. 38), "*the most critical shift during the past twenty years has been a move away from a conception of learning as passive absorption of information to a conception of learning as the active engagement of meaning.*" This confirms that there has been a shift in learning processes, which was also evident in the definitions of student engagement presented in the past. It is, therefore, beneficial to examine the concept of student engagement over the years to understand how it has transformed and shifted to being more complex, multidimensional, and multifaceted.

### ***2.1 Student Engagement is Multifaceted, Multi-Dimensional, and Complex***

Varga (2017) contends that student engagement reveals a student's interest and attention in academic-related activities, participation in educational activities through independently working on subject assignments, contribution to discussions during lectures, working on a learning task with peers, and a desire to participate in the learning experience as

a whole. Bowden et al. (2019) agree that it is a multi-feature construct that includes resilience, effort, and persistence when confronted by obstacles (vigour) - in addition to passion, inspiration, and pride in academic learning (dedication). Further, Peters et al. (2019) observe that there has been increasing attention toward a more comprehensive understanding of student engagement over the past decade. It has also associated with the interaction between time, effort, and other closely connected resources invested by both students and their institutions, which were intended to optimise the student experience to enhance learning outcomes. Hence, it is evident that the literature associates student engagement with positive educational outcomes, a beneficial construct in higher education environments.

Student engagement involves desirable student behaviours such as regular attendance, undivided concentration, and interactive participation, as well as establishing the psychological experience, which entails displaying emotions that one is cared for, respected, and part of the institution (Olson & Peterson, 2015). From experience as a lecturer, most colleagues depend on these observable indicators to gauge whether students are meaningfully engaging. Therefore, engagement has been associated with being active, attentive, interested, effort-driven, and motivated (Cronin, 2019). Additionally, it refers to the curiosity, optimism, and passion students demonstrate when learning or being taught. This extends their motivation level to accelerate their academic education progress (Dary et al., 2016).

The concepts of student engagement focus on students who are enthusiastic about learning. They look for specific indicators like facial expressions, those eager to respond to questions, those who follow guidance, and those who ask in-depth questions. According to Pather et al. (2017), when students are focused and gainfully engaged, they can work autonomously, develop positive, constructive peer relationships, feel competent to succeed and make legitimate knowledge claims. Empirical evidence showed many indicators; some are observable, whilst others are not. Based on the variety of indicators that promote positive student engagement, this phenomenon may be confirmed as multifaceted.

Table 1 outlines the myriad indicators for measuring student engagement, which can be divided into three categories. Such various indicators make this phenomenon complex and multifaceted, which is not always simple to measure. In addition, with the changing landscape in the education field, student engagement indicators also evolve and increase in number.

**Table 1***Indicators of student engagement (Bond & Bendlier, 2019, p. 3)*

<b>Cognitive engagement</b>	<b>Affective engagement</b>	<b>Behavioural engagement</b>
Purposeful	Enthusiasm	Effort
Integrating ideas	Sense of belonging	Attention/focus
Critical-thinking	Satisfaction	Developing agency
Setting learning goals	Curiosity	Attendance
Self-regulation	Sees relevance	Attempting
Operational reasoning	Interest	Homework completion
Trying to understand	Sense of wellbeing	Positive conduct
Reflection	Vitality/zest	Action/initiation
Focus/concentration	Feeling appreciated	Confidence
Deep-learning	Manages expectations	Participation/involvement
Learning from peers	Enjoyment	Asking teacher or peers for help
Justifying decisions	Pride	Assuming responsibility
Understanding	Excitement	Identifying opportunities/challenges
Doing extra to learn more	Desire to do well	Developing multidisciplinary skills
Follow through/care/thoroughness	Positive interactions with peers and teachers	Supporting and encouraging peers
Preference for challenging tasks		
Teaching self and peers' positive attitude about learning/values	Teaching self and peers' positive attitude about learning/values	Teaching self and peers' positive attitude about learning/values
Use of sophisticated learning strategies		Time on task/staying on task/persistence
Positive perceptions of teacher-support		

While most research refers to multi-aspect constructs when defining student engagement, other definitions allude to the dimensions of this phenomenon. The variety of

definitions converges to disclose three interrelated facets: cognitive, behavioural, and affective engagement, which further elaborated by Alcine (2019) to three interconnected dimensions (emotional, cognitive, and behavioural) pertaining emotional or affective dimension to interaction with teachers, school staff, other students, and the institution. On the other hand, the behavioural dimension highlights students' involvement in academic and social activities while cognitive dimension comprises the psychological and cognitive aspects. Angelle (2018) contends that although there is no definite consensus on a concise and uniform definition, student engagement can often be described as a complex psychological concept of different dimensions which involves behavioural, emotional, and cognitive elements – all of which are linked to feelings of belonging, enjoyment, and attachment.

Since student engagement is challenging to quantify, researchers like Angelle (2018) maintain that there are many aspects to consider when measuring student engagement at HEIs. Generally, student engagement is widely used in teaching and learning environments to explain students' behaviours. However, researchers have indicated that the definition of student engagement is still too broad, and there is no consensus on its exact meaning, measurement, and definition (Nguyen et al., 2018). After perusing the different interpretations of this concept, it became apparent that attention is drawn to the positive indicators. However, empirical evidence showed many indicators. Hence, the conceptualisation of engagement has three categories (cognitive, behavioural, and emotional), which researchers find helpful when they recognise that students engage in different and complex ways. The complexity of conceptualising student engagement assists in gaining a deeper insight into this phenomenon. However, it has become somewhat enigmatic for lecturers, educators, and researchers concerning ongoing conversations about its nature and evolution. Therefore, it is necessary to comprehend this phenomenon by exploring it continuously due to its complexity.

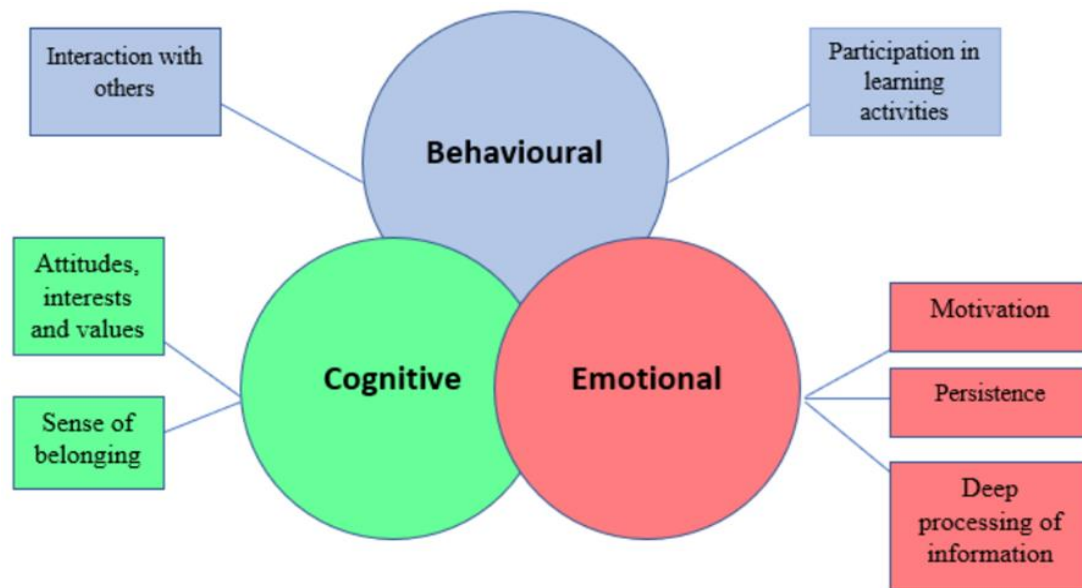
### **3. Conceptual Framework**

This article investigated the lecturers' perspective on student engagement at a higher education institution. As discussed in the literature review, there are three dimensions or categories of student engagement (i.e. behavioural, cognitive and emotional), each with its defining characteristics. However, Schindler (2017) mentions that while each dimension of student engagement has distinct features, there are standard features across the dimensions.

The conceptual framework in figure 1 shows the indicators for identifying each dimension. It is one of the current student engagement models, which displays behavioural, emotional and cognitive indicators and outlines how it has been conceptualised, with each dimension exhibiting specific indicators that correspond to the characteristics of the type of engagement (Schindler et al., 2017). With the concept of student engagement having a variety of indicators, it is beneficial to conceptualise it as it assists in gaining a better understanding. Since the topic was broad and complex, this study's conceptual framework was a prerequisite for acquiring an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon.

**Figure 1**

*Conceptual framework and indicators of student engagement*



*Source:* Schindler et al. (2017, p. 27)

***Behavioural dimension and indicators.*** Behavioural engagement is the extent to which students are gainfully involved in learning activities, as observed in their interaction and participation (Schindler et al., 2017). The literature review showed that most teachers or lecturers measure student engagement based on the behavioural component, which is more observable via interaction and participation. Although behavioural engagement is observable, student participation and interaction require cognitive and emotional involvement to achieve one's aims and objectives (Frymier & Houser, 2016). Therefore, it is evident that there is commonality across the dimensions of student engagement.

***Emotional dimension and indicators.*** There is a link between emotional reactions and learning, which can be noticed in attitudes, interests, and values (Schindler et al., 2017). The motivation and persistence of the student largely determine emotional engagement. To determine which goal in one's life is active and being pursued, there must be some yardstick to measure this. One's goal is activated when one wants to learn more about a new topic and attempts to reach this goal. The motivation that drives an individual is influenced by various factors: the choice of pursuit, the intensity of their effort, and the persistence in achieving one's goals. Motivating people to learn not only influences what they learn but also increases their level of intensity and length of engagement in learning activities (Vollmeyer & Rheinberg, 2000).

***Cognitive dimension and indicators.*** Cognitive engagement is the extent to which students invest in their learning and the mental effort injected to master the prescribed content (Schindler et al., 2017). In terms of indicators, this could include motivation to learn, the ability to overcome challenges, critical thinking and self-regulated learning.

Although there are different indicators for each dimension of student engagement, there are instances where an indicator could have characteristics similar to more than one dimension (Schindler et al., 2017). However, the literature only mentions the dimensions evident in the conceptual framework. This study intends to discover other dimensions that may appear in the research findings. Since the landscapes of education constantly fluctuate, the researcher aims to explore each of these dimensions of student engagement comprehensively. While gaining a deeper understanding through the conceptualisation of student engagement is essential, the theoretical framework also sets the foundation for how this knowledge can be thoroughly understood. Hence, the theoretical framework underpinning this study will guide the research processes to analyse this complex phenomenon concerning student engagement.

#### **4. Methodology**

This research adopted a phenomenological qualitative approach by doing in-depth interviews with participants (Cohen et al., 2018). The interpretivist paradigm and a descriptive case study strategy were applied to conduct this study. Descriptive case studies involve narrative accounts of real-life situations that lend themselves to the researcher's data collection methods. Moreover, the case study strategy follows interpretive research traditions, which



narrate the story from the individual's perspective (Cohen et al., 2018). Data generation methods are aligned to how information and the type of explanations are elicited (Paradis et al., 2016). For this study, the researcher used discursive conversations and discussions, narrative interviews, and open-ended questionnaires as data collection techniques. The sample in this study consisted of eight lecturers who presently facilitate compulsory modules at one higher education institution. The rationale for selecting these eight lecturers was that the initial teacher education programme lasted four years. Hence, one lecturer from each student cohort was chosen. The Intermediate and Foundation Phases also offer the initial teacher education programme. Hence, four lecturers from each phase were voluntarily chosen as each has different compulsory modules. Also, lecturers who teach compulsory modules were chosen as they receive the full complement of students. Table 2 outlines the participants' profiles.

**Table 2**

*Summary of sample size*

<b>Role</b>	<b>Cohort</b>	<b>Phase</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Experience (in years)</b>
Lecturer 1 (L1)	First year	Intermediate Phase	Male	5
Lecturer 2 (L2)	Second year	Intermediate Phase	Male	6
Lecturer 3 (L3)	Third year	Intermediate Phase	Female	6
Lecturer 4 (L4)	Fourth year	Intermediate Phase	Female	5
Lecturer 5 (L5)	First year	Foundation Phase	Female	3
Lecturer 6 (L6)	Second Year	Foundation Phase	Female	14
Lecturer 7 (L7)	Third Year	Foundation Phase	Female	9
Lecturer 8 (L8)	Fourth Year	Foundation Phase	Female	6

Table 2 provides information on lecturers facilitating compulsory modules in the initial teacher education programme in the Foundation and Intermediate Phases at a HEI. They were selected (with all ethical protocols observed) based on their suitability and willingness to participate in the study and were subjected to participation involving all three data generation methods.

To ensure a rich, descriptive data analysis, the researcher chose thematic analysis to dissect the data elicited from the participants. Thematic analysis assisted in identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) concerning the transcribed data (Braun et al., 2019).

In comparison to other methods, it was advantageous in that it accurately organises and describes data comprehensively. Research themes indicate attributes, descriptors, elements, concepts, and grouping of ideas in a way that helps researchers to answer research questions (Vaismoradi et al., 2016). Braun et al. (2019) add that the thematic analysis technique provides a detailed account of the complete data set. When the data generation and transcription were completed, the researcher coded the data according to common themes within the data set. Once the data was coded, the themes were divided into sections aligned to the research questions.

## 5. Findings and Discussion

After the data analysis and interpretation processes, the findings emerged. The research question examined lecturers' perspectives on student engagement at a higher education institution. Four themes emerged from the data elicited from narrative interviews, discursive informed conversations, and open-ended questionnaires. These themes were active participation/involvement, collaborative and co-constructive relationships, interaction, and metacognition.

### 5.1 Active Participation/Involvement

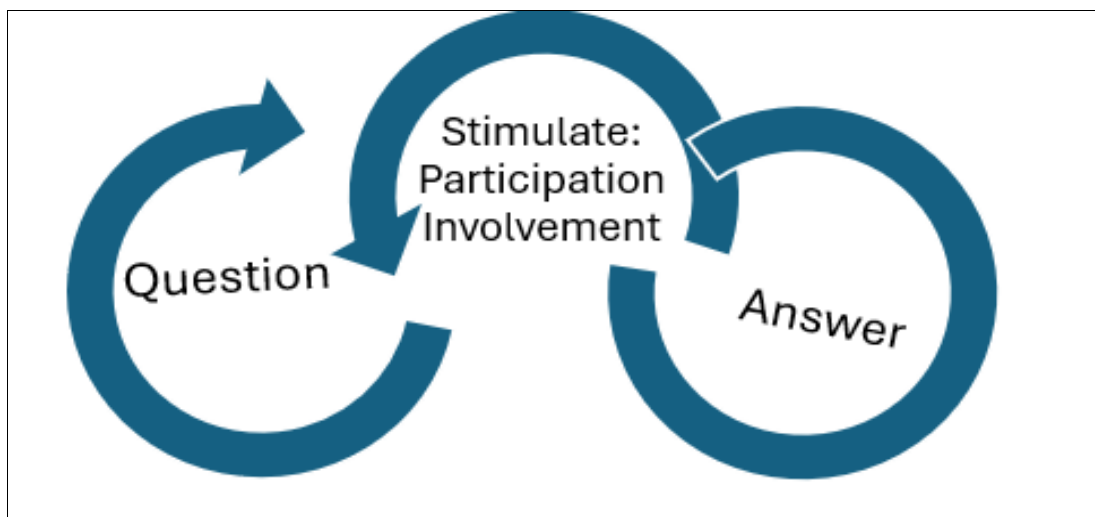
Participants were prompted to share their understanding of student engagement during the narrative interviews and discursive conversations. The following responses emerged:

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|----|--|
| L2 | So, I would say student engagement has to do with how I relate with students in terms of engaging with them, with the materials, the activities, and everything related to the module that we put out there for them. So, I regard it as active participation in the learning process where students are not just passively participating because they must tick all the boxes to meet the criteria for certain subjects or modules. However, students actively and intentionally become involved in the learning process. |
| L4 | I think the most basic definition would be students being able to get involved, not passively but actively, in their learning process, where you are not lecturing to them.  |
| L5 | To me, student engagement would be active participation, feedback, and even asking questions about something they do not understand, whether they are typing it out or just putting their hands up in the venue and asking a question. I think when students engage in the lecture, they try to understand the content of the lecture. That, to me, is student engagement.   |
| L3 | Student engagement involves students being active in the lesson. This may involve responding to questions and sharing views on the lesson's content. Perhaps they could teach or facilitate a part of the discussion or even present the content as group work and answer other students' questions while the teacher facilitates.   |
| L4 | Student engagement means students play a meaningful role in learning. Students become active participants and co-constructors of knowledge and not merely passive recipients.  |
| L5 | My understanding of student engagement is when students are actively involved in the lecture or lesson.  |
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The study's findings revealed that lecturers' perspectives of student engagement at the HEI involve active participation by students in the learning activities. In other words, they ask questions and get interested in ensuing discussions. It was noted that the words *participation* and *involvement* were used interchangeably. The findings were congruent with Angelle's (2018) contention that there is a significant migration in the interpretation of student engagement: learning is no longer the passive absorption of information but a process that involves interactive and meaningful participation. Most participants recommended that students become more actively involved or engaged in lessons by asking relevant and critical questions to stimulate class discussions.

**Figure 2**

*Question and answer as active participation*



Similarly, Varga (2017) suggests that student engagement highlights a student's attention and interest in academic activities, and this occurs by participating in learning activities, independently and collaboratively working on class assignments, contributing to class discussions, working harmoniously on learning tasks with peers, and the willingness and zest to participate in the learning process. The findings confirmed that students who actively participate by demonstrating engagement through activities such as discussions and answering questions display sound behaviour patterns. Wang et al. (2016) agree that sound and relevant behavioural engagement includes asking and answering questions, interactive participation, and persistence to succeed. Whilst the findings resonate with improving student involvement and active participation in lessons, they also raise the question of how this will be measured

using online technology and platforms considering the transition of higher education institutions to online spaces.

### ***5.2 Collaborative and Co-constructive Relationship***

Participants indicated via their responses that student engagement is a bi-directional collaborative relationship involving joint co-construction of knowledge. In other words, both the student and the lecturer are responsible for engagement in terms of co-constructing knowledge. The responses follow:

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L3	Genuine interaction revolves more around collaboration when I work with my students to problem-solve something to discover answers. Then, I realised that we had moved onto an online platform. Even though many struggle with interacting and engaging with their students, I find that by using digital tools, I am learning and collaborating with my students because they are helping me understand the tool. I am learning to use it better because of it.
L4	It becomes more of a collaborative space. Students engage with the material because they are co-constructing knowledge with you, so it becomes a very engaging endeavour, an active process where they are involved as participants. I think that is what student engagement means.
L5	It is not a one-way, unidirectional flow of knowledge from the lecturer to the student. However, the flow is much more two-directional, where they are actively engaged by responding to you, and you are providing clarity and feedback. I think this is what makes our job exciting, especially when these responses are unexpected and challenging. However, you have to respond knowledgeably. So, I think that this kind of cycle of engagement makes my job full of joy, especially when challenged. I enjoy it in the classroom when students challenge my ideas or even the material they are studying. Thus, together, you co-construct new knowledge or get a clear understanding of the module's content. Moreover, I would say that that is really what engagement is: a co-construction of knowledge, where it is not a unidirectional flow from the lecturer to the student, but together, you are negotiating your way through whatever material you are working through. You determine how it can be understood and applied in a particular context and how it can be utilised in the classroom based on what content you teach them on a particular day.

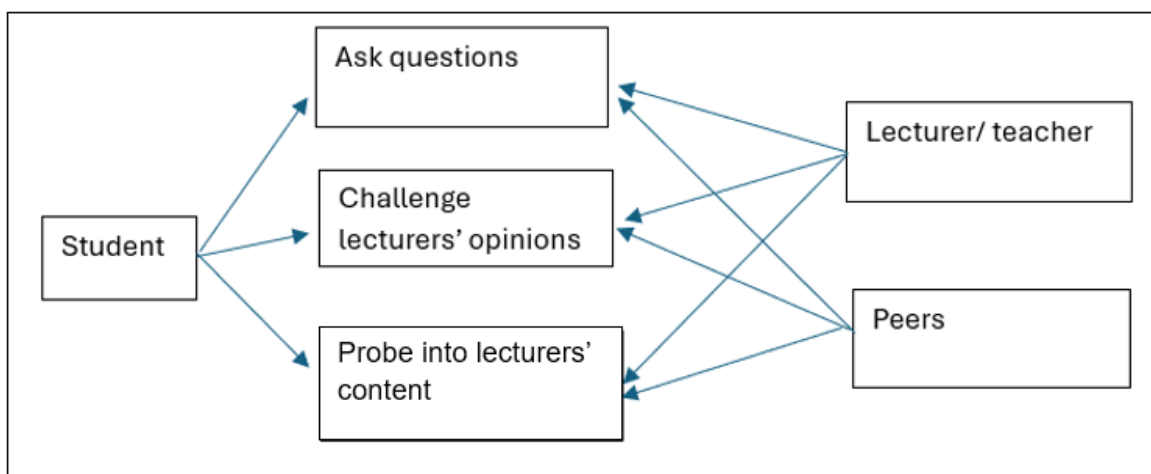
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The findings also revealed that student engagement is a collaborative relationship that involves the co-construction of knowledge. In other words, the student and the lecturer are responsible for engaging in relevant discourses to construct new knowledge. This implies that student engagement is a bi-directional relationship between the student and the lecturer. This

implies that students ask questions, challenge the lecturers' opinions, or probe into aspects of the lecture's content. This is consistent with Zepke's (2014) study, which found that emotional engagement is about reactions to and relationships with teachers, classmates and administrators who encourage a love for learning via discussion. Similarly, Davis et al. (2012) mention that emotional engagement has more to do with students' pleasant and unpleasant emotions, which relate to the quality of relationships with teachers, peers, and the institution, rather than the feelings they express during learning activities. Moreover, Madland and Richards (2016) suggest that when teaching content, it is imperative to engage students actively with the content; interaction is the primary reason why formal educational systems exist.

**Figure 3**

*Co-constructive collaboration*



Considering the co-constructive collaboration illustrated in figure 3, it can be concluded that active participation means interrogating the lesson's content through interaction with lecturers, peers and other relevant role players. Hence, students must interact more with the lecturers to enhance academic performance by demonstrating interest, understanding, and inquisitiveness.

### **5.3 Interaction**

During the interviews and discursive informed conversations, lecturers also mentioned that student engagement is about interaction. The questionnaire also elicited responses that indicated that lecturers saw student engagement as an interactive process. From the interpretation of data, lecturers indicated the following:

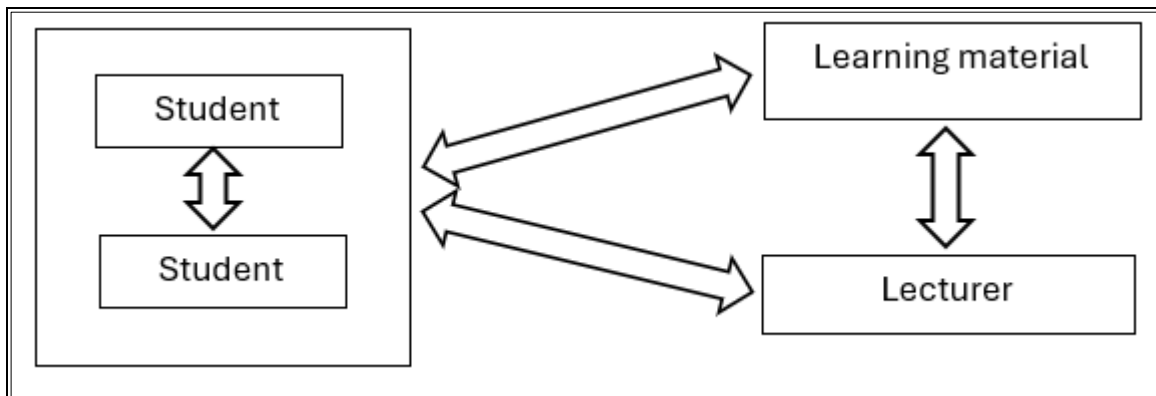
L3 Well, on a very superficial level, student engagement would mean just interaction much of the time. I want to be able to ask my students questions, and I want them to answer, or I want them to do group work, and I would consider that interaction.

L8 It entails interacting and breaking down these big concepts into simpler terms or expressing them in a manner that students will not find difficult to understand.

The study's findings revealed that lecturers at HEIs also understand student engagement as interaction with the learning materials, lecturers, peers, and relevant educational authorities. This concurs with Schut et al. (2020), who state that teaching-learning occurs through human interaction. Therefore, teachers' characters (e.g., congeniality) should encourage critical thinking and harmony with learners to create a learning environment that fosters higher academic performance.

**Figure 4**

*Interaction with learning materials*



Pastore and Luder (2021) recommend inclusive classrooms where teachers' quality interactions and professional relationships with students can be seen as essential in supporting students' behavioural, social, and emotional engagement. One participant mentioned interaction with content in terms of simplifying complex concepts and texts into expressions that are not difficult to understand. Considering the interaction with learning materials as shown in figure 4, it can be affirmed that active participation can also be seen through interaction with the text during lectures when students and facilitators dissect written discourse; hence, student-lecturer interaction indicates positive student engagement and active participation during lesson presentations. Such interaction between the lecturer and the student

leads to a greater understanding of learning materials, which enhances learning outcomes. This could also be stimulated by challenging traditional knowledge and/or asking questions. This leads to better lecturer-student, student-student, and student-lecturer-content interactions.

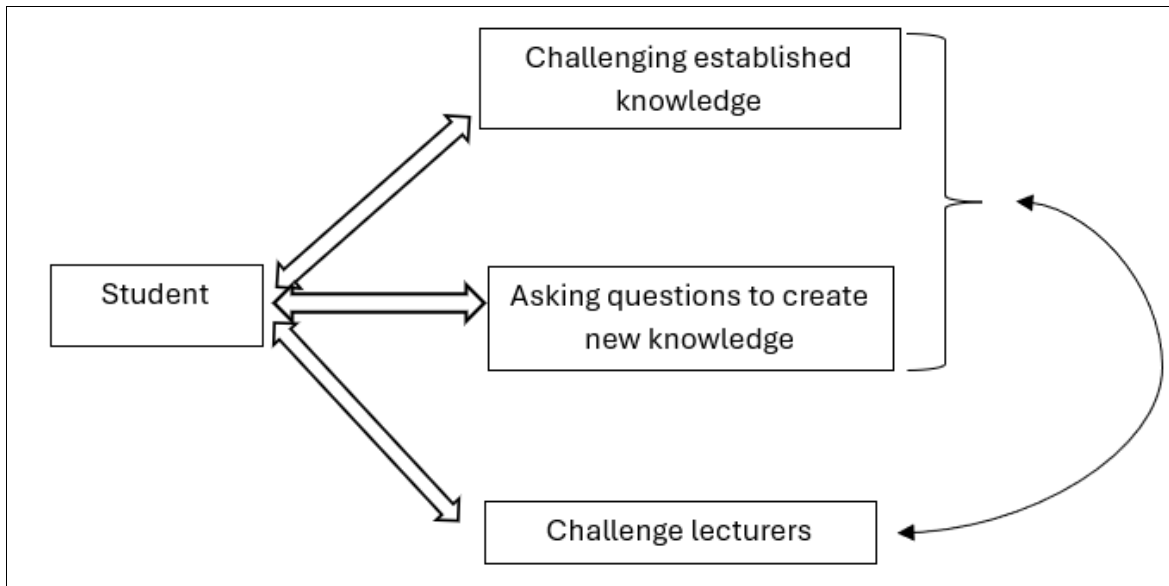
#### ***5.4 Metacognition***

When lecturers were asked about their understanding of student engagement during the three data generation processes, they also referred to metacognition. Whilst cognitive skills may include (among others) thinking, reading, and remembering, metacognitive skills involve one's ability to regulate one's learning through circumventing challenges and asking probing questions. During the data generation processes, lecturers mentioned the following:

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- L1 Are they awake? Are they taking in information? What are they thinking? Is the brain engaged? I think that is what engagement is. I was going to say, can they do some reasoning and use their logic in making decisions? The most significant point for students is ensuring they think during the lecture. This is evident when they raise their hands to make a point, ask a question, answer a question, challenge someone else in the class, or challenge the lecturer.
  
  - L2 Sometimes, they ask probing questions that make you think more deeply about the modules you teach. In so doing, you immerse yourself in the modules and subjects you teach. So, when it comes to teaching and learning, that is what I regard as student engagement.
  
  - L3 Usually, at the end of the lecture, I always have many students waiting to ask me or tell me something, or they want to share something with me. Moreover, I can relate to this as that is their way of engaging with me.
  
  - L4 They provide feedback via questioning and, in addition, provide real-life examples that relate to what was discussed in class.
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The findings showed that lecturers understand student engagement as related to the process of metacognition, which is thinking about thinking. Metacognition is an increasingly useful mechanism to enhance student learning for immediate outcomes and to help students understand their learning processes. Whilst cognitive skills may include (among others) thinking, reading, and remembering, metacognition includes one's ability to regulate one's learning through challenging established knowledge and asking questions to create new knowledge.

Figure 5

*Metacognitive engagement*

Most participants mentioned that student engagement includes questioning, providing feedback, thinking, and challenging lecturers about the content of the modules that they present during lectures. Further, the processes of memorising, thinking, reasoning, problem-solving, critical thinking, planning, and speed-processing, broadly described as aspects of human intelligence (Anstey, 2016), highlight that student engagement can be classified as the cognitive dimension. Casimiro (2016) adds that cognitive engagement describes how students think, make sense of the material, and use self-regulating and metacognitive strategies to master academic content. Redmond et al. (2018) affirm that cognitive engagement is an active process, one of the most fundamental forms of student engagement. Schindler (2017) maintains that cognitive engagement is the degree to which students invest in learning and the mental effort they inject to master the prescribed content of modules at HEIs. Indicators could include motivation to learn, overcoming challenges, critical thinking, and self-regulated learning. Using metacognition requires reflecting on one's learning process - a critical-thinking process that disciplines learners to structure and assume responsibility for their learning (Gaup et al., 2018).

The findings concerning lecturers' perspectives of student engagement at a higher education institution align with the literature reviewed to unpack the concept of student engagement. Notably, the ability to regulate one's learning demonstrates motivation and



autonomy. Gleaning from the researchers' experience, when students demonstrate autonomy to regulate their learning, it demonstrates active participation and authentic student engagement. It is beneficial for students to develop metacognitive skills as this supersedes other forms of student engagement and demonstrates a higher level of active participation.

## **6. Conclusion**

The findings revealed that the lecturers at a HEI understand student engagement as active participation, which entails involvement, interaction, collaborative relationships, and metacognition. Lecturers suggested many ways to encourage active participation. However, conducting further research on student engagement will be beneficial as this is a complex, multi-faceted, and multi-dimensional concept. With the changing landscapes in education and the move online, there is a need to examine and explore strategies to enhance student engagement effectively.

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