

The student engagement in examination

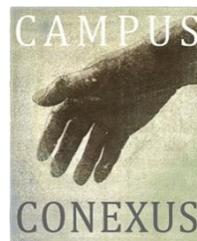
—

Evaluating Finnish first year students' engagement to their studies

Vesa Korhonen, School of Education, University of Tampere

Mikko Inkinen, Centre for Research and Development of Higher
Education, University of Helsinki

Auli Toom, Faculty of Behavioral Sciences, University of Helsinki



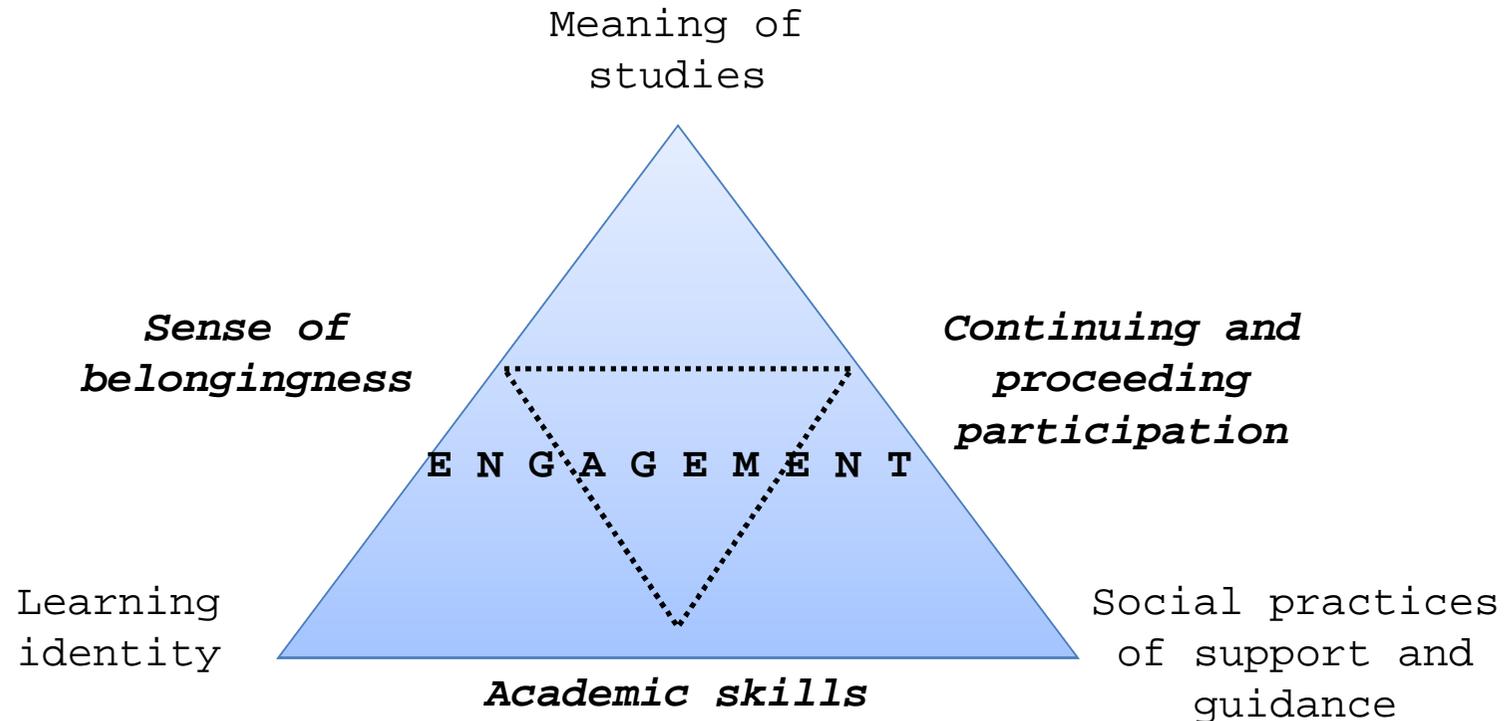
Starting points for evaluating the first year students' engagement

- The expansion of higher education has led to an increased requirement to support the diverse student population ('massification' and widening participation)
 - starting points for attending university differ
 - more heterogenic student population begin their university studies (i.e. non-traditional and first-generation students)
- Increasing concern with the first-year experience and its' significance for performance, retention and future success in studies (e.g. Lähteenoja, 2009)
- The majority of the reported research on the first-year experience is based on single institution studies, often with small samples of students and from a single programme of study (see Harvey, Drew & Smith, 2006)
 - lack of systematic evaluation of first year experience and quality of student engagement

Aims and research questions

- **General aim:** to develop the theory-based questionnaire for research on student engagement and test its functionality and reliability for the future research purposes
- Research questions
 1. What kind of relations emerge between the elements of student engagement and students' own experience of engagement?
 2. What kind of relations appear between the students' motives for attending university and the elements of student engagement?

The student-centered process view of engagement



Engagement seen as an interactional relationship between:

- a) *sense of belongingness,*
- b) *proceeding participation,* and
- c) *artistry of academic learning*

(Wenger, 1998; Korhonen, 2012; Poutanen, Toom, Korhonen & Inkinen, 2012)

Dimensions of the engagement process

In our earlier qualitative study based on the same model, we got confirmation to its functionality in practice (Poutanen et. al 2012):

- **academic skills** as tools for engagement
 - students experienced the need for various studying skills
 - shortcomings in the skills make the progress of studies decisively difficult
- **social practices of support and guidance** enabling engagement
 - studying includes many kinds of guided activities from mass-lectures to long-lasting small group communities
 - unsatisfactory studying was often described as lonely and compulsive performing
- **proceeding participation** constructing engagement
 - experiences of participation in academic teaching and learning communities, scientific communities and in student peer group communities which support studying
 - the significance of peer group communities was often estimated most important

- personal **meaning of studies** as prerequisite for engagement
 - experiences of meaning of studies and suitability of studying field
- **sense of belonging** deepening engagement
 - sense of belongingness develops in the long run with encounters and shared practices
- **learning identity** as a result of engagement
 - the learning identity in university is constructed through affirmative and negative learning experiences: the students reflect what they wish to be or what they are supposed to be

(Poutanen et. al 2012, 29-40)

Designing and piloting the engagement evaluation questionnaire (EEQ)

- The engagement questionnaire was outlined from theory-based six sub-scales mentioned before (6-8 self-made items per sub-scale, total 50 items)
- In addition, there was one specific question estimating the strength of engagement:
 - "Estimate on scale 0 -100, how strongly are you engaged on the studies at the moment."
- Respondents also evaluated their motives for attending university education by a question-set applied from SMAU (Student Motivations for Attending) measurement (Cote & Levine, 1997; 2000)
 - Five sub-scales of motives.

Engagement Evaluation Questionnaire (EEQ): Pilot Study Participants

- Students in educational sciences at Universities of Helsinki and Tampere
- Female: n=86; male: n=8; total: n=94,
- Mean age: 24,7 years; Std=7,9
- Three different cohorts:
 1. Students attending a lecture of educational sciences n=50
 2. Tutor training n=29
 3. Study skills course n=16

Engagement Evaluation Questionnaire (EEQ)

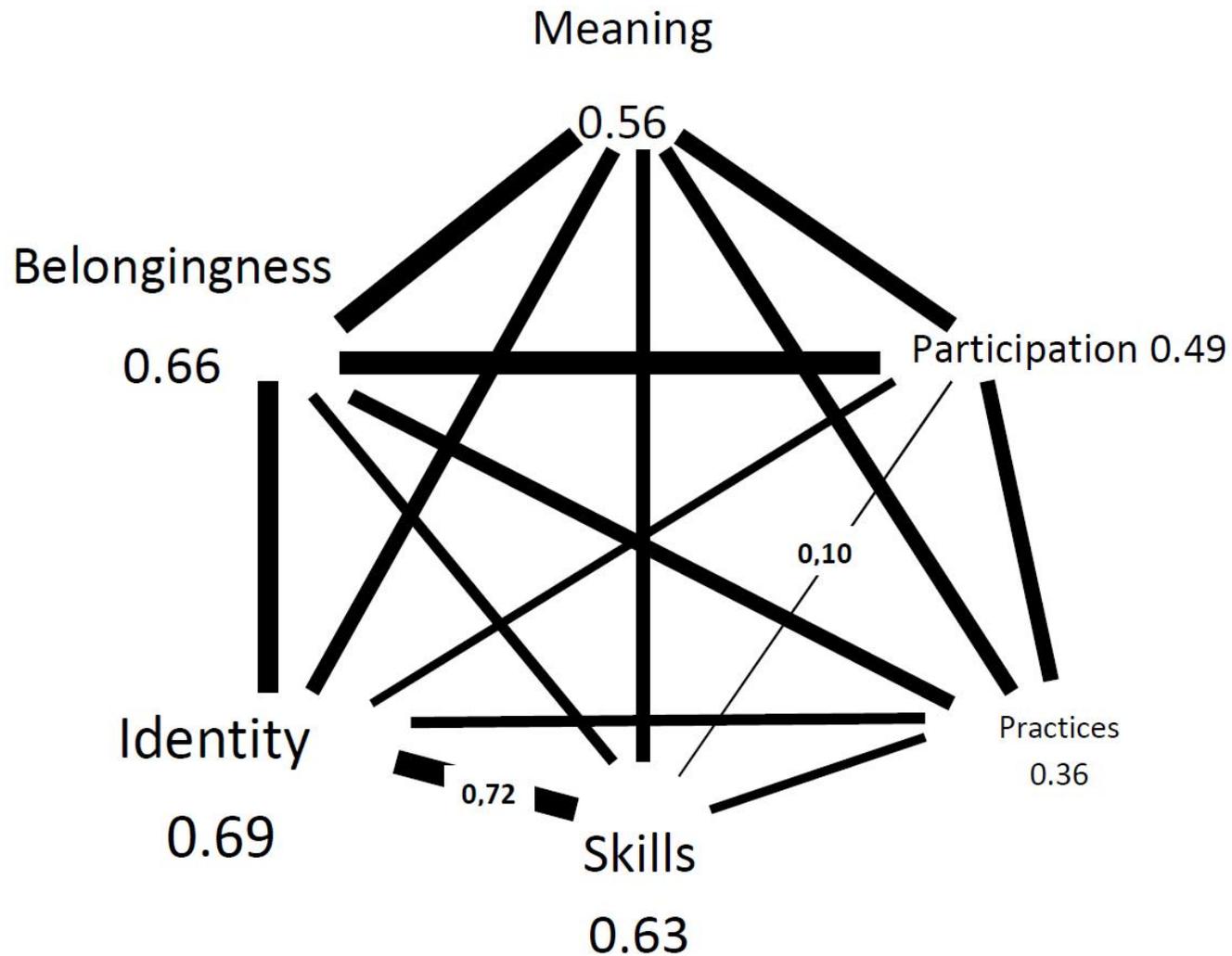
Forming subscales

- Reducing items from 50
- Items were chosen after negotiation on the basis of
 - Internal consistency on test population
 - Diversity
 - Face validity
- Three items / subscale, altogether 18 items

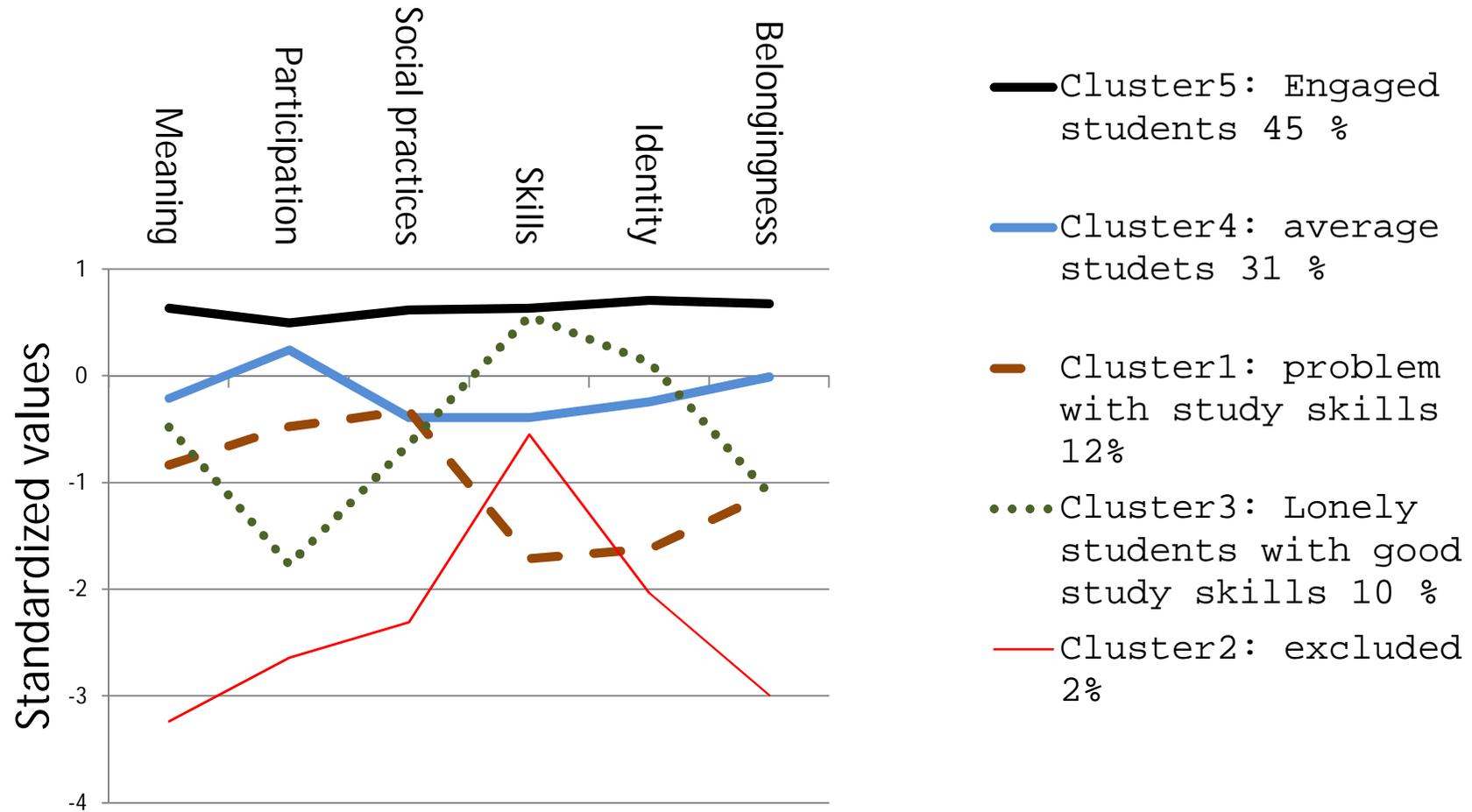
Engagement Evaluation Questionnaire (EEQ): Scale and subscales

Subscales	Questions deals with	N	Mean	Std	Alpha
Meaning of studies	Enthusiasm, significance of studying, suitability of current major	91	16,5	3,1	0,68
Sense of belongingness	Contacts to other students, knowing other students, participation to study-related discussions	91	16,4	3,6	0,71
Social practices of support and guidance	Amount of small group learning and guidance, lonely learning practices	91	12,2	3,5	0,59
Academic skills	Regular, timetabled study practices and experience of good enough academic skills	91	14,7	4,0	0,73
Learning identity	Mastering suitable study practices, fitting to university, growing to become an expert	91	14,5	3,7	0,75
Sense of belongingness	Belonging to university, being part of other students, educational exclusion	91	16,3	3,6	0,76
	Whole scale	91	90,3	15,7	0,88

Research question 1:
Correlations of subscales to each other
and to 0-100 question



Cluster groups. K-Mean clustering



Research question 2: Motives for attending university and the engagement scales

		Correlations						
		Strenght of Engagement	Meaning	Participation	Practices	Skills	Identity	Belongingness
Personal- Intellectual Development	Pearson Correlation	,252*	,532**	,237*	,221*	,145	,439**	,399**
	Sig. (2- tailed)	,017	,000	,021	,031	,160	,000	,000
	N	89	95	95	95	95	95	95
Humanitarian	Pearson Correlation	,130	,403**	,111	,231*	,139	,139	,168
	Sig. (2- tailed)	,225	,000	,284	,024	,178	,179	,105
	N	89	95	95	95	95	95	95
Expectation- Driven	Pearson Correlation	-,234*	-,193	,045	-,177	-,197	-,164	-,060
	Sig. (2- tailed)	,028	,061	,662	,086	,056	,113	,565
	N	89	95	95	95	95	95	95
Careerism- Materialism	Pearson Correlation	,030	,063	,131	-,051	,022	,227**	,159
	Sig. (2- tailed)	,783	,542	,205	,626	,829	,027	,123
	N	89	95	95	95	95	95	95
Default	Pearson Correlation	-,063	-,206*	-,063	-,143	-,047	-,132	-,187
	Sig. (2- tailed)	,562	,046	,546	,170	,656	,205	,071
	N	88	94	94	94	94	94	94

Conclusions and discussion

- Students' *identity, belongingness* and *management of study skills* were strongly related to their overall experience of their engagement to their studies
- From the engagement perspective two problematic students groups were identified: Another having problems with study skills and other studying in lonely practices
- Students who represented personal-intellectual development motives towards their university studies were clearly committed to the studies and represented engagement in almost all the dimensions of engagement
- During this spring we started longitudinal study with these scales in large sample (n~2400) of first year students to study in detail the processes of engagement.
- It is crucial to support and appropriately challenge students' true personal interest towards the university studies in many different ways to enhance their engagement
- It is important to aim at increasing students' participation in their academic, scholarly community through versatile activating and engaging pedagogical practices (cf. Lonka & Ketonen, 2012; Paavola & Hakkarainen, 2007)

THANK YOU!

vesa.a.korhonen@uta.fi

mikko.inkinen@helsinki.fi

auli.toom@helsinki.fi