

Comparing Teachers' and Students' Perspectives of Student Engagement in Higher Education: Between Performativity and Invisibility

Paulo Padilla-Petry¹, Sara Pérez-Hernando¹, Julio Rodríguez-Rodríguez¹ & Cristina Vidal-Martí¹

¹ Department of Methods of Research and Diagnosis in Education (MIDE), Faculty of Education, University of Barcelona (UB), Barcelona, Spain

Correspondence: Paulo Padilla-Petry, Faculty of Education, University of Barcelona, Passeig de la Vall d'Hebron, 171, Barcelona, 08035, Spain. E-mail: ppadillapetry@ub.edu

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Abstract

Student engagement in higher education has been studied from various perspectives, but few studies have compared teachers' and students' perspectives on the subject. Considering that student engagement may be reduced to a performativity scarcely related to learning outcomes and that a good deal of it may be invisible to teachers, further studies are needed to contrast teachers' and students' views of student engagement in higher education. This article presents the results of a quantitative study about definitions and indicators of student engagement carried out with 118 students and 45 teachers of Law, Education and Nursing from two Catalan public universities (Spain). The results confirm the performativity associated with the concept by both teachers and students, and reveal that students may appreciate silent and invisible engagement more than teachers. The results also show that teachers may conflate signs of student engagement with good academic results and learning, risking an oversimplification of both student engagement and learning.

Keywords: student engagement, higher education, learning, students' perception, teachers' perception

1. Introduction

Student engagement in higher education (HE) continues to be a matter of concern for universities and stakeholders as engaged students are less likely to drop out and are more inclined to engage in lifelong learning (Kuh, 2009). The institutional efforts to improve student engagement include teaching methods and depend on how teachers perceive their students (Almarghani & Mijatovic, 2017). Given that some student engagement may be invisible to the teacher (Gourlay, 2017; Padilla-Petry & Vadeboncoeur, 2020), and that students' perception of the subject and their own engagement may differ from that of the teachers' (Zepke et al., 2014), few studies have compared teachers' views of student engagement with those of students' and little is known about an engagement that may go beyond a performativity (Macfarlane & Tomlinson, 2017b). Consequently, HE policies may be focusing on student engagement only as it is seen from the teachers or the institutions.

This article presents results of a quantitative study conducted in two Catalan public universities (Spain) with 118 students and 45 teachers of Law, Education and Nursing. The participant teachers and students responded to two online surveys that included open and closed questions about definitions and indicators of student engagement and the possible invisibility of student engagement to the teachers. In seven sections, the article presents critical theoretical issues regarding the definition of student engagement and its relation to learning, reviews studies on teachers' and students' perceptions of engagement, describes the research methods, presents and discusses the results and offers conclusions.

1.1 Student Engagement in Higher Education

Student engagement in HE has received considerable attention from scholars, universities and stakeholders in the last 30 years. Student engagement has been studied and defined following a historical interest in student persistence (see Braxton, 2002; Braxton et al., 2004; Tinto, 1997, 1998). Researchers have addressed student engagement from different perspectives such as student agency, teachers' pedagogy and relationships with students, and the impact of environmental factors such as family background (Zepke, 2013). Theories on student engagement may emphasise the objects, contexts and relationships of this engagement (Kahn, 2014; Lawson &

Lawson, 2013). Parallel to the studies and theories on student engagement, large-scale systematic assessments such as the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) or the Australian Survey of Student Engagement (AUSSE) attempt to measure student engagement as a unified concept in HE institutions (Baron & Corbin, 2012; McCormick & McClenney, 2012). The results of those assessments are frequently used by universities as claims for the high quality of their institutions (Baron & Corbin, 2012). Besides this institutional interest in the concept, changes in HE policies may affect how student engagement is understood. Kelly et al. (2017) state that a shift in the UK government's conceptualisation of the role of higher education is accompanied by a change in the concept of student engagement, which changed from that of a cultivated person who would try to understand and create the democratic conditions, to individualised customers in a corporate enterprise. Nowadays, the engaged student ideal would be the individual who could maximise the return on their educational investment.

From this perspective, student engagement can be interpreted as a largely externally imposed agenda, from the perspective of government efficiency in the allocation of resources and institutional effectiveness. Consequently, it does little to enhance learners' autonomy or scope in setting the conditions of their own learning. In a Foucauldian sense, student engagement might be construed as a means of disciplining students towards effective modes of conformance and desired personal conducts which are intended to serve themselves and their institutions well. In highly performative institutional cultures, student engagement is an overt manifestation of the regulated student subject who exercises desired forms of behavioural compliance (Macfarlane & Tomlinson, 2017b, p.12).

Mainstream views of student engagement in HE reduce it to behaviours in classrooms organised by teachers and institutions and experienced by students (Zepke, 2015). While definitions of student engagement outside HE typically mention dimensions (e.g., affective, cognitive, behavioural; see Appleton et al., 2008; Fredricks et al., 2004), student engagement in HE is often defined and described as a result of personal variables (e.g., efforts, participation) in interaction with HE policies. However, these mainstream views are deemed insufficient for some since they lack a "democratic-critical conception of learning that is participatory and dialogic" (Zepke, 2015, p. 1317). Student engagement in HE should be about adults making learning choices in post-compulsory education, thus avoiding an infantilization of HE students with compulsory attendance and emotional responses such as personal reflections on professional or experiential learning (Macfarlane & Tomlinson, 2017b).

1.2 Student Engagement in Higher Education Between Performing and Learning

Since student engagement as a concept has traditionally been associated with high-quality learning outcomes (Wimpenny & Savin-Baden, 2013) such as critical thinking (Carini et al., 2006), most studies are concerned with its effectiveness linking alleged signs of student engagement (e.g., higher attendance) with specific pedagogic interventions (Macfarlane & Tomlinson, 2017b). However, some scholars have questioned the meaning of student engagement and its associated learning gains (Macfarlane & Tomlinson, 2017a). Gourlay (2015) considers the concept as an ideology that reifies the notion of participation that may serve to underscore notions of what is acceptable student behaviour. Different elements of what is considered legitimate engagement "focus on activity, which is communicative, recordable, public, observable and often communal" (Gourlay, 2015, p. 404). It also emphasises a set of culturally specific Western values such as individual self-reliance (Gourlay, 2015). The performativity associated with student engagement may not be directly related to learning, the conflation of student satisfaction and engagement may be illusory if the former is scarcely related to learning gains (Macfarlane & Tomlinson, 2017b). In a study on online interactions within Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), Wintrup (2017) found that a deepening of understanding and new perspectives of real-world problems described by the participants could not be inferred from the analysis of online interactions. The author concludes that it is important to think about the meaning of engagement so that the measures used "are relevant to the processes and outcomes of learning that we are trying to encourage" (Wintrup, 2017, p. 95). Thus, equating meaningful learning to largely behavioural measures may fail to capture the quality of learning (Tomlinson, 2017). Would engagement-as-opposition (engagement outside the norms, protesting etc.) be recognised as engagement (Macfarlane & Tomlinson, 2017b)? Task completion may be a more appropriate description of what is understood as engagement, which risks shaping learning in a way that elicits conforming and adaptive behaviours (Wintrup, 2017).

HE policies and studies on student engagement may be misdirected if this engagement is reduced to simple behaviours such as adopting a positive attitude towards learning actively and contributing more broadly to the life of the institution. The consequences of that may be a performativity in which targets and performance indicators must be met and, for students, compulsory attendance and grading of their contributions in class or online forums.

Students must be perceived as active learners and what is visible and easily observable is measured (Macfarlane & Tomlinson, 2017b). The lecture theatre may be seen as a pure performance space in which nowadays teaching is becoming a dirty word (Gourlay, 2017). Pedagogies such as flipped classrooms that try to reduce all classroom time to student interaction may narrow the scope of student behaviour that is accepted as teaching quality and disregard or pathologize student behaviour that does not conform to this ideal (Gourlay, 2017).

Besides the performativity of student engagement measures, some scholars highlight the invisibility or misinterpretation of certain forms of student engagement. Gourlay (2017) states that some students may have an independent style of engagement and collaborate less with peers, while others seem to be passive. The invisibility of solitary forms of student engagement such as reading, writing or enquiring on the content of the subject outside the class may be ignored by teachers (Gourlay, 2017; Padilla-Petry & Vadeboncoeur, 2020) and students who prefer more solitary or independent learning may feel alienated and even vilified in classes where participation is mandatory (Tomlinson, 2017).

Finally, some scholars refer to consumerist students or a consumer's attitude towards HE. Consumerist students may seek gratification through more accessible modes of pedagogic engagement that fulfils short-term goals calculating the value of their learning against its costs (Tomlinson, 2017). They may look for a product that suits them according to different variables, including delivery modes, time spent on campus and subjects (Kahn, 2014). Since HE institutions see students as both consumers and commodities (Baron & Corbin, 2012), criticising their wise consumer's attitude could be a little contradictory. As Kahn (2017) puts it, students might evaluate how to secure a passing grade for their work with as little effort as possible or decide which project or subject to prioritise among competing tasks. Finally, as customers, students have autonomy and may make demands regarding the contents and methods of instruction but assume less responsibility for their own learning and expect knowledge to be provided in the most effective ways (Klemenčič, 2017).

1.3 Teachers and Students' Perceptions of Student Engagement

Since student engagement is thought to depend on teachers' pedagogy, their understanding of the subject and their perception of their students' engagement is relevant. Vuori (2014) interviewed informants from three US public universities who held administrative positions or faculty roles, or both, about the student engagement concept, how to foster it, and the obstacles to this process. The three institutions studied showed three different realities ranging from student engagement as a known and enacted concept to student engagement regarded as fashionable and valuable but used for different purposes, or student engagement as a concept that was not popular despite the administration's efforts. The author also found a blurring between student engagement and community engagement. Writing about their experience as lecturers in HE, Richards and Richards (2013) state that students all too often position themselves as passive recipients of knowledge, which is at odds with the authors' view of a dialogic class based on active engagement and reflective consciousness. They argue that active engagement requires students to accept that knowledge is not external to themselves and that they can draw knowledge from experience. In a case study with students from a business school, Bryson and Hand (2007) found that some final year students were more acting upon some tasks than personally committed to them and that they seemed more engaged with obtaining a good degree to secure a good job later than with HE itself. The authors also noticed that the students would do only the minimum work required whenever they disliked the course and that some lecturers were more likely than not to cause the students to disengage. The students also highlighted that the teacher's engagement and enthusiasm were a condition for their own engagement.

Zepke et al. (2014), in a case study conducted in New Zealand, compared teachers' and students' perceptions of how important nine selected teachers' behaviours were in engaging students. Besides asking both the teachers and students the same question, they also asked the teachers how important these behaviours would be for the students. Thus, they compared a) the teachers' and students' perceptions and b) the students' perceptions and the assumptions the teachers drew of the students' perceptions. Although the teachers and students ranked some teachers' behaviours similarly, three particularly interesting differences emerged. First, the teachers thought that "challenging students to think" generated more student engagement than the students did. The students believed that receiving feedback from the teacher was more important than the teachers did. Finally, "teachers being enthusiastic about their subject" was ranked higher by the students than the teachers. Curiously, the teachers were able to predict the importance the students would give to the five least important items, but the teachers' scale did not tally with that of the students. Put simply, although the teachers knew what the students believed would help further their engagement, they thought otherwise.

Despite the importance of the concept in HE policies and studies, student engagement may still lack a narrower definition and a clear relationship with learning (Axelson & Flick, 2010). Assuming that student engagement is a

good predictor of learning because the more students study a subject, the more they know about it (Kuh, 2009) may be oversimplifying since learning may be reduced to good academic results and what is understood as legitimate student engagement may vary according to teachers' expectations and pedagogy (Gourlay, 2015) and reduced to task completion (Wintrup, 2017). Furthermore, students may have independent styles of engagement (Gourlay, 2017) that could be invisible to teachers (Padilla-Petry & Vadeboncoeur, 2020). Thus, more studies on the differences between HE students' and teachers' perspectives on student engagement and learning are needed to better inform HE policies on student engagement.

2. Method

2.1 Goals and Design

This article presents the results of a study that aimed to compare the views on student engagement in HE of teachers and students of Law, Education and Nursing from two Catalan public universities (Barcelona and Lleida) in the framework of blended teaching. The specific objectives of the research were: 1) to identify the degree of agreement/disagreement in relation to indicators of student engagement from the point of view of students and teachers; 2) to ascertain the students' and teachers' opinion on the visibility or invisibility of student engagement; 3) to compare the students' and teachers' opinions about and assessments of student engagement; 4) to explore how teachers and students understand learning in HE. The study followed a quantitative design with an ad hoc survey to compare the students' and teachers' responses to similar questions about learning and student engagement.

2.2 Participants

The participants were 45 teachers and 118 students from two universities (University of Barcelona and University of Lleida) in different degree programmes: Education (Pedagogy, Teaching or Social Education), Law and Nursing. Participation in the study was voluntary, with no financial or academic reward. Anonymity and confidentiality of the data obtained were guaranteed, and no identifying data were collected from the participants. The ethical measures to guarantee the guidelines established in the project design were applied by explaining the research objectives and requesting informed consent. Ethics approval was given by the Institute of Professional Development of the University of Barcelona (REDICE20-2780).

The teachers were invited to participate in the survey through different channels. The survey was mainly announced through faculty e-mail distribution lists. Other teachers were also invited through different personal contacts and chain-referral (Penrod et al., 2003). The only inclusion criteria were having more than five years of teaching experience in HE and teaching in Law, Education or Nursing studies. In addition, groups of students from the same studies across all years were invited by the research team and the teachers participating in the research using e-mail distribution lists.

Table 1. Characteristics of the participants

Details	Teachers		Students		
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	
Sex	Women	37	82.2%	92	77.96%
	Men	8	17.8%	26	22.04%
Totals		45	100%	118	100%
Studies	Nursing	10	22.2%	37	31.35%
	Law	12	26.7%	40	33.89%
	Education	23	51.1%	41	34.76%
Totals		45	100%	118	100%

The teachers were mainly full-time scholars (n=31) with more than 10 years of teaching experience in HE (n=29). The students were evenly distributed across the first four years of studies (25.42% first year; 25.42% second year; 28.81% third year; and 18.64% fourth year, two students did not answer) and 51.7% (n=61) combined work with studies.

2.3 Data Collection

Two different ad hoc surveys with open and closed questions were designed, one for the teachers and another for the students. Both surveys had the same structure and theme, and most of the questions were the same. The students and teachers were asked about evidence of student learning but not in the same way. While the students were asked how they knew they learned something new in a course, the teachers were asked about their criteria for

assessing their students' learning in presential and online courses. In each survey, the teachers and students were asked an open question about how the former assessed student engagement. Both surveys also included a closed question about whether student engagement could be invisible to the teachers and an open question on how student engagement might be invisible to teachers. Also, both surveys had the same table that asked both teachers and students about their agreement (7-point Likert scale) with 19 possible signs of student engagement.

Table 2. Possible signs of student engagement

Order	Item
1	Attend presential classes
2	Connect to synchronous sessions
3	Ask questions and make contributions in class
4	Turn on webcam in synchronous sessions
5	View recorded classes asynchronously
6	Listen in silence to the teacher's explanations
7	Enquire outside of class about the content of the course
8	Participate in class group dynamics
9	Participate via asynchronous virtual tools such as the course's moodle forum
10	Undertake non-compulsory activities to expand on the content of the course
11	Positively assess the work done by the teachers
12	Aim to achieve the highest possible grade
13	Make critical comments on the course
14	Obtain good grades
15	Aim to get the most out of the course regardless of the grade
16	Identify with the contents and competencies of the course
17	Maintain a collaborative attitude with classmates
18	Be a student representative (delegate)
19	Participate in extracurricular activities at the university

2.4 Data Analysis

The quantitative data were analysed following the recommendations of Hollander et al. (2014) and Stockemer (2019), both for the descriptive analysis (mean and standard deviation) of the different items and for the comparison of the groupings of participants according to the sociodemographic data collected. This second level of analysis was performed using non-parametric tests (Mann-Whitney U and Kruskal-Wallis). SPSS software (version 25) was used to analyse the quantitative data.

All open questions underwent content analysis. The answers were read multiple times and coded, starting from the more frequent answers until all the responses were coded. Since each participant could give more than one answer for each open question, there were more answers than participants and there could be more than one code for each open question. In cases where there were multiple answers coded differently, each different code of the same answer was counted only once. For instance, if an answer listed five elements but two of them shared the same code, this answer had four different codes and would thus be counted as 4 answers.

3. Results

3.1 Learning

The students and teachers were asked about evidence of student learning through open questions but not in the same way. While the students were asked how they knew they learned something new in a course, the teachers were asked about the indicators or criteria they used for assessing their students' learning in presential and online courses.

The 118 students gave 140 responses. Almost half of the responses (49.29%) from 58.5% of the students (n=69) associated their learning with applying or using what they learned in daily situations, in other courses or professionally, and being able to explain what they learned to other people: 'because I find a connection with my daily life's issues', 'when I can explain new knowledge to other people', or 'because I know how to solve practical questions'. Only 13.57% of the responses related what they learned to remembering the contents of the course (e.g., 'when after some time I still remember the information'), and 8.57% linked their learning to understanding new concepts (e.g., 'I understand things that I did not').

The 45 teachers gave 62 responses, half of which (50%) from 68.9% of the participants (n=31) mentioned evaluation tasks and methods, specific evaluation criteria, or grades (e.g., ‘passing tasks and tests’). Almost one-fifth of the answers (19.35%) mentioned class attendance and participation (e.g., ‘active participation in the proposed activities’), and 11.3% of the answers were about knowledge, abilities, competencies and values (e.g., ‘the course’s contents but also other competencies: writing, presentation, use of information technology tools’). Finally, a few responses cited self-evaluations and feedback (n=2), critical reflection and creativity (n=2) and integrating theory and practice (n=2).

3.2 Student Engagement

The students’ and teachers’ assessments of behaviours that might indicate student engagement were analysed. Overall, on most items, both groups obtained mean scores above 4 (the midpoint of the Likert scale). The students’ three lowest-rated indicators of student engagement were ‘be a student representative’ (3.17), ‘turn on the webcam in online classes’ (3.29) and ‘participate in extracurricular activities’ (3.78). For teachers, the three lowest-rated indicators were ‘be a student representative’ (4.05), ‘participate in extracurricular activities’ (4.59) and ‘aim to achieve the highest possible grade’ (4.84). On the other hand, the three behaviours that the students rated highest were ‘aim to get the most out of the course’ (6.02), ‘participate in the group dynamics’ (5.92) and ‘maintain a collaborative attitude’ (5.80). The teachers above all rated ‘ask questions or make contributions in class’ (6.61), ‘participate in the group dynamics’ (6.57) and ‘maintain a collaborative attitude’ (6.52). Of the six behaviours indicating a greater or lesser degree of engagement (3 greater and 3 lesser), the students’ and teachers’ ratings concurred on four: ‘be a student representative’ and ‘participate in extracurricular activities’ among the lowest, and ‘participate in the group dynamics’ and ‘maintain a collaborative attitude’ among the highest. This concurrence may indicate that a) both groups understand student engagement as more class-oriented than university-oriented and b) both students and teachers see student engagement mainly as participation and a collaborative attitude. The four differences between teachers and students are also interesting. On the lowest end, while students underestimated turning on the webcam in online classes as a sign of engagement, teachers did the same with students aiming to achieve the highest possible grade. On the highest end, students overestimated trying to get the most out of the course and teachers emphasised making contributions in class.

The comparison of the responses of the two groups to each item showed significant differences ($p < 0.05$) between the teachers and students in 11 of the 19 items (Table 3). Within these 11 items, the teachers attributed more importance to all the items except ‘listen in silence to the teacher’s explanations’, which the students rated as higher. Among the items with significant differences were 3 items related to class participation; 3 of the 4 items associated with non-compulsory activities and attitudes; (e.g., making enquiries outside class), the 2 items relating to a possible passive style of engagement (listening in silence and having the webcam turned on); the 2 items having a link to student engagement beyond the courses (be a student representative and extracurricular activities); and the item regarding the student’s identification with the course.

Table 3. Items with significant differences

Item	Students Mean	Teachers Mean	Significance
Ask questions and make contributions in class	5.41	6.61	.000*
Turn on webcam in synchronous sessions	3.29	5.77	.000*
Listen in silence to the teacher’s explanations	5.58	4.95	.026*
Enquire outside of class about the content of the course	4.96	6.07	.000*
Participate in class group dynamics	5.92	6.57	.001*
Participate via asynchronous virtual tools such as the course’s moodle forum.	4.93	5.91	.000*
Undertake non-compulsory activities to expand on the content of the course	5.09	6.16	.000*
Identify with the contents and competencies of the course	5.50	6.09	.013*
Maintain a collaborative attitude with classmates	5.80	6.52	.000*
Be a student representative (delegate).	3.17	4.05	.006*
Participate in extracurricular activities at the university	3.78	4.59	.024*

The 8 items with no significant differences (Table 4) included the 3 on qualifications and achievement in the course, the 2 related to class attendance (presential and online), the 2 on student comments on the course, and 1 of the 4 items on non-compulsory activities and attitudes.

Table 4. Items without significant differences

Item	Students Media	Teachers Media	Significance
Attend presential classes	5.64	6.09	.349
Connect to synchronous sessions	5.54	5.77	.773
View recorded classes asynchronously	4.96	5.07	.989
Positively assess the work done by the teachers	4.96	5.16	.885
Aim to achieve the highest possible grade	4.83	4.84	.739
Make critical comments on the course	5.39	5.84	.056
Obtain good grades	4.86	5.18	.531
Aim to get the most out of the course regardless of the grade	6.02	6.25	.186

The teachers and students gave different responses to the open-ended question on the criteria used to assess student engagement. Of the 63 responses by the teachers, 60.3% referred to signs of participation or interest and 22.2% to grades, marks and evaluations of compulsory tasks. Thus, more than 80% of the teachers' open-ended responses and almost 90% of the teachers (n=40) prioritised participation and assessment results as signs of student engagement. On the other hand, the students gave 194 responses to the same open-ended question on teachers' criteria to assess student engagement. Their answers were more diverse than those of the teachers, allowing us to distinguish between participation (30.4%), undertaking activities proposed by the teachers (25.3%), showing an attitude of engagement to the course through attention, questions and interest (13.9%), attendance (11.9%) and qualifications (11.9%). If we add the first 4 together, we find that the students attached more weight to showing interest and participation (81.5%) than teachers did (60.3%), while the teachers gave greater importance to qualifications (22.2% vs. 11.9%). Though the differences are not great, they show that students expected teachers to assess their engagement based more on their activity and attitude than teachers' responses, while teachers gave a little more importance to the grades than students.

Comparing the students' responses to the Likert-scale question on signs of student engagement with their responses to the open-ended question about teachers' criteria to assess student engagement, it was possible to see the differences and similarities between their criteria and what they assumed to be the teachers' criteria. The possible signs of student engagement most agreed on by the students mainly confirmed the answers about the possible teachers' criteria and the main difference between both criteria was the emphasis placed by the students on aiming to get the most out of the course regardless of the grades and identifying with the contents and competencies of the course. Both signs of student engagement were not mentioned in the students' responses to the open-ended question. This result raises the issue of the visibility of student engagement since students' identification and intentions with the course may easily remain unknown to teachers.

3.3 Visibility of Student Engagement

Concerning the visibility of student engagement, 68.9% of the teachers and 76.3% of the students responded that some of this engagement might be invisible to the teachers. When asked how this is possible, 39.3% of teachers' responses attributed the invisibility of student engagement to a lack of participation by some people who hide in their work, and 32.1% of the responses mentioned large groups, online classes and anonymity. However, 28.6% of the responses were proposals linked to this invisibility, with the majority seeking to approach the less visible students individually, and only one response proposing ignoring participation and considering academic results only. The students agreed with the teachers on some points, but they also took advantage of this question to complain about certain teaching practices. On the one hand, they confirmed the lack of visibility of student engagement due to a lack of participation (28.4% of responses), online classes (10.2%) and large groups (6.8%). On the other hand, most of the responses were mixed: teachers ignore the amount of work students have done (23.9%), focus only on qualifications (14.8%), are not sufficiently involved (5.7%) and subjectively assess student engagement (4.5%). Two of the three proposals by students were to make webcam activation and class participation compulsory and reduce the size of the groups.

4. Discussion

The similarities and differences between how the participating teachers and students perceived student engagement help us to understand the concept's meaning for each group. While both groups agreed on the importance of attendance, seeking the best qualifications and commenting positively or critically on the subject, there were significant differences regarding class participation and non-compulsory activities and attitudes. The lesser importance attributed by students to participation may suggest that students are more critical of the

association between participation and student engagement. This can also be interpreted as a defence of the right to participate less without implying less student engagement or passivity (Richards & Richards, 2013). Both teachers and students agreed less with items related to student engagement beyond the courses (be a student representative and participate in extracurricular activities) and agreed more with participation and a collaborative attitude, which may indicate a conception of student engagement that is limited to student behaviour in the courses and a lack of recognition of student volunteering (Resch et al., 2022). It thus seems to exclude student engagement with the university community in general (Kuh, 2009; Vuori, 2014) and to emphasize the performativity of student engagement in class. However, students defended their right to engage through silent listening and keeping the webcam off in online classes and valued their efforts to get the most out of the course as a sign of engagement. In these cases, the invisibility of student engagement is at stake since teachers may have trouble assessing these efforts and literally do not see the student with the webcam off, but students may feel that they are sufficiently engaged.

The invisibility of student engagement for teachers has already been discussed in different studies (Gourlay, 2017; Padilla-Petry & Vadeboncoeur, 2020), but it remains under-researched. Most of the participants in the two groups accepted the invisibility of student engagement, but the reasons for this invisibility varied considerably between them. The students confirmed the teachers' explanations (lack of participation, large groups, and online classes) for the invisibility of student engagement and complained about a possible lack of teacher involvement or objectivity in assessing student engagement. Some of the students' complaints appeared to be directed at teachers' lack of awareness of students' efforts and personal conditions. These complaints are consistent with criticisms of an orthodoxy of student engagement (Gourlay, 2015), which ignores certain student behaviours.

All the results confirmed the hypotheses of the critical perspectives of different studies (Gourlay, 2015, 2017; Macfarlane & Tomlinson, 2017) regarding the performativity of student engagement. The participants stressed those indicators of student engagement that "focus on activity, which is communicative, recordable, public, observable and often communal" (Gourlay, 2015, p. 404). However, the students' responses added new, valuable aspects. More than the teachers, they attached importance to attentive and silent listening as an indicator of student engagement, which may reveal more tolerance of a less performative engagement. Also, the students' perspective does not indicate an association between a consumerist attitude and silent listening since what may be interpreted by teachers as a passive consumer attitude may be a less performative form of student engagement.

Since most of the studies that relate student engagement with learning seem to take the latter for granted and conflate learning with academic results, this study looked for the participants' understanding of learning. While most of the teachers trusted their evaluation methods as indicators of the students' learning, the students largely related learning with being able to apply or use what they learn outside the class. Both responses are not contradictory since teachers cannot know how much of what students learn in their courses will be later used or applied in other contexts. However, the students' responses let us think that the relationship between learning and student engagement should be studied beyond academic results.

Finally, both the teachers and students believed that achieving good qualifications indicates student engagement. The association between academic results and student engagement is one of the arguments in favour of fostering student engagement, but it does not justify the assumption that student engagement is necessarily lacking in students with lower grades. In fact, 23.9% of the students' responses on the invisibility of student engagement were complaints about the lack of visibility of the work involved in each course, and 14.8% complained that teachers looked at qualifications only. Moreover, it is worth noting that almost 20% of the teachers' responses to the question about students' learning associated learning with class attendance and participation. Considering that the same behaviours may be related to student engagement, some teachers may conflate student performativity, student engagement and learning. This confirms the risk of reducing learning to conforming and adaptive behaviours (Wintrup, 2017).

5. Conclusions

This article offers two conclusions.

There is student engagement in HE beyond good academic results and the performativity asked and recognised by institutions and teachers as student engagement. As adults deciding their education and hoping to learn something that can be useful beyond the courses and classes, students are expected to engage in teachers' terms but do not always correspond to these expectations and desires. What may be then interpreted by HE teachers and institutions as a lack of student engagement may wrongfully dictate new HE policies. Good academic results may be a sign of student engagement but there may be a lot of student engagement behind poor academic results and a lack of learning behind good academic results. For student engagement to be a relevant concept in HE policies, it clearly

needs to be defined and assessed beyond performative aspects and academic results. This paper confirms the need for further research into what is meant by student engagement for teachers and students, with a view to overcoming simplifications of the concept that may reduce it to the qualifications obtained by students or the number of times a student participates in a class discussion or an online forum. The invisibility of student engagement may be unavoidable, but cannot be ignored. Besides, the assumption that the less-engaged students are less involved in the subject may lead to misjudgements that are not overlooked by students.

Though student engagement in HE is related to lifelong learning (Kuh, 2009), its relation to a learning that is significant and present outside the specific context of a course should be studied. The positive relation between student engagement and good grades in a given course is expected but our results show that students evaluate their learning beyond the scope of each course. Thus, the relationship between student engagement and learning in HE should also be investigated outside the reality of specific courses.

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