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The Relationship between Teachers' Behaviors and Student Engagement Among First-Year College Students

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Abstract — This study examined the relationship between teacher behaviors and student engagement among first-year college students at St. Vincent's College Incorporated in Dipolog City, Philippines. Grounded in Basic Psychological Needs Theory, the research explored how teacher behaviors that satisfy or frustrate students' psychological needs influenced their cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement in learning. A cross-sectional, nonexperimental quantitative design was used, with 453 students completing a self-administered survey on teacher behaviors and engagement. Exploratory factor analysis revealed two supportive teacher behaviors: encouraging student academic growth and creating an inclusive learning space, and three unsupportive behaviors: establishing an creating an unwelcoming learning environment, Dismissing Students' Ideas, and using limited meaningful engagement. Descriptive statistics indicated a mix of both supportive and unsupportive behaviors, while correlation analysis showed that positive teacher behaviors were linked to higher engagement, and negative behaviors to lower engagement. Multiple regression analysis found that teacher behaviors promoting academic growth and inclusivity significantly predicted cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement, including students' enthusiasm for learning. Unsupportive behaviors, particularly creating an unwelcoming environment, were significant negative predictors of cognitive engagement. These findings emphasize the role of teacher behaviors in shaping student motivation and engagement. The study suggests that professional development and institutional policies should focus on enhancing supportive teaching practices while minimizing negative behaviors to improve student engagement and success.

Keywords: Teacher Behavior, Student Engagement, Academic Growth, Supportive Teacher Behaviors, Unsupportive Behaviors, Basic Psychological Needs Theory, Exploratory Factor Analysis.

I. INTRODUCTION

First year students face both academic and social challenges as they transition to first year college learning. Teachers' behaviors and interactions can either positively or negatively affect student engagement in learning. Effective knowledge transfer can enhance a positive teacher-student interaction and provide an initial welcome for students' engagement. Teaching and learning feelings are largely affected by teachers. Teachers in continuous growth are able to help students understand the importance of embracing challenges and setbacks as they provide a variety of opportunities to develop.

They also promote respect and trust, where students can ask questions, share their opinions, and collaborate. The presence of teacher behaviors such as instrumental help, emotional support, positive reinforcement, and fair practices are sufficient to make a class feel like a safe and motivating place for students to come and prepare them to be academically engaged. Teachers have to transfer knowledge and be responsible for creating learning enthusiasm amongst students from many different dimensions (Fong, 2021). Teachers with high emotional intelligence can better identify and address their students' emotional needs and create a good learning environment that increases student participation (Somerwil, 2020).

Teachers who do not encourage their students can make them much less interested in learning, leading to disengagement, feeling undervalued, and refusing to participate. Students are less involved in their learning when teachers do not treat them fairly The encouragement of student autonomy by teachers implies that certain teacher behaviors are important in stimulating student engagement (Brandišauskienė et al., 2023). The feeling of unjustness and indifference demonstrated by some educators results in participants' disengagement, often in a compounding manner. Teacher-student relationship pertains substancially to the level of student participation, which accentuates the need to optimize collaboration (Martin et al., 2018). Class disengagement has an impact on the collective relationship within the classroom ecosystem and hampers the students' involvement to the course matter.

The significance of equitable development as a factor in student engagement cannot be ignored. Learning environments that engage students are those that adaptable to their diverse needs. For students to be academically successful, teaching strategies must be equitable as well as

the support provided by teachers. The quality of teachers' connections to students significantly increases equitable educational experiences. The impact of teachers' fair treatment is particularly important in emergency online teaching and learning and affects students' self-efficacy and academic engagement as well as their overall academic achievement (Huang, 2023). Thus, equity in teaching is providing the same level of support to all students and keeping them actively and confidently involved in the learning process. Classroom environments which place a high degree of value on equity invites participation from students of all socio-economic backgrounds. This kind of treatment and community design is vital for effective learning (Cirstea, 2022).

This study examines the relationship between teachers' behaviors and first year college student academic engagement. It provides a much needed contribution to the current state of higher education, showing a previously undocumented phenomenon, and focusing on instrumental help, emotional support, positive reinforcement and equitable practices, strengthened the teacher's cognitive, affective, and behavioral influence on student engagement, during the critical stage of academic transition and teacher's behavioral and attitudinal practices becomes instrumental in developing student motivation, engagement, and performance. Teacher behaviors provides a strategy for educators to practice, and apply in developing an inclusive, supportive, and participant centered learning environment. Improving engagement also fosters a sense of belonging to the community. A comprehensive description of the multiplicity of teacher roles in students' academic experiences is essential to identify and clarify the student engagement connection where it is less developed.

As the higher education sector continues transforming to address the varied needs of students, the insights from this study provides significant support to practitioners who intend to adopt pedagogical strategies that foster the engagement of students in a deep and persistent manner. This study clarifies how teachers' actions and students' engagement interrelate and demonstrates how purposefully and constructively teaching can improve students' experiences in higher education and academic performance, as well as the potential impact on students' subsequent education and development.

Literature Review

Definition of Student Engagement

Student engagement covers the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral elements of learners' participation in their educational activities. Engaged students, in addition to taking active and constructive roles within their educational activities, build emotional connections to their experiences and apply mental energy to the comprehension of the content. Such varied engagement fosters on-the-spot assistance for learning and facilitates prolonged academic success and individual growth.

Cognitive engagement is the psychological involvement that students put into learning and comprehending the material presented in the course. This involves the application of deep-level learning strategies, engagement in critical thinking, application of self-regulated strategies, and the usage of metacognitive strategies during information processing. Students engaged on a cognitive level, meaning they made an effort, brought in their previous knowledge and experiences and connected it to the new information, and also made an effort to understand the information that they were required to memorize to articulate the meaning of a concept. Research shows that students who engage at a deeper level and on a critical level with their academic material, attain academic success at a higher level than their peers. Furthermore, they have retention of information and retrievability of information at a higher level, as well as high academic success attainment (Hart et al. 2023). This cognitive investment gives the students the ability to build the required analytical skills and problem-solving skills that they need to attain academic excellence.

Affective engagement means the emotional aspects of the learning process and the feelings of the students, like interest, satisfaction, enjoyment, and the emotional attachment to the learning process. When students are affectively engaged, they are emotionally connected to the learning process. They actually feel part of the learning process and feel part of the school community. This emotional connection to learning also gives students the motivation and the emotional fulfillment they need to work on an academic task and to set long term educational goals. They are also likely to feel even more affectively engaged, emotionally fulfilled, and driven to work on the academic task to achieve the educational goals that they set (Tomaszewski et al., 2020) mention that

emotionally engaged students perform better academically and are more emotionally fulfilled. Students become more intrinsically motivated to work even when educational goals are academically challenging.

Teacher Behaviors and Student Engagement

Due to their unfamiliarity with the school setting, new students often become more susceptible to teacher behaviors. They may want to be accepted and supported. Vulnerable students' accounts demonstrate the importance of teacher-student relationships to their experience. Struggles resulting from negative interactions, such as being branded as a problem and being given unreasonably adjusted assignments, strongly affect students' educational decisions, which underscores the importance of teacher-student relationships (Vergara et al., 2024). While all think of new students as being vulnerable, they are more susceptible to the threats of a challenging teacher, as their unfamiliarity means they have little to judge the teacher on. These students may have social or academic challenges which makes supportive teacher-student relationships all the more important. An emotional bond with a teacher means a student can be more involved and receptive toward learning and feedback, so they are less likely to see critical feedback as a personal attack (Pastore & Luder, 2021). New students are often in a vulnerable position because they are in a phase of transition. These students need to be supported by a strong teacher-student relationship, which goes on to satisfy their emotional and social requirements.

The emotional support provided by teachers through their concern and availability can deeply impact the wellbeing of new students, who may become more aware of the interpersonal dynamics at play. Their awareness may help them adjust and improve their overall experience within the educational setting (Zheng, 2022).

New students are most susceptible to the impact of teachers, as the educational setting is new and potentially threatening. Students with the need for the support and protection of their emotional wellbeing can experience a sense of belonging and engagement, and positive teacher-student relations are associated with this. On the other hand, weak supportive attachments may reduce the educational and emotional well-being of the students. Increasing the threat associated with a new educational environment increases the need for teacher support to ensure positive

educational and social outcomes (Li & Zhang, 2024). Due to their developing self-concept and emotional wellbeing, new students are susceptible to the impact of teachers. Seeking support and validation, new students become sensitive to teacher-student relational dynamics. Positive relations are associated with increased emotional engagement and academic adaptability while negative relations and dynamics are associated with increased stress and emotional distress. Establishing belongingness, supportive and democratic relations are important for the mental wellbeing and psychosocial functioning of students

II. METHODOLOGY

This study used cross-sectional predictive nonexperimental quantitative design (Johnson, 2001) because it analyzed the factors that constitute the behavior of teachers and its relationship with the school engagement of first-year college students.

Measures

Teacher Behavior . The instrument used to measure teacher behavior was developed and validated for this study, with the items formulated for each of the two domains: BPN-satisfying teacher behaviors, which support the satisfaction of the needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness (36 items), and BPN-thwarting teacher behaviors, which frustrate these needs (36 items). The initial item statements were formulated based on the definitions of the domains, guided by BPNT (see Appendix A). A 5-point frequency-based response format was used, from Never (1) to Always (5). This response anchor was most suited to the study because the participants were prompted to think of their teachers in general rather than a specific teacher. The factor structure (or dimensions) was extracted from the item pool through an appropriate statistical analysis. Mean scores were obtained for each dimension. Higher mean scores indicated a greater extent of exposure to teacher behaviors.

Student Engagement in School. The Student Engagement in Schools Questionnaire was used to measure student engagement in school. SESQ measured five dimensions of student engagement:

cognitive (12 items), affective-liking for learning (5 items), affective-liking for school (4 items), behavioral-effort and persistence (9 items), and behavioral-extracurricular involvement (3 items). This 5-dimensional model had adequate model fit as preliminary validity evidence (Hart et al., 2011). The participants responded to the items on a 5-point scale from 1 = "Never" to 5 = "Always." Mean scores were obtained for each dimension. Higher mean scores in each dimension indicated higher engagement. All the item statements are in Appendix B.

Data Analysis

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was employed to analyze teacher behavior in the domains of support of student autonomy and control. Sample descriptive statistics and preliminary Pearson's correlations were used on the extracted dimensions from the EFA and the student engagement variables. Multiple regression analysis was employed to assess the correlation between teacher behavior and student engagement in school.

III. RESULTS

Factor Structure of Satisfying Teacher Behavior

The final model therefore retained two interpretable factors. Factor 1 was labeled encouraging student academic growth, which reflected competence-supportive teaching practices, while Factor 2 was labeled creating an inclusive learning space, which represented autonomy supportive practices. Thus, although seven factors were initially extracted, only two were retained because they met the statistical, theoretical, and reliability standards for meaningful interpretation. As shown in Table 2, the rotated factor loadings revealed a two-factor solution for satisfying teacher behaviors. Items with loadings ≥ .40 were considered substantial and thus considered to have significantly based in their factor. Only the significant factor loadings were shown for purpose of emphasis.

Factor 1, *encouraging student academic growth*, was named based on the items that loaded strongly on this factor, with loadings ranging from .481 to .596 as shown in Table 2. This factor is defined as teachers encourage confidence, value student questions and ideas, adapt explanations

to student needs, and provide feedback, collectively fostering students' academic engagement, understanding, and reflection. Specifically, the items included: *"My teachers encourage me to be confident in my choices related to my own learning," "My teachers create a classroom environment where asking questions or clarification is valued," "My teachers explain the topic in different strategies whenever the topic is confusing to assist my learning," "My teachers create an opportunity where I can share my ideas and opinions in class," and "For improvements and reflection, I take into consideration the comments my teachers have made."* The described teacher behaviors justify this factor, as they promote confidence in students' capabilities, develop a positive environment for students' contributions and questions, adapt teaching for student understanding, provide constructive feedback to support students' metacognitive processes.

Factor 2*, creating an inclusive learning space*, was named based on the items that clustered under it, with loadings from .413 to .583, as shown in Table 2. This factor is described as teachers creating a respectful and supportive atmosphere that empowers students to learn at their own pace and in their own ways. This entails offering choices, being available to assist, creating enough opportunities to practice, providing respectful autonomy, and being supportive of students' learning goals and needs. The items specifically included: *"My teachers give me options on how to do my assignments," "When I struggle in class, my teachers have my back to support me," "When I don't understand a topic, my teachers give me a chance to practice," "My teachers ensure that students feel respected," and "My teachers give me the freedom to work at my own pace and own way."* Collectively, these teacher practices highlight that the focus of flexibility, emotional support, the provision of skills, mutual respect, and learner autonomy, the inclusive classroom paradigm empowers students to engage with their individual learning requirements and learning pace.

While the other five factors might be less strong, they provide teacher behavior insights worth elaborating on. In the case of Factor 3, *promoting student respect*, reflected in the statements *"My teachers ensure that students feel respected" and "My teachers give me options on how to do my assignments"* shows the teacher's role in building a respectful culture. Factor 4, *providing teacher support*, illustrated in the statement *"When I'm having trouble with my homework, my teachers guide me through the steps on how to do it,"* looks at the teacher involvement at problem situations. Factor 5, *providing flexibility*, illustrated in the statement *"My teachers give me freedom*

to work at my own pace and own way," looks at the provision of teacher's adjustment to students' ways of learning. Factor 6: *encouraging critical thinking*, illustrated in the statement *"My teachers taught me various ways that I can use in solving problems"* speaks to the provision of problem solving skills. Finally, Factor 7, *fostering learning choices*, illustrated in the statement *"My teachers give me choices about the things I want to learn,"* looks at the freedom teachers give the students in the focus of their learning.

TABLE 2
FACTOR CHARACTERISTICS – ROTATED SOLUTION

	Eigenvalues	Sum of Sq. Loadings	Proportion variance	Cumulative Variance
Factor 1	4.992	1.929	0.074	0.074
Factor 2	1.361	1.272	0.049	0.123
Factor 3	1.262	1.146	0.044	0.167
Factor 4	1.209	1.112	0.043	0.210
Factor 5	1.157	0.980	0.038	0.248
Factor 6	1.021	0.969	0.037	0.285
Factor 7	1.012	0.673	0.026	0.311

Factor Structure of Thwarting Teacher Behavior

As shown in Table 4, the rotated factor loadings revealed a three-factor solution for thwarting teacher behaviors. Items with loadings ≥ .40 were considered substantial which significantly loaded in either factor. For emphasis, only the significant factor loadings are shown for purposes of emphasis on the items that significantly loaded in a factor.

Factor 1, *creating an unwelcoming learning environment*, comprises seven items with factor loadings ranging from .417 to .669, as shown in Table 6. These items include: *"My teachers won't respond when I'm talking to them," "My teachers discourage collaboration instead, encourage competition," "My teachers won't connect with me as an individual or a student," "My teachers create a classroom environment that is uninviting or unwelcoming," "When I'm upset, my*

teachers won't care," "My teachers say things that will hurt me," and "My teachers made me feel left out doing class activities." Unresponsive and dismissive teachers create an unwelcoming climate. Teachers who are perceived this way will not listen when students talk. They do not recognize the emotions that students express. Consequently, students do not feel supported emotionally in the classroom. Students will not feel supported when teachers do not respond to their comments or even acknowledge them when they are present or contributing. As such, they may feel invisible or that their contributions are not valued in the classroom. Unresponsive environments create barriers that inhibit students from getting help, participating in discussion and engaging in the learning process. This type of environment has a detrimental effect on a student's ability to feel a sense of belonging and connection to the classroom; both of which are required for engaging in and having successful academic performance (Ryan & Deci, 2020).

Factor 2, *dismissing students' ideas*, consists of three items with factor loadings of .616 to .733, as shown in Table 6. These include the items, *"My teachers would not give freedom to use my creativity in my homework," "My teachers won't appreciate my ideas in class so there's no point in sharing," and "Every time I try to explain myself, my teachers won't listen."* This factor addresses the teacher behavior of not valuing or fostering student initiative and creativity. Such teachers often ignore, dismiss, or otherwise devalue students' contributions, be it through comments made or as explained. On the one hand, comments may be dismissed through negative remarks that close the floor to further discussion or interrupting and cutting students off to end their turn. On the other hand, dismissive behavior may be described as nonverbal through sighing, eye rolling, and moving on as though students' contributions have not been heard. These behaviors communicate to students that what they have to offer in terms of ideas and creativity, is not important. When students' ideas are dismissed many times, they become reluctant to offer their ideas, take risks, or make contributions to further the discussion in class. The suppression of student voice leads to the loss of opportunities to take initiatives, be creative, and lose the motivation to engage in the learning process, particularly the loss of students' agency regarding their own learning (Kiemer et al., 2021).

Factor 3, *limited meaningful engagement*, consists of five items, with factor loadings between .408 and .665 (Table 6). These items include: *"My teachers will get mad if I take initiative on doing my homework," "My teachers give lessons that are not tailored to my abilities," "In*

explaining lessons, my teachers make simple things complicated," "When asking for help, my teachers are reluctant to give me good advice," and "My teachers pinpoint what I did wrong." This dimension pertains to teacher behavior involving ineffective, unsupportive, and nontailored instruction. These practices include making lessons overly convoluted, leading to confusion instead of clarification and creating more difficulty for students to learn the material. Teachers exhibiting these behaviors do not provide sufficient meaningful engagement and limit opportunities for students to interact actively with the content and apply their learning in substantive ways. Furthermore, these teachers do not provide meaningful supportive feedback to students when they ask for or struggle with guidance or clarification. Ultimately, these teachers demonstrating ineffective instructional practice spend most of their time drawing attention to mistakes rather than providing the necessary feedback to help students improve and gain a better understanding of the material. All of these behaviors create barriers for students to learn, either by making comprehension more difficult, limiting their instructional growth, or providing adequate support to foster the confidence (and eventually the competence) of the students (Hafen et al., 2021).

Factoring 4, the lack of teacher-student interaction is the weakest factor because it has only one item with a loading of .408. The item is “My teachers don’t connect with me as an individual or a student.” This factor implies that teachers restrain their interaction with students on a personal level, which leads to students feeling disconnected and less appreciated in the classroom. Even though this factor is the weakest in comparison to others, it still emphasizes an important issue in the student-teacher relationship that may concern student engagement.

TABLE 4
FACTOR CHARACTERISTICS BASED ON A ROTATED SOLUTION

	Eigenvalues	**Sum of Square Loadings**	**Proportion variance**	**Cumulative Variance**
Factor 1	6.743	2.427	0.101	0.101
Factor 2	1.306	2.053	0.086	0.187
Factor 3	1.114	1.940	0.081	0.268
Factor 4	1.000	1.138	0.047	0.315

Correlation Among the Variables

Correlations among the variables in Table 7. revealed meaningful relationships between satisfying teacher behaviors, thwarting teacher behaviors, and student engagement outcomes. The two satisfying teacher behavior factors, *encouraging student academic growth* and *creating an inclusive learning space*, were positively correlated ($r = .34$, $p < .001$), suggesting that when teachers provide competence support, they are also likely to respect students' perspectives and foster autonomy.

TABLE 7
CORRELATIONS AMONG THE VARIABLES

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1.Encouraging Student Academic Growth	---								
2.Creating an Inclusive Learning Space	0.34***	---							
3.Creating an Unwelcoming Learning Environment	-0.32***	-0.21***	---						
4.Dismissing Students' Ideas	-0.23***	-0.11*	0.54***	---					
5.Limited Meaningful Engagement	-0.20***	-0.09*	0.57***	0.47***	---				
6.Cognitive Engagement	0.43***	0.32***	-0.25***	-0.18***	-0.09	---			
7.Behavioral Engagement: Effort and Persistence	0.40***	0.38***	-0.23***	-0.19***	-0.09	0.50***	---		

8.Affective Engagement: Liking for Learning	0.47***	0.37***	-0.25***	-0.20***	-0.15**	0.53***	0.46***	---	
9.Affective Engagement: Liking for School	0.25***	0.18***	-0.02	0.08	-0.02	0.26***	0.22***	0.31***	---
10.Behavioral Engagement: Extra Curricular Activities	0.42***	0.30***	-0.22***	-0.15***	-0.15**	0.46***	0.43***	0.62***	0.35**

Note. $^{*}p < .05$, $^{**}p < .01$, $^{***}p < .001$

The three thwarting teacher behavior factors *creating an unwelcoming learning environment*, *dismissing students' ideas*, and *limited meaningful engagement* were also positively interrelated (rs = .47–.57, ps < .001), indicating that unsupportive teaching practices tend to cluster together as overlapping forms of negative classroom experiences.

As expected, the engagement dimensions *cognitive engagement*, *effort and persistence*, *liking for learning*, *liking for school*, and *extracurricular activities* were positively correlated with each other (rs = .22–.62, ps < .001). The strongest associations were found between *effort and persistence* and *cognitive engagement* (r = .50, p < .001), as well as between *extracurricular activities* and *liking for learning* (r = .62, p < .001), highlighting the reinforcing nature of cognitive, behavioral, and affective components of engagement.

Satisfying teacher behaviors were also positively associated with all dimensions of engagement. Specifically, both *encouraging student academic growth* and *creating an inclusive learning space* showed significant positive correlations with *cognitive engagement*, *effort and persistence*, *liking for learning*, *liking for school*, and *extracurricular activities* (rs = .25–.47, ps < .001), reinforcing the role of supportive teacher practices in promoting multiple aspects of student engagement.

Conversely, the thwarting teacher behaviors were negatively correlated with most engagement variables, with significant negative associations observed between *unwelcoming learning environment*, *dismissing students' ideas*, and *limited meaningful engagement* and the majority of engagement outcomes (rs = –.20 to –.29, ps < .01). Notably, these negative factors did

not show significant relationships with *liking for school*, suggesting that general school attitudes may be less influenced by specific teacher behaviors compared to direct measures of classroom engagement.

All correlation coefficients were below .85, providing evidence of discriminant validity, which indicates that while the constructs are related, they are not redundant. Overall, these findings support the structural coherence of the model: satisfying teacher behaviors reinforce student engagement, while thwarting teacher behaviors undermine it, and the engagement dimensions themselves are strongly interrelated.

IV. DISCUSSION

Every classroom has its own rhythm a subtle harmony or dissonance shaped by how teachers and students connect. The experiences of first-year college students revealed that teacher behavior is more than a set of professional practices; it is the emotional and motivational heartbeat of learning. The way teachers speak, listen, and respond determines whether students approach their lessons with curiosity or withdrawal, with enthusiasm or indifference.

Students consistently described how certain teacher behaviors gave life to their learning. When teachers encouraged academic growth, they nurtured not only students' intellect but also their confidence. These teachers became catalysts of motivation they explained lessons patiently, provided constructive feedback, and celebrated small improvements. In such classrooms, students did not simply aim to comply, they desired to understand. They became more thoughtful, invested, and willing to persist when facing difficult tasks. Learning felt like a shared journey rather than a solitary struggle. The encouragement they received acted as fuel, transforming uncertainty into determination (Haider et al., 2023).

Similarly, when teachers created inclusive learning spaces, students felt respected and valued. Classrooms that welcomed ideas, encouraged dialogue, and recognized individuality became spaces of belonging. Students felt their voices mattered, which inspired participation and trust. They were no longer afraid to ask questions or share opinions because they believed their teachers would listen. These findings align with evidence that autonomy-supportive and inclusive

teaching practices promote emotional safety, social belonging, and meaningful engagement (Xu et al., 2022).

However, the story changed in classrooms where teachers displayed thwarting behaviors that discouraged or invalidated students' efforts. When students encountered unwelcoming learning environments, they described feelings of invisibility—questions left unanswered, ideas dismissed, and needs ignored. Over time, these experiences bred quiet withdrawal and disengagement. Such emotional distance mirrors findings that poor teacher–student relationships reduce motivation and well-being (Martin & Collie et al., 2019).

When teachers dismissed students' ideas, students felt rejected and hesitant to participate again. This dismissal eroded their confidence and sense of competence, leading to disengagement. They internalized the feeling that their contributions lacked value, weakening their desire to learn. This pattern reflects evidence that devaluing students' perspectives lowers motivation and participation (Vergara et al., 2024).

Limited meaningful engagement had a similar demotivating effect. Students described moments when lessons were unclear or overly rigid, or when mistakes were emphasized without supportive guidance. These practices created frustration, not from lack of interest, but from the absence of meaningful direction. Students began to disengage mentally, performing tasks mechanically rather than purposefully. This echoes prior findings that limited meaningful engagement or overly controlling teaching increases frustration and reduces self-determined motivation (Zhou & Li, 2023).

Across these experiences, one clear pattern emerged, satisfying teacher behaviors awaken engagement, while thwarting behaviors suppress it. Yet their influence differs in strength. Supportive behaviors directly fulfill students' needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness, nurturing intrinsic motivation and sustained engagement (Ryan & Deci, 2020). In contrast, need-thwarting behaviors harm engagement more indirectly; some students remain motivated through resilience or external support. Still, engagement under such conditions often feels forced rather than fulfilling (García-Moya et al., 2020).

These patterns strongly reflect Basic Psychological Needs Theory (BPNT). Engagement flourishes when students feel capable, respected, and connected, and diminishes when these needs

are frustrated. Teachers who encourage participation, validate effort, and promote autonomy create emotional conditions that sustain learning (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Encouragement and inclusion are not simply acts of kindness they are psychological necessities that make motivation possible.

The variability of student responses also highlights the role of cultural interpretation. In Filipino classrooms, students often view structure and discipline as signs of care. Behaviors that appear controlling in other contexts may be perceived as guidance when delivered with warmth or fairness. This cultural lens explains why some students maintain engagement even in strict environments, supporting evidence that the meaning of control can differ across cultures (Li & Zhang, 2024).

Ultimately, this study shows that teacher behaviors define the emotional climate of learning. Encouraging academic growth and creating inclusive spaces nurture curiosity, confidence, and perseverance, while unwelcoming or dismissive practices erode motivation and belonging. Engagement rarely disappears suddenly—it fades quietly when students no longer feel valued or capable. These findings reinforce the view that supportive teacher–student interactions strengthen both psychological well-being and motivation (Kassab et al., 2024).

In the end, the classroom becomes a reflection of the teacher's approach. When teachers listen, students speak. When teachers believe, students try. When teachers include, students belong.

But when teachers ignore or discourage, students retreat not because they cannot learn, but because they no longer feel that learning is for them.

The overarching message of this study is clear, teacher behaviors are powerful determinants of student engagement. Satisfying behaviors cultivate motivated, resilient learners, while thwarting ones drain curiosity and joy. The heart of engagement lies not in the lesson itself, but in the relationships that make learning possible. Teachers hold the power to transform classrooms into spaces of growth, connection, and meaning where students do not just study but discover who they can become.

V. CONCLUSION

This study established that teacher behaviors are critical determinants of student engagement across cognitive, behavioral, and affective dimensions among first-year college students. The research yielded two primary findings: first, satisfying teacher behaviors encouraging student academic growth and creating inclusive learning spaces consistently predicted higher levels of student persistence, enjoyment, and intellectual investment in learning. Second, thwarting teacher behaviors creating unwelcoming environments, dismissing student ideas, and providing limited meaningful engagement significantly reduced engagement, confirming that teacher practices directly influence the satisfaction or frustration of students' basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

The findings validate Basic Psychological Needs Theory (BPNT) within the context of teacher-student relationships in Philippine higher education. Teacher behaviors that respected student perspectives, provided meaningful choices, and validated student efforts fulfilled psychological needs and enhanced engagement. Conversely, dismissive or controlling behaviors frustrated these needs and diminished motivation. Cognitive and behavioral engagement proved most responsive to competence-supportive practices, while affective engagement flourished under autonomy-supportive and relatedness-building interactions.

Three conclusions emerge from this research. First, teacher behaviors function as psychological mediators that shape not only academic outcomes but also students' emotional connection to learning. Second, the promotion of engagement requires intentional cultivation of inclusive, competence-enhancing, and autonomy-supportive classroom environments not merely content delivery. Third, satisfying teacher behaviors exert stronger positive effects on engagement than thwarting behaviors exert negative effects, suggesting that investment in supportive teaching practices yields substantial returns in student motivation and achievement.

This study extends BPNT by demonstrating how specific teacher behavior patterns—rather than general teaching quality—either enhance or diminish engagement through the satisfaction or frustration of basic psychological needs. The central contribution is clear: teachers possess the power to fuel or hinder student engagement, and meeting students' basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness is fundamental to unlocking their academic potential.

Educational institutions must prioritize teacher development programs that equip educators with practical strategies for implementing need-supportive behaviors while minimizing need-thwarting practices to optimize student engagement and success.

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