

A model for improving undergraduate accounting students' engagement in research

Oyedele Martins Ogundana, Emmanuel Adegbite, Lucia Egbe, Ugbede Umoru & Tasmia Hossain

To cite this article: Oyedele Martins Ogundana, Emmanuel Adegbite, Lucia Egbe, Ugbede Umoru & Tasmia Hossain (28 Oct 2025): A model for improving undergraduate accounting students' engagement in research, Accounting Education, DOI: [10.1080/09639284.2025.2579669](https://doi.org/10.1080/09639284.2025.2579669)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09639284.2025.2579669>



© 2025 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



Published online: 28 Oct 2025.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 157



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

A model for improving undergraduate accounting students' engagement in research

Oyedele Martins Ogundana^a, Emmanuel Adegbite^{b,c}, Lucia Egbe^a, Ugbede Umoru^a and Tasmia Hossain^a

^aNottingham Business School, Nottingham Trent University, Nottingham, UK; ^bUniversity of Nottingham, Nottingham, UK; ^cJames Cook University, Singapore, Singapore

ABSTRACT

A recent UK study highlighted a steady decline in student engagement with research projects. This study investigates why undergraduate accounting students disengage from research (a Research Module) and the strategies that can be adopted to improve their re-engagement. Using a thematic analysis of diverse data sources – including in-depth interviews and institutional documents – we identify structural and psychosocial factors that negatively affect student engagement. We outline these issues and how they can be mitigated by enhancing the following: students' motivation and agency, transactional engagement between students and tutors, re-orienting accounting students, and providing and publicising additional institutional support. Drawing on these insights, we propose a new model for understanding and addressing non-engagement in accounting Research Modules. This study contributes to the broader literature on accounting education and pedagogy by offering practical, evidence-based strategies to support student engagement in research.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 27 April 2024

Revised 9 October 2025

Accepted 20 October 2025

KEYWORDS

Accounting students; education; higher education institutions (HEIs); pedagogy; research project; student engagement

Introduction

This study explores the research question: *Why are undergraduate accounting students not engaging with a Research Module, and how can this issue be addressed?* This is a critical inquiry, as validated by a recent United Kingdom (UK) engagement survey that reported 'a steady decrease in recent years in students' engagement with their own Research Projects' (Advance HE, 2022, p. 12). According to Advance HE, this trend is 'concerning as evidence indicates that students who conduct their research were more confident problem solvers and self-learners – two vital competencies required of individuals to be successful in their future career' (Advance HE, 2022, p. 12). Although previous studies (Carini et al., 2006; Igwe et al., 2020; Lim, 2017; Nzekwe-Excel, 2022; Sawang et al., 2017) have explored factors contributing to student disengagement, very few have

CONTACT Oyedele Martins Ogundana  oyedele.ogundana@ntu.ac.uk  Nottingham Business School, Nottingham Trent University, 50 Shakespeare Street, Newton Building, Nottingham NG1 4FQ, UK

© 2025 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

focused specifically on disengagement from a Research Module, particularly among undergraduate accounting students in higher education institutions (HEIs). While these prior studies offer valuable insights into general disengagement and strategies for improvement, their conclusions may not directly apply to undergraduate accounting students undertaking a Research Module in HEIs. This is because a Research Module, in particular, relies heavily on self-directed learning, which presents unique challenges for undergraduate accounting students. Also, disengagement factors and re-engagement strategies often vary across disciplines (Buck, 2016; Farrell & Brunton, 2020). Therefore, subject-specific investigations are essential to understanding these nuances and developing tailored solutions. Such targeted approaches can better support students in re-engaging with their studies and achieving academic and professional success (OECD, 2000).

This study's research question is particularly relevant to accounting educators worldwide, as undergraduate accounting students in HEIs are often more likely to disengage from research activities – especially a Research Module – compared to other course subjects (Advance HE, 2022; CERP, 2017). Existing literature suggests that this disengagement may stem from students perceiving the module as overly challenging, irrelevant to practical accounting, or unrelated to mathematics (Earley, 2013; Markle, 2017; Mullins, 2017; Nzekwe-Excel, 2022). The limited availability of module-specific guidance further complicates the efforts of accounting educators to address this issue effectively (Buck, 2016; Farrell & Brunton, 2020). By addressing this gap, this study aims to help accounting educators better understand the factors contributing to disengagement and identify actionable strategies to re-engage students. Practical insights from this study can empower accounting educators and HEIs with tools to enhance student engagement in a Research Module. Improved engagement can lead to better module performance, higher student completion rates, greater satisfaction, enhanced employability, and a stronger institutional reputation (Crosling et al., 2009; Lim, 2017; Yorke & Longden, 2004).

In answering our research question, the study focuses on a UK university as its empirical context, recognising that the issue of student engagement remains complex and influenced by institutional and individual factors (Igwe et al., 2020; Sawang et al., 2017; Tight, 2020). This complexity is further reflected in recent UK engagement surveys that highlight a continued decline in students' engagement with research projects (Advance HE, 2022). Within our case-study university, we collected and analysed in-depth interview data from key stakeholders and crucial artefacts on the engagement of final-year accounting students. These included feedback, student survey reports, and data from IBM Cognos analytics, which records information on how students use the university's online learning room for a Research Module. While our study provides valuable insights, we acknowledge its limitations. The data was collected during the COVID-19 lockdown, which may affect the generalisability of our findings as students' experiences were shaped by unique circumstances. Additionally, the sample size was small and limited to the UK and a single-case university. However, the use of qualitative interviews enabled us to capture rich, context-specific data, offering valuable insights into Kahu's integrated theory of student engagement. This approach allowed us to revise the framework based on students' perceptions of their educational environments, providing a more practical foundation for curriculum development (Igwe et al., 2020).

Contribution

This study makes several significant contributions to the literature on student engagement, particularly in the context of accounting education. Focusing on undergraduate accounting students' engagement with a Research Module provides a detailed examination of the factors influencing student engagement, offering a more nuanced understanding of its dynamic, context-specific nature (Herrmann et al., 2017). The study advances Kahu's integrated theory of engagement, contributing to the operationalisation and refinement of key concepts and constructs (Farrell & Brunton, 2020). In particular, it expands on how institutional contexts, student characteristics (such as course discipline, programme level, and year of study), and course-specific factors influence engagement (Sawang et al., 2017; Tight, 2020). This nuanced application of Kahu's model strengthens its explanatory power and makes it adaptable to various educational contexts. While this study is situated in the UK, its methodology and findings present a transferable framework that can inform accounting educators and policymakers globally, offering comparative insights into the factors that affect engagement across different institutional settings.

From a methodological perspective, this study addresses limitations in prior research, which has predominantly relied on quantitative surveys (e.g. Herrmann et al., 2017), potentially limiting the depth and context of findings (Kahu, 2013). In contrast, this study adopts a qualitative, multi-method approach that integrates in-depth interviews, student feedback, and learning analytics. This comprehensive approach offers a richer, more contextually grounded interpretation of the factors shaping student engagement. This study enriches the existing literature by emphasising qualitative research, providing a more balanced and thorough understanding of student engagement in accounting education.

Practically, the study provides actionable insights for addressing the growing disengagement of accounting students with a Research Module, a key challenge in UK higher education (Advance HE, 2022). The findings shed light on the reasons for disengagement and offer concrete strategies for re-engaging students. This research equips accounting educators with tools to respond to the unique challenges faced by accounting students and allows HEIs to make informed adjustments to their curricula. By enhancing student engagement, the study contributes to improving learning outcomes, boosting module performance, and strengthening institutional reputation. The insights offered by this study are relevant within the UK and globally, serving as a valuable resource for educators, administrators, and policymakers striving to foster more effective and engaging Research Project experiences in accounting education worldwide.

The rest of this article is as follows. The next section reviews the literature and theory underpinning our research enquiry. Thereafter is the research method and data analysis section. We present the findings and discussions, and lastly, the conclusion.

Literature review and theoretical framework

This section begins by exploring the concept of student engagement and reviewing relevant prior literature on the topic. It is followed by section 2.2, which discusses various theoretical perspectives that offer insights into its dynamics. Section 2.3 delves into Kahu's integrated theory of student engagement; section 2.4 concludes and focuses on strategies for enhancing student engagement.

Review of existing studies on student engagement

Student engagement has become an increasingly important topic in higher education, as universities and colleges worldwide strive to provide an educational experience that prepares students for future careers and empowers them to become well-rounded individuals (Kahu & Nelson, 2018; Sawang et al., 2017). Engagement refers to a student's emotional, behavioural, and cognitive investment in their learning (Bacher-Hicks et al., 2021; Heinicke & Guenther, 2020; Igwe et al., 2020). It encompasses the degree to which students are motivated to learn, participate actively in classroom activities, and connect with the subject matter (Brown et al., 2015). When engaged, students are more likely to succeed academically, graduate on time, and develop the necessary skills to succeed in their careers (Kahu & Nelson, 2018; Krause & Coates, 2008). In contrast, disengaged students are less likely to learn, retain information, and perform well academically, which can negatively affect their future careers (Bagley et al., 2021). Yet, many students struggle to stay engaged in their studies due to various factors that can be better understood and resolved on a module-by-module basis (Buck, 2016; Farrell & Brunton, 2020). This is primarily because students' reasons for disengagement and the extent of their disengagement can differ significantly between modules (Tight, 2020). Similarly, subject-specific investigation and re-engagement strategies can better support students' re-engagement with their studies (OECD, 2000).

Many prior studies on 'student engagement' are concentrated in the United States, New Zealand and Australia (Chand et al., 2012; Mortensen et al., 2012; Tight, 2020; Trowler, 2010). Nonetheless, interest in student engagement remains widespread globally, including China (Cheng & Ding, 2021), Denmark (Herrmann et al., 2017), Ethiopia (Tadesse et al., 2018), Ghana (Asare et al., 2017), Italy (Gilardi & Guglielmetti, 2011), Korea (Choi & Rhee, 2014), UK (Igwe et al., 2020), Mexico (Toledano-O'Farrill, 2017), Sweden (Dong et al., 2023), Spain (Navarro-Abal et al., 2018), Jordan and Qatar (Mardini & Mah'd, 2022). This suggests that the issue of student engagement remains unresolved mainly as it is complex and dependent on various institutional contexts and students' characteristics (Igwe et al., 2020; Sawang et al., 2017; Tight, 2020). In the past, studies have examined the experiences of different student groups, including ethnic groups (Greene et al., 2008), non-traditional students (Cheng & Ding, 2021), international students (Igwe et al., 2020; Ishiyama, 2002; Lee & Castiello-Gutiérrez, 2019), postgraduate/undergraduate students (Byrne et al., 2012; Holmes & Rasmussen, 2018; Krause & Coates, 2008; Mearns et al., 2007; Ward et al., 2023); online/distance learners (Buck, 2016; Farrell & Brunton, 2020) and students with disabilities (DuPaul et al., 2017). Others have focused on variations in student engagement by year of study (e.g. Brown et al., 2015; Kuh et al., 2008) or discipline (e.g. Mardini & Mah'd, 2022).

Although those existing studies generated exciting insights, these studies mainly investigated student engagement from the perspective of students who possess a single characteristic (i.e. based on the year of study or course of study). Perhaps the conclusion of those prior studies might be limited, especially as students' engagement might differ based on the intersection of multiple characteristics (Tight, 2020). Furthermore, the implications of students' engagement based on a combination of their year of study and discipline might generate insights different from those gleaned from studies based only on either of those features. Thus, in this study, we investigated student engagement

using an intersecting lens that considers students' engagement based on a specific institution, course/discipline, specific programme level and year of study. The focus on these intersecting characteristics is crucial as Zepke and Leach (2010) observed that many significant differences exist between various courses of study because of the assumptions that underpin different disciplines. Thus, the OECD (2000) suggested that the issue of student engagement can be better addressed within each institution and at the discipline or programme level.

Previous research in accounting education has primarily focused on factors influencing students' decisions to pursue accounting studies or a career in accounting (Byrne et al., 2012; Jackling & Calero, 2006). Additionally, there have been various studies examining the impact of distance learning, information technology (IT), and traditional learning approaches on accounting students' engagement and academic performance (e.g. Cheng & Ding, 2021; Holmes & Rasmussen, 2018; James et al., 2024; Mardini & Mah'd, 2022). However, research investigating final-year accounting students' engagement in the Research Module is scarce. Existing studies that explore student engagement in the Research Module are limited and often conducted in disciplines other than accounting, predominantly at the postgraduate level (e.g. Nzekwe-Excel, 2022).

Student engagement and related theoretical perspective

The study of student engagement encompasses three primary theoretical perspectives: behavioural, psychological, and sociocultural (Astin, 1984; Krause & Coates, 2008; Pike, 2006). However, previous research has identified challenges associated with these perspectives, including problems with definition, a lack of distinction between different aspects of engagement, and the immediate and long-term consequences of engagement (Blondeel et al., 2023; Huang & Wang, 2023; Trowler, 2010). To overcome these challenges, this study adopts Kahu's (2013) integrated theory of student engagement, which combines the sociocultural perspective with psychological and behavioural views. Kahu's integrated theory is widely recognised as a comprehensive framework for understanding and enhancing student engagement in higher education (Bond, 2020; Farrell & Brunton, 2020). It incorporates multiple dimensions of engagement, including academic, social, and institutional aspects (Bryson & Hand, 2007; Fredricks et al., 2004). Unlike the behavioural perspective, which primarily focuses on institutional practices (e.g. Krause & Coates, 2008), Kahu's integrated theory takes a holistic approach by considering students' motivation, expectations, and emotions (Bond, 2020). This holistic perspective is valuable as student engagement extends beyond academic activities to encompass social and institutional dimensions (Farrell & Brunton, 2020). While the behavioural approach provides insights, it overlooks students' emotional experiences, crucial for a deeper understanding of their engagement (Huang & Wang, 2023; Kahu, 2013; Trowler, 2010).

One strength of Kahu's integrated theory is its emphasis on the reciprocal nature of engagement. In contrast, the psychological perspective primarily focuses on students' individual responsibility for their involvement, defined as the amount of physical and psychological energy students invest in learning, understanding, or mastering the knowledge and skills (Gibbs & Poskitt, 2010; Newmann, 1992). Kahu's theory highlights that engagement is not solely the students' responsibility but also requires active involvement

and support from the institution. This bidirectional relationship encourages institutions to create an engaging environment and support student success (Trowler, 2010). While the psychological and sociocultural perspective often relies on student surveys, raising concerns about response validity, Kahu's integrated theory advocates for qualitative methods that allow for a deeper understanding of the dynamic nature of student engagement (e.g. Gilardi & Guglielmetti, 2011; Herrmann et al., 2017). In-depth qualitative research is essential for capturing diverse experiences (Igwe et al., 2020).

However, Kahu's integrated theory also has limitations. Firstly, the model may not adequately address cultural and contextual factors since it was developed based on research conducted in New Zealand. Its effectiveness and relevance in different cultural and institutional settings require further exploration and validation (Farrell & Brunton, 2020; Kahu & Nelson, 2018). Additionally, some dimensions and constructs within the model lack clarity and operationalisation, making it challenging for researchers and practitioners to consistently measure and evaluate them across studies and institutions (Farrell & Brunton, 2020). Furthermore, the theory could benefit from a more nuanced understanding of the role of individual student characteristics in shaping engagement, enhancing its explanatory power.

In conclusion, Kahu's integrated theory of student engagement is a valuable framework for comprehending and fostering engagement in higher education (Bond, 2020; Farrell & Brunton, 2020). Its holistic perspective and acknowledgement of the reciprocal nature of engagement offer valuable insights for institutions seeking to enhance student success. However, further research is necessary to address the theory's limitations, such as its cultural applicability and the operationalisation of its constructs, to ensure its effectiveness in diverse educational contexts. Therefore, this study adopts Kahu's integrated theory of student engagement to investigate, contextualise, and advance our understanding of the factors contributing to accounting students' disengagement from a Research Module and the strategies that can be employed to improve their re-engagement within the UK context.

Integrated theory of student engagement

Kahu's (2013) integrated theory of student engagement generally categorised the factors that influence students' engagement into structural and psychosocial influences (Bond, 2020; Farrell & Brunton, 2020; Kahu, 2013). Structural influences relate to the university's curriculum, assessment, policies, students' background, family and lifeload (Farrell & Brunton, 2020; Kahu, 2013). Structural influences within the university, such as course design and assessment, have a recognised impact on student engagement (Barnett & Coate, 2004; Cheng & Ding, 2021; Krause & Coates, 2008). For instance, student engagement is often supported by a well-designed course that promotes interaction, a purposeful learning journey, efficient use of students' time; linking learning activities to goals; building on existing knowledge whilst addressing gaps in understanding; and provides immersive, real-world simulations or experiences (Cheng & Ding, 2021; Farrell & Brunton, 2020; Frey, 2015). Likewise, an inappropriately designed curriculum, assessment and policy can adversely influence students' engagement (Farrell & Brunton, 2020; Stone & O'Shea, 2019). There are instances where students, irrespective of how well the university's curriculum is designed, continue to disengage for reasons such as

student burnout, emotional exhaustion, cynicism, lack of self-efficacy and absence of parental support (Navarro-Abal et al., 2018; Olwage & Mostert, 2014). In another instance, structural influences within the university (such as teacher support and participation) have no impact on the engagement level of students, especially adult learners, as they often take sole responsibility for their learning experiences (Xu et al., 2020). In other words, structural influences within the university (such as its curriculum, assessment and policies) are not stand-alone determinants of students' engagement but intertwine with other crucial variables (Olwage & Mostert, 2014; Xu et al., 2020).

Students' engagement can also be influenced by structural influences deriving from the characteristics of students, including their background, family and lifeload (Farrell & Brunton, 2020; Kahu, 2013; Kahu & Nelson, 2018). Many students struggle to engage with academic work due to the challenges of balancing work, family and study (Brown et al., 2015; Buck, 2016). Combining study, family, social life, and work can cause students to feel considerably stressed (Brown et al., 2015; Stone & O'Shea, 2019). 'Lifeload', the sum of all the pressures a student has in their life, including part-time work and university work, is a critical factor influencing students' level of engagement (Kahu, 2013). The needs of the family, finances, social and health have all been noted as prominent influencers of students' extent of engagement in higher education (Farrell & Brunton, 2020; Yorke & Longden, 2004). However, Zepke et al. (2014) believe that these structural influencers emanating from students (including lifeload, family-related issues, finances and health) are often one-offs and not continuous but only exert influences within a period. Besides, when they do occur, their extent of impact will often depend on students' ability to manage such crises, especially if they have prior experiences or have some form of support in place. In other words, structural influences deriving from the characteristics of students (such as students' background, family and lifeload) may not impact the level of engagement of all students, especially those who are adult learners, experienced with dealing with crises and possess support from families and friends (Farrell & Brunton, 2020; Kahu, 2013; Xu et al., 2020).

The psychosocial influences emanate from university- and student-related variables (Kahu, 2013; Kahu & Nelson, 2018). The university-related variables generally include relationships with staff, autonomy support from staff, and assistance from non-teaching staff, including learning development professionals (Gravett & Winstone, 2019; Jiang & Tanaka, 2022; Smith, 2007). Effective staff provide timely, proactive support by establishing personal presence and actively engaging their students using synchronous and asynchronous methods to maintain their students' engagement (Farrell & Brunton, 2020; Stone & O'Shea, 2019). Autonomy support from teachers, including the provision of meaningful rationale and use of non-controlling language, was positively related to students' timely engagement, academic performance, satisfaction with campus life and psychological well-being but negatively related to students' depressive symptoms (Gravett & Winstone, 2019; Jiang & Tanaka, 2022). The psychosocial influences that emanate from students include the issue of motivation (Fazey & Fazey, 2001), personality (Poropat, 2014) and self-theories (Yorke & Knight, 2004). For instance, Sawang et al. (2017) found a relationship between introversion and students' low level of engagement such that, compared to extroverted students, introverted students were less engaged in higher education. Furthermore, Kuh et al. (2008) identified that students from minority backgrounds were less engaged than native students. Some other groups of studies

observed that students are often disengaged in higher education because they are motivated to do so by their colleagues (Diamond, 2005; Dishaw & Strong, 1999). Students lacking the necessary digital skills to engage with the technological aspects of learning comfortably and competently can be a barrier to successful engagement (Brown et al., 2015; O'Shea et al., 2015). In addition, a positive relationship exists between students' engagement and their possession of crucial soft skills, including time management, strong organisational skills, and tenacity (Bagley et al., 2021; Buck, 2016; Farrell & Brunton, 2020; Harrington et al., 2021). To stay engaged, students must establish a sustainable study routine and a positive study environment and design an effective study structure in tandem with other responsibilities (Buck, 2016).

Improving students' engagement

Kahu's conceptual model offers a foundational understanding of student engagement, focusing on the underlying factors that influence it. We adopted Zepke and Leach's (2010) framework to build on this theoretical foundation, which provides a more practical and detailed proposal for improving engagement (Igwe et al., 2020; Taylor & Parsons, 2011). Zepke and Leach's (2010), a routinely cited framework for improving student engagement, synthesises 93 prior research studies from ten countries to develop ten detailed proposals for improving students' engagement. Thus, while Kahu highlights the importance of self-efficacy, Zepke and Leach proposed initiatives to build students' confidence and autonomy. Kahu's focus on the sociocultural context also aligns with Zepke and Leach's call for inclusive institutional practices that support diverse student populations. Together, these frameworks bridge theory and practice, providing a comprehensive approach to understanding and improving student engagement.

Zepke and Leach's framework organises strategies for enhancing engagement into four interconnected dimensions: student motivation and agency, transactional engagement (student-teacher interactions), institutional support (a conducive learning environment), and active citizenship. Key attributes such as self-belief, self-efficacy, and self-perceived competence are pivotal to fostering student motivation and agency (Chiu, 2021; Kahu & Nelson, 2018; Llorens et al., 2007). Zepke and Leach (2010) explained that students' confidence in their competence is a strong motivator for ongoing active learning, and such learners often stay engaged in the face of short-term failures. Better grades in a module have been suggested to motivate students to be more engaged in that same module (Farrell & Brunton, 2020; Kahu & Nelson, 2018). The issue is that many modules often have a single assessment, which typically concludes the module once grades are released to students. As a result, students are unlikely to re-engage with the course after completing the assessment.

The way students and teachers engage with each other is described as transactional engagement, in which Kuh et al. (2008) place teaching and teachers at the heart of students' engagement. Students are more likely to engage if they are supported by teachers who are approachable and have established an active and collaborative learning environment (Bryson & Hand, 2007; Gravett & Winstone, 2019; Jiang & Tanaka, 2022; Malan, 2020; Mearns et al., 2007; Smith, 2007). With regard to institutional support, institutions can provide support services that could enhance students' level of engagement (Jiang & Tanaka, 2022; Pike, 2006). Prior studies (Kiernan et al., 2020; Pittaway & Moss, 2006)

have observed that institutions that organise orientation processes, special support in essay planning, student mentoring programmes, childcare supports and quiet work-spaces are more likely to improve students' degree of engagement in higher education contexts. However, there is evidence that students might not engage with these support mechanisms for various reasons, including the non-alignment with their specific needs (Boud & Molloy, 2013; Lim, 2017).

Zepke et al. (2014) described active citizenship as students taking the initiative to seize opportunities and push the boundaries of the curriculum through critical questioning. However, within the dominant operational discourse of engagement, students often struggle to engage this way. Zepke and Leach (2010) further highlighted that many students lack the social capital – such as extensive social networks and cultural literacy – needed to participate critically as active citizens. Additionally, the act of questioning requires self-confidence, maturity, and experience, which can present further challenges (Zepke et al., 2014). Overall, while Zepke and Leach's (2010) perspectives for improving students' engagement offer some detailed insights, they must be elaborated by drawing upon specific contextual issues that apply to accounting students in higher education. By doing that, such strategies are more likely to effectively resolve the issue of accounting students' disengagement from a Research Module (Bentley et al., 2009; Kahu, 2013; Welter, 2011).

Research method and data analysis

Research design

Considering the exploratory nature of our research questions, we adopted a qualitative method to understand students' perceptions of their 'lived experiences', that is, *why accounting students are not engaging with a Research Module* (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Strauss & Corbin, 1994). The qualitative method facilitates an in-depth exploration of a phenomenon, in this case, students' perspectives on the factors impacting their level of engagement with a Research Module. We utilised both inductive and deductive approaches since one of our objectives is to develop a model that conceptualises the strategies to enhance accounting students' engagement level with a Research Module. This study was a case study design as it allows for the analysis of real-life, contemporary settings using multiple types of data (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Yin, 2009). This case study was embedded in a HEI in the UK with a well-established accounting programme. We followed an iterative process in collecting and analysing data, discerning underlying patterns and relationships (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). By recurring between data collection and analysis, we could probe further into any variability we observed from the data collected.

Research context

The context of this study includes full-time accounting undergraduate students in their final year at one of the universities in the UK who have not opted to undertake a placement year as an alternative to conducting research. At the case university, the Research Module is a compulsory 20-credit academic module for students in the accounting programme who choose to proceed with their studies in their third and final year. However, the inclusion of

Research Project Modules varies across universities. In some UK and international institutions, such modules are mandatory components of undergraduate accounting programmes, while in others, they are optional or not included in the curriculum. At the case university, final-year students take other modules besides the Research Module, including Strategic Management Accounting, Corporate Finance, Corporate Reporting, and Developing Professional Impact (See [Table 1](#)). At the case university, accounting students often demonstrated a significantly lower level of engagement with their Research Module compared to other core modules like Corporate Reporting (See [Table 2](#)). Specifically, their login frequency, content accessed, and completion rates on the learning platform were 24% lower (see [Figure 1](#)). Additionally, over 72% of accounting students applied for a Notification of Extenuating Circumstance (NEC), which provides an extension to assessment deadlines (see [Table 1](#)). This proportion is more than double that of students applying for NECs in other core modules. Furthermore, fewer than 7% of accounting students have often participated in the feedback survey. This lack of engagement has also negatively impacted student satisfaction with the Research Module.

The Research Module comprises only one assessment point that requires accounting students to produce an independent Research Project, usually containing five chapters and a maximum of 7000 words, contributing to an existing body of knowledge. Usually, students can produce a Research Project on any topic related to Accounting, Finance, Business, and Management. The purpose of that exercise is to enable students to develop crucial skills (including the ability to think analytically and logically; put ideas together; and learn on their own) required by employers of labour (Advance HE, 2022; Ishiyama, 2002; Thiry et al., 2012). Possessing those soft skills could give students an edge while seeking accounting-related roles after completing their studies (Bagley et al., 2021; Ishiyama, 2002; Thiry et al., 2012). The Research Module typically runs for 19 weeks, from October to submitting the research output in March of the following year. The Research Module often commences with nine weeks of lectures and workshops where accounting students are taught the rudiments and processes for conducting an academic Research Project. In the fifth week of the

Table 1. Proportion of Accounting students applying for extensions across the core modules in 2020/2021 academic year.

Modules taken by final year Accounting students	Total number of students	Number of students who applied for Notification of Extenuating Circumstance (NEC)	Percentage
Research Project	144	103	72%
Strategic Management Accounting	144	43	30%
Corporate Finance	144	9	6%
Corporate Reporting	144	0	0%
Developing Professional Impact (DPI)	144	25	17%

Table 2. Profile of the respondents in 2020/2021 academic year.

Level of engagement	Number of students	Proportion of respondents
Low	8	42%
Mid	7	33%
High	5	25%
Total	20	100%

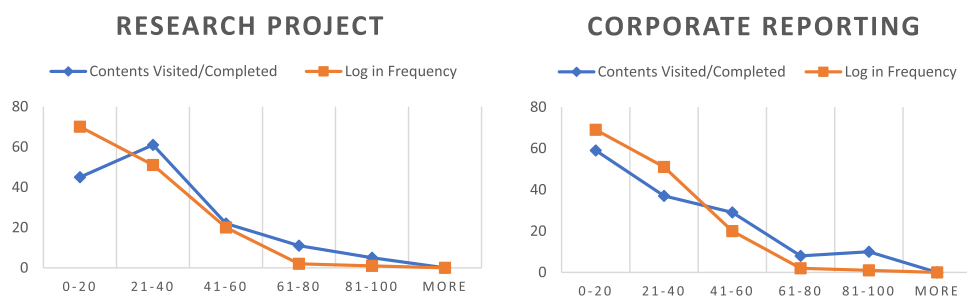


Figure 1. Log in frequency, content visited and completed for Research Project and Corporate Reporting in 2020/2021 academic year. Source: University's online learning room.

lecture and workshop session, accounting students are allocated individual supervisors responsible for guiding and grading each student's Research Project output.

Data sources

This study utilised three forms of data: semi-structured interviews with students, programme faculty, and teaching staff; and institutional documents, including feedback and student survey reports, as well as IBM Cognos analytics data, which record information on student engagement with the Research Module's online learning room (Creswell et al., 2007; Creswell & Poth, 2016; Yin, 2009). These multiple sources of evidence facilitated methodological triangulation, enabling a broader and more reliable understanding of the research inquiry and enhancing the validity of our findings (Saunders et al., 2016; Strauss & Corbin, 1994; Yin, 2009). We placed particular emphasis on qualitative interviews, as they allowed participants to articulate their lived experiences and provide nuanced insights into the case study context (Creswell & Poth, 2016). A self-completed questionnaire was deemed unsuitable because it restricts responses to predetermined categories and limits opportunities for clarification or elaboration (Phellas et al., 2011; Saunders et al., 2016). In contrast, interviews facilitated interactive discussions, enabling follow-up questions and deeper probing of participants' responses (Wertz, 2011).

Purposive and snowball sampling techniques were employed to recruit participants (Emerson, 2015; Etikan et al., 2016). Ethical approval was secured prior to data collection. Data collection commenced with a call for student participation; however, initial responses were limited due to students' workload and examination schedules. Consequently, snowball sampling was adopted, with participating accounting students referring peers who were willing to take part. In total, twenty (20) in-depth student interviews and four (4) interviews with programme faculty and teaching staff were conducted between September 2020 and July 2021. The student interviews took place across different stages of study – mainly during the second term and the early dissertation preparation phase – to capture variations in engagement levels. Each interview lasted approximately 45–60 min and was conducted via Microsoft Teams to accommodate participants' convenience. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim into Microsoft Word. The first, third, and fifth authors conducted and transcribed the interviews, while all authors collaboratively reviewed transcripts for consistency and accuracy.

To reinforce data triangulation, institutional documents (feedback reports, student surveys, and IBM Cognos analytics) were examined to validate and contextualise the interview data (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Patton, 2002; Yin, 2009). This cross-referencing enabled the identification of convergent themes and enhanced the robustness of findings by mitigating potential biases associated with any single data source.

Data analysis and analytical framework

We commenced initial data analysis by transcribing all audio interview recordings into a Microsoft Word processed file. After that, we read and re-read each interview’s transcripts and artefacts to get acquainted with the commentaries and process of interpretation (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Saunders et al., 2016). By doing that, we understood the content and extracted meanings from the qualitative data (Smith & Osborn, 2007). Next, we uploaded all the interview transcripts and artefacts onto NVivo Qualitative data analysis software to help us manage the large volume of qualitative data, aid the coding exercise, and track text in the interview data with associated occurrences from other sources (Ogundana et al., 2021). We began by thoroughly reading, examining, and breaking down the interview transcripts and artefacts until inductive primary codes naturally emerged, which were then used to categorise chunks of text (see Figures 2 and 3). This process continued until further analysis no longer revealed additional primary codes (Gioia et al., 2013). Subsequently, using a deductive approach, we developed secondary codes, grounded in Kahu’s theory, by grouping similar primary codes into higher-order concepts to create broader categories and establish their inter-connections (see Figures 2 and 3; Strauss & Corbin, 1994). This iterative process was

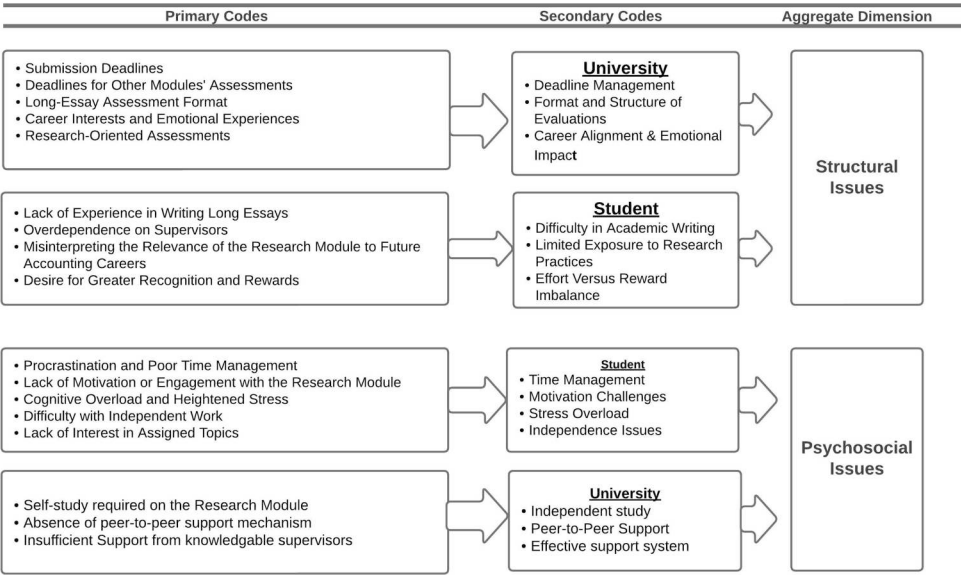


Figure 2. Analytical codes and themes from qualitative data analysis highlighting structural and psychosocial challenges affecting engagement.

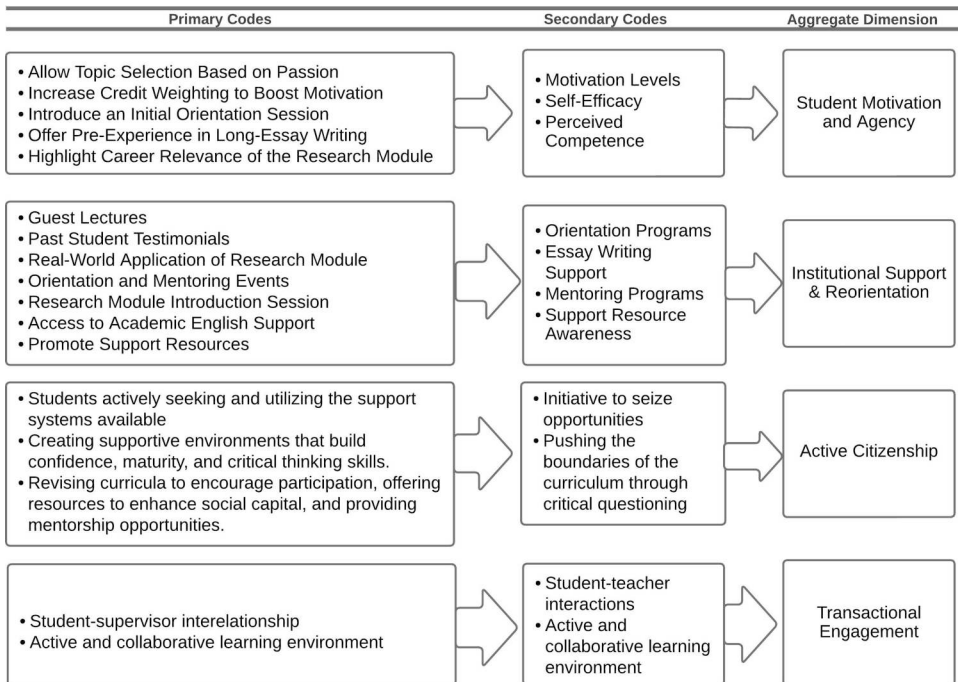


Figure 3. Analytical codes and themes from qualitative data analysis highlighting strategies and solutions for enhancing engagement

repeated until all primary codes were accounted for and no new higher-order concepts emerged (Gioia et al., 2013).

In summary, Kahu's theory served as the framework for determining the secondary codes and dimensions – indicating a deductive theming process based on Kahu's theory – while the generation of primary codes followed an inductive approach. From that exercise, we unravelled themes such as '*Deadline Management*', '*Format and Structure of Evaluations*', and '*Career Alignment & Emotional Impact*' – See Figures 2 and 3. Next, we abstracted our secondary codes into an aggregate dimension using '*a priori themes*' derived from the existing literature. For instance, we aggregated secondary codes such as '*assessment*' and '*curriculum*' using '*structural issues*' as the aggregate dimension – see Figures 2 and 3. Moreover, observed patterns during the coding exercise were used to unravel and establish the data-driven interrelationships between the codes and themes (Yin, 2009). Figures 2 and 3 summarises the analysis by showing how it progressed from primary codes to secondary codes and from secondary codes to aggregate (relational) dimensions. The codes and themes were analysed further to reveal their connections and interrelationships.

Findings and discussions

The outcomes of this study offer comprehensive insights into the reasons behind the lack of engagement among accounting students in the Research Module, as well as the potential strategies to enhance their involvement. In the following subsections, we present our

findings, which shed light on the detrimental effects of structural and psychosocial factors on the level of engagement among accounting students. Furthermore, we propose potential strategies for addressing these issues and improving student engagement within the Research Module.

Reasons for lack of engagement

Structural issues

Structural challenges within the university, encompassing curriculum, assessment methods, policies and overall workload, can significantly impact student engagement (See Figure 2). In contrast to certain studies (e.g. Navarro-Abal et al., 2018; Olwage & Mostert, 2014), our research indicate that most participants identified structural factors as the primary influencers of their engagement level with the Research Module. These factors include the assigned credit weighting for the module, its relevance to their accounting career prospects, and the nature of assessments associated with the Research Module. All the interviewees mentioned that the assessment submission deadline for the other modules inhibited their engagement with the Research Module. The respondents explained that they skipped several Research Project's lectures, seminars and supervision meetings with their supervisors to spend those hours completing the assessments of other modules including, Corporate Finance (CF) and Strategic Management Accounting (SMA), which were due for submission at a time similar to the Research Module deadline. This structural issue deriving from clashing assessment submission deadlines was repeatedly captured in the conversation with the student respondents, as shown below:

We had some modules' assessments due as well in December. During December, we had to gain CPD. These were the things we thought were just more important than Research Projects, and Research Projects was just something you just have to type out and submit. I just thought that CF and DPI (Developing Professional Impact) were just more important since their submission was closer. Next Friday, SMA assessment submission is due after the submission of the Research Project. It was just a bit stressful. (Respondent 1)

I feel like it's a bit more difficult with my other modules to handle as well with the same deadline. So, I think that's the reason why [I was not engaging with the Research Project]. Maybe engagement was maybe low, just because also we had other deadlines as well. (Respondent 5)

These commentaries, which were corroborated by all the sampled teaching staff and programme leads, reiterate that students may disengage from a module when it shares a similar assessment deadline with other modules. However, the student's initial interest in the subject often influences the selection of a module from which to disengage. This is evident from the respondents' choices to disengage from the Research Module while engaging with other modules such as CF and SMA, which they perceive as more closely aligned with their accounting courses and career aspirations. Thus, the issue of conflicting assessment submission deadlines alone does not determine students' engagement levels but rather intersects with other factors, such as career interests (Olwage & Mostert, 2014; Xu et al., 2020). This is because student engagement extends beyond academic activities but encompasses students' emotional experiences (Kahu, 2013; Trowler, 2010).

The choice of assessment method employed in the Research Module emerged as another factor contributing to the lack of engagement among the respondents. Accounting students tend to favour modules involving mathematical components (Cheng & Ding, 2021; Holmes & Rasmussen, 2018). Therefore, a significant majority (four-fifths) of the respondents expressed that adopting a long-essay assessment format in the Research Module hindered their engagement. Specifically, Respondents 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 10, 12, and 13 highlighted that the accounting course primarily revolves around numerical analysis and calculations, making it difficult for them to engage with the Research Module, which required extensive essay writing. This was captured nicely by Respondents 5 and 13, who respectively stated that:

In the Accounting and Finance course, we are so used to like working with numbers so obviously trying to do the Research Projects, I struggled quite a lot. I mean it is not something that I'm used to. As such, I was disinterested. it's just something that's so different like it's nothing we've ever done before. Like we're used to doing. (Respondent 5)

For me a very, very long piece of writing dissertation essay, whatever it may be, is quite a lot to take on. Like it's quite daunting, and so I would say, just anyway, for accounting and finance students, it was more too daunting because people that have chosen accounting and finance-related courses obviously prefer numbers and mathematics. (Respondent 13)

In addition, four-fifths of the respondents stated that they were inexperienced in writing long essays comprising of 7000 words maximum. Prior to the undertaking of the Research Module, respondents 2, 3, 4, 5, and all the interviewed programme faculty and teaching staff specifically claimed that the maximum word count for a module assessment assigned to final year accounting students throughout their lifetime is less than 1500 words. Thus, several excerpts obtained from student feedback and survey reports described the 7000-word essay requirement for Research Project as '*such a long piece*', '*overwhelming*', '*daunting*', '*weird*', '*worrying*', and '*massively shocking*'. A few selected commentaries below confirm that:

The highest number of words for a document I've ever written was less than 2000 words but never written anything like 7000 words. 'As accounting students, we mainly deal with numbers. We also do get essays, but this is usually between 1000 and 2000 words. For me, I was asking myself, how would I write that kind of word count? Yes, it was a massive shock to me because I had never written such a number (volume) of words all-in-one documents before. (Respondent 5).

The Research Project looks like a big task for me.

When I heard we need to write 7000 words, I was scared.

I saw some people's [students'] report and I was seeing like 50 pages.

So, [it was scary] for someone that was not used to that huge number of word count. The maximum I think I've ever written was like 10 pages and I was like [even that is] that's a lot of work. So, for me, it is the word count which can be overwhelming for someone that is not quite used to that. (Respondent 9)

What was worrying for me was the idea that I'd got to write 7000 words. Actually, a top-level essay, and this worried me. It's definitely weird and I thought I couldn't do it. (Respondent 12)

Most respondents claimed that the research-focused assessment of the Research Module might not require a high level of student engagement with the module. Respondents 2, 3 and 4 explained that they saw no need to attend the lectures and seminar sessions of the Research Module because they thought they could write the essay without attending classes. Respondent 4 expressly stated that:

I didn't really put that much effort into Research Project because I feel like what I need to do was just do my research and my topic. And start writing. I didn't really attend my seminars for my Research Project for that reason.

One teaching staff observed that their supervisees were less engaged, possibly because *'they [students] know that their supervisor is going to be available anytime.'* This suggests that students felt no urgency to participate in lectures or seminar sessions, as they could conveniently address their questions or concerns through one-on-one interactions with their supervisors. Data from IBM Cognos analytics for 2018-2021 revealed that many non-engaged students failed to achieve satisfactory results in the Research Module. This highlights the importance of student engagement in attaining good grades and academic success (Igwe et al., 2020; Kahu & Nelson, 2018; Krause & Coates, 2008). Some (four out of ten) of the respondents indicated that their low engagement with the Research Module stemmed from perceiving it as lacking direct relevance to their future careers as accountants. While this viewpoint holds some validity, it is essential to recognise that the Research Module is crucial in nurturing problem-solving skills and fostering critical thinking abilities among students (Boud & Molloy, 2013; Bowden et al., 2021). Specifically, some respondents (including Respondents 4, 6, 9 and 13) stated that they believed the Research Module was not required to reach their goals of becoming Tax, Management and Financial Accountants. Instead, they suggested that the other core modules (including CF and SMA) were more crucial for achieving their accounting career interests and goals.

Four students expressed a desire for greater recognition and rewards for their efforts in the Research Module. They highlighted the need for the module to carry academic credits proportional to its workload. For example, equating the Research Module's 20 credits to those of other core modules implies it is of equal value, yet students and teaching staff argue otherwise. One lecturer noted, 'This research project module should not be a 20-credit unit as it demands far more effort compared to other modules. Many students have told me it should be a 40-credit module.' Interestingly, some students showed a lack of interest in the long-essay assessment, with four respondents stating that as long as they avoid failing, they are content to focus their efforts on excelling in other core modules. This perspective aligns with Farrell and Brunton's (2020) findings, which suggest that better recognition in a module (i.e. in the form of credit weighting) can enhance student engagement. Students' level of commitment may depend on how much the module contributes to their desired final grade in the accounting course. Modules deemed crucial to achieving overall academic goals tend to foster greater engagement, while those with less perceived impact may be deprioritised.

Psychosocial issues

Psychosocial challenges that hindered student engagement with the Research Module arose from university-related and student-related factors (Kahu, 2013; Kahu & Nelson,

2018). These psychosocial issues, which significantly affected the engagement of accounting students with the Research Module, encompassed social and behavioural aspects (See Figure 2). They included the absence of effective support mechanisms within the university, struggles with procrastination, disinterest in the Research Module, and an imbalanced allocation of study time among different modules. In alignment with Bagley et al. (2021), eight students acknowledged that their lack of engagement with the Research Module was a deliberate choice stemming from procrastination and ineffective time management issues. A sample of those commentaries is provided below:

Well, I guess one of this is just a general case of procrastination, which I guess is common within everyone since the deadline was far away, we thought we could work on it like later and since like we had exams. So, we wanted to like to adjust our focus. So that probably like later on, we can readjust our focus back to the Research Project. (Respondent 3)

My engagement with the Research Project was very low up until about February [a month to the submission of the assessment], and then I started doing a lot more work on it then because it was due in March. We had January exams, so we had to factor that in, and so I spent a lot more time on the examination modules because I knew that I could do the Research Project afterwards. (Respondent 9)

Honestly speaking, I didn't get around to properly doing the Research Project assessment until mid-December [2-3 months to the submission deadline]. So, I did absolutely nothing [on the Research Project assessment] for two months. (Respondent 15)

As such, many students did not have sufficient time to work on the assessment, which impacted the quality of their final Research Project report. According to Farrell and Brunton (2020), the efficient use of students' time is associated with students' engagement and academic success. Besides, about half of the students who delayed their engagement in the Research Module due to procrastination and ineffective time management were unable to complete the assessment and, thus, requested an extension to the submission deadline. As a result, secondary data obtained from IBM Cognos analytics for 2018-2021 revealed that the Research Module recorded one of the highest proportions of submission deadline extensions, as roughly three-quarters of accounting students requested extra time to submit their Research Projects (See Table 1). Nevertheless, it was observed that several students who sought an extension for their Research Project Module often struggled to achieve grades in the second-class upper division and above (i.e. 65 per cent and above). This underscores the connection between engagement and academic success, suggesting that simply obtaining an extension for the submission deadline may not necessarily lead to a successful re-engagement and achievement in the Research Module. This is because poor time management habits may persist, leading to continued procrastination and a lack of productive engagement with the module (Bagley et al., 2021; Buck, 2016). Besides, extending the deadline does not address other underlying issues, such as the lack of motivation or disinterest in the Research Module, but could rather result in students accumulating multiple pending tasks simultaneously, leading to cognitive overload and increased stress.

Seven students stated that they disengaged from the Research Module because they could not work independently, a crucial skill required in the Research Module (Boud & Molloy, 2013; Bowden et al., 2021). One of the interviewed students explained:

I think that independent learning was a big thing that impacted students' engagement, as you gotta do it all on your own. I feel like coming from school [before university] people are handheld, and then having to try and do something on your own is very difficult to ask something of people who are used to being told what to do. (Respondent 9)

All the interviewed programme faculty and teaching staff agreed that the final year accounting students lacked prior experience with independent research, describing this as a maturity gap that affected their confidence and perseverance. This observation about student maturity aligns with prior studies linking self-regulation to engagement and academic success (Farrell & Brunton, 2020). Notably, many of the students (including Respondents 1, 4 and 5) described the independent learning experience on the Research Module as '*depressing*' and '*demotivating*'. As such, many respondents claimed that the high proportion of self-study required on the Research Module adversely impacted their level of engagement with the module. A positive relationship exists between students' engagement and their ability to work with little or no supervision (Farrell & Brunton, 2020). This is the focus of the Research Module, designed to specifically cultivate those essential soft skills that employers highly value and serve as vital prerequisites in the professional world (Advance HE, 2022).

In addition, more than half of the respondents mentioned disengaging from the Research Module because they selected topics they were not passionate about. According to Respondent 3, such research topics were chosen because they represent fields the students feel they have substantial information about. Respondents 3 and 4 captured this succinctly below:

Some students picked some topics they did not like. Because they had more information on it, so they were not enthusiastic to write about the topic. They just wanted to get information and just, basically just get the information and just put it down so that they can get the job done. I guess they were not motivated about it. (Respondent 3)

I picked Branding because I felt like I had a lot to say about it. It is not something I'm interested in, but I'm interested in business which is good. I just picked it because I feel like I could talk more about it. (Respondent 4)

In essence, students must strive for alignment between their topic of interest, personal passion, and the feasibility of completing the Research Module. Students are more prone to disengagement when these three factors are not aligned. This is because the passion for a topic or subject tends to enhance motivation, commitment, and active involvement in the learning process (Fazey & Fazey, 2001; Poropat, 2014).

Some respondents also mentioned that the barriers to their peer-to-peer support system impacted their engagement level in the Research Module. For instance, the social distancing regulations during the lockdown prevented students from meeting up with their colleagues with whom they usually discuss their assessments. Thus, Respondents 1, 3 and 4 identified that during the COVID-19, the absence/limit to peer-to-peer support mechanisms inhibited their level of engagement with the Research Module. Respondent 4 explained the benefits they stand to derive from their peer-to-peer support system:

Another thing I would say would be the pandemic. Before the pandemic, we actually help each other. Staying home is kind of like different. You don't know what this person is

doing. We can't really help one another. It's not like in the past when we used to go to the library at the same time and go back home at the same time.

This suggests that the social interrelations between students can influence their peers' engagement level, including during a pandemic (Diamond, 2005; Mardini & Mah'd, 2022). Respondent 3 highlighted the significant influence of students' relationships with their supervisors on their engagement with the Research Module. Providing autonomy support from teachers has been found to positively affect various aspects of student life, including timely engagement, academic performance, satisfaction with campus life, and psychological well-being (Gravett & Winstone, 2019; Jiang & Tanaka, 2022). Sixteen students stated that their engagement with the Research Module improved when the supervisors allocated to them were helpful, encouraging, and knowledgeable about the students' topic choices. Two of the interviewed programme faculty and teaching staff similarly commented that they recorded improvements in students' engagement when they regularly emailed their allocated supervisees regarding upcoming deadlines and the implications of non-submissions and disengagement on their final grades.

Improving accounting students' engagement with the research module

The strategies that can help improve students' engagement with the Research Module should emphasise enhancing students' motivation and agency; transactional engagement; active citizenship, and institutional support (See Figure 3). To improve students' motivation, over half of the interviewees agreed that they felt more motivated when given the freedom to select their own topics for their Research Projects. However, students could only maximise the benefits of self-selecting a research topic when they choose study areas that they are passionate about. This was clearly explained by Respondents 1 and 13 in their commentaries:

I was allowed to choose my topic. Obviously, I really enjoyed writing about the topic that I was passionate about. (Respondent 1)

I enjoyed my research title, I guess I think that's why I enjoyed it, really because I thought I kind of chose something that I was after (Respondent 13)

In the same light, Respondents 3 and 4 explained that their motivation was lost when they picked topics, they were not passionate about but had something to write about in the research area. This suggests that a greater emphasis should be placed on encouraging accounting students to select research topics that they are more passionate about and not topics they have something to write on. Guiding students to select a topic that interests them can enhance engagement and motivation in research (Keller, 2008). Providing autonomy in topic choice allows students to connect their personal interests with academic work, fostering a deeper commitment to the project (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Support mechanisms, such as structured brainstorming sessions and access to diverse resources, can further help students identify topics they are passionate about while maintaining academic rigour (Tinto, 1993).

Moreover, Respondents 1 and 9 expressed that increasing the credit units for a Research Module from 20 to 40 would enhance their motivation to engage with it. In agreement, two of the teaching staff we interviewed stated that they believe that a higher weighting of credit units for the Research Module can motivate students to be

more engaged in that particular module (Kahu & Nelson, 2018). However, while these perceptions highlight the importance of credit allocation in shaping student engagement, any adjustment must align with institutional credit guidelines and notional hours to ensure that the workload accurately reflects the required effort and maintains consistency and fairness across the curriculum. About half of the interviewees suggested that some initial introductory session to the Research Module could commence in their second year, with some form of long-essay assessments to gain some experience with writing a large volume of reports required for the Research Module. According to Respondent 5:

Maybe if you guys introduced the Research Module at the end of second year to student. Students can have that opportunity to start thinking of, you know, the things that they should do. And I feel like maybe by the time they come, by the time they come back to the university, it is not a big shock to them because already they have had that experience in writing a long document. So, students are more likely to engage in a way. Rather than the current approach where we are suddenly told to write a 7000-word document which may be too much to handle. (Respondent 5)

Scaffolding assignments, such as short research papers or annotated bibliographies, can provide step-by-step practice, helping students refine their writing process before tackling a longer essay (Shute, 2008). Peer feedback and targeted writing workshops also promote skill development and reduce anxiety related to long-essay tasks (Carless & Boud, 2018; Steenkamp & Brink, 2024). Allowing accounting students to gain experience before starting a Research Module might encourage students to engage with a longer document.

Using guest lectures can also boost students' engagement with a Research Module, especially when past students are invited to recount their experiences with a Research Module and discuss how they have applied those experiences in their work life. For instance, Respondent 15 stated explicitly:

I'm not going to lie I emailed students from the university who have already graduated just to understand what this Research Project is about. because I didn't understand it. No one at the university is able to help. I mean it's partially my fault.

Through such guest lecture events, students are more likely to be able to understand the usefulness and benefits derivable from undertaking a Research Module for their future accounting careers. Consistent with this, Pittaway and Moss (2006) found that institutions that implement orientation processes and student mentoring programmes are more likely to witness higher levels of student engagement in higher education settings. More than three-fifths of the respondents identified the need for additional support to improve their engagement with a Research Module.

Respondents 1, 3 and 5 mentioned that the availability of the Academic English (AE) student support group within the university was beneficial for resolving questions and receiving feedback on the initial drafts of their Research Project. However, Respondents 3 and 5 stated that many of their colleagues were unaware of such institutional support at the university (including AE). Perhaps there is a need for more awareness on the various institutional support mechanisms at the university. In addition, Respondent 3 recommended that students be signposted to the different institutional supports using a Research Module online learning room to publicise the various institutional supports available at the university. Nevertheless, it was noted by the programme faculty and

teaching staff that students frequently fail to proactively seek and take advantage of the support mechanisms provided by the university. This emphasises the significance of a collaborative effort in enhancing student engagement, wherein both the institutions and students play a crucial role (Malan, 2020; Trowler, 2010). It involves the institutions providing effective support mechanisms, and students actively seeking and utilising the available support systems.

Evidence from feedback, student survey reports, and IBM Cognos analytics (2018–2021) reveals that fewer than one-third of accounting students engage as active citizens by questioning, contributing, and expanding the boundaries of the accounting curriculum. However, this narrow focus may overlook other valid expressions of active citizenship, such as developing ethical awareness, engaging critically with course content, or applying social responsibility in real-world contexts. In line with Zepke and Leach's (2010) broader definition, the data suggest that while curriculum involvement is limited, there remains potential to cultivate active citizenship through other pathways. Similar to the findings of Farrell and Brunton (2020), nearly all the students cited a lack of time, interest, self-confidence, and maturity as barriers to critical engagement. The data also highlighted that many students lack the social capital needed to participate effectively as active citizens, such as strong social networks. Furthermore, about two-thirds of the interviewed programme faculty and teaching staff noted that many of the accounting students are short on confidence, maturity, and experience required for students' active citizenship. The findings suggest a critical gap in fostering active citizenship among accounting students, as most do not engage in critical questioning or contribute to curriculum development. The implication is that institutions must address these barriers by creating supportive environments that build confidence, maturity, and critical thinking skills. This includes revising curricula to encourage participation, offering resources to enhance social capital, and providing mentorship opportunities.

A vast majority (eight out of ten) of the respondents mentioned that they required more transactional engagement with their tutors and supervisors to stay motivated and engaged with a Research Module. According to Respondents 1, 2, 3 and 5, the engagement between students and teachers is a valuable source of encouragement, guidance and confidence booster, which are strong motivators for learners to stay engaged (Zepke & Leach, 2010). In addition to that, Respondents 1 and 2 commented on the need to establish a more active and collaborative learning environment for the lectures and seminars on a Research Module. According to Respondent 1, this will enable students to apply the knowledge from the lectures/seminar sessions to their individual research topics. Creating a strong student-supervisor relationship is key to fostering an active and collaborative learning environment. One way to facilitate this is by using the first 9 weeks of lectures to establish ongoing, formative interactions rather than relying solely on a final deliverable.

Active learning strategies – such as group discussions, peer reviews, and collaborative assignments – combined with thoughtful use of technology in blended learning environments can significantly enhance student engagement, retention, and academic performance (James et al., 2024; Malan, 2020; Steenkamp & Brink, 2024). A structured approach, incorporating clear deadlines and staged deliverables, helps students manage their research more effectively by breaking the process into manageable components. This scaffolding increases their ability to meet key learning outcomes. Incorporating tools

like gamification within these strategies can further motivate learners, creating a more interactive and rewarding experience that combats low engagement (James et al., 2024). These activities promote continuous feedback and allow students to refine their research ideas with input from both peers and supervisors, creating a dynamic learning atmosphere. Scoring aspects of the learning process – such as participation in discussions, the quality of early drafts, and feedback provided to peers – can ensure that students are not just preparing for one significant deliverable but are consistently engaged in developing their research projects. This approach aligns with formative feedback principles, which suggest that ongoing, constructive feedback improves student learning outcomes (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). This system also builds student confidence and ensures they are better prepared for the final project.

Conclusion, contribution, limitations and future research

This study explored the research question: *Why are undergraduate accounting students not engaging with a Research Module, and how can this issue be addressed?* We observed that structural and psychosocial issues adversely impacted undergraduate accounting students' level of engagement with a Research Module – See Figure 4. Contrary to the behavioural, psychological, and sociocultural perspectives (e.g. Krause & Coates, 2008; Pike, 2006), the findings indicate that structural and psychosocial issues collectively, rather than individually, explained and influenced the engagement of accounting students with a Research Module. This suggests that stakeholders in the higher education sector, including HEIs and policymakers, should comprehensively address student engagement issues, considering both structural and psychosocial aspects, rather than attempting to address them in isolation (Xu et al., 2020). Moreover, the collective nature of the identified structural and psychosocial issues underscores that student engagement is not solely the responsibility of a single stakeholder. It necessitates active

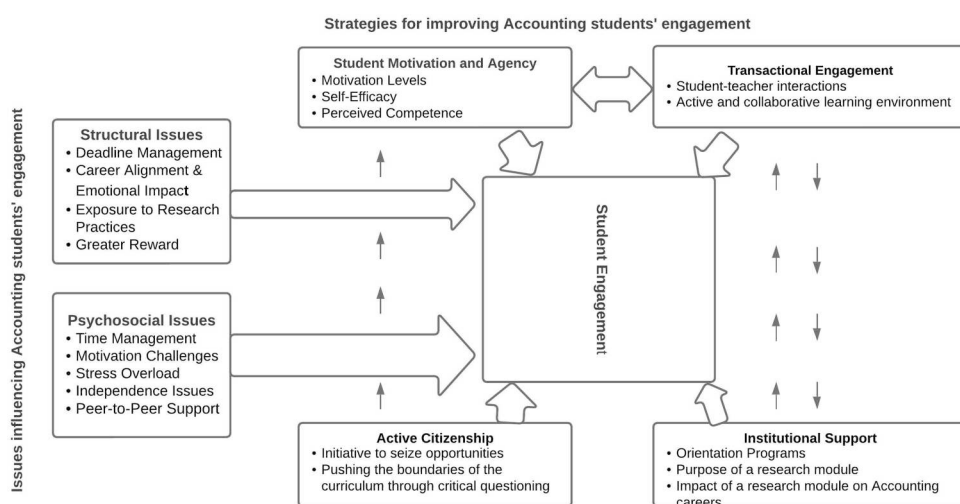


Figure 4. Model for improving accounting students' level of engagement with the research Module.

involvement and support from all parties involved, including students, teachers, HEIs, and policymakers (Kahu, 2013).

The observed structural and psychosocial issues could be mitigated by enhancing students' motivation and agency; transactional engagement between students and tutors; reorienting accounting students, and by providing and publicising additional institutional supports – See Figure 4 (Zepke & Leach, 2010). By doing that, students are more likely to be confident, motivated and engaged with a Research Module. In addition, accounting students require 'Reorientation' regarding the implications of a Research Module (See Figure 4). By doing that, students' misunderstandings and doubts about the usefulness of a module can be clarified (Pittaway & Moss, 2006). For instance, many students mentioned that they are unsure about the purpose of a Research Module, its implications for their accounting careers, and the sources of institutional support available at their university. Perhaps, accounting students must be educated on the consequences of a Research Module in their first lectures and its implications for their accounting careers. For instance, a Research Module enables students to develop independent learning, academic writing, critical thinking, time management and communication skills (Boud & Molloy, 2013; Nzekwe-Excel, 2022). With this clarity of the purpose of a research, students are more likely to engage with the module.

This study makes significant contributions to the international discourse on student engagement in accounting education. By focusing on the underexplored area of undergraduate accounting students' engagement with Research Project Modules, it offers new insights into the dynamic and context-specific nature of student engagement (Herrmann et al., 2017). This study advances Kahu's integrated theory of engagement by exploring its key concepts, constructs, and operationalisation in the context of accounting education (Farrell & Brunton, 2020). Specifically, the study highlights how institutional contexts, discipline-specific factors, programme levels, and year of study influence student engagement (Sawang et al., 2017; Tight, 2020). By contextualising and extending Kahu's model, the study enhances its explanatory power and applicability, offering a framework that can be used for comparative studies across diverse educational settings. While the study is situated in the UK, its findings and methodological approach have global relevance, providing valuable insights for accounting educators and policymakers worldwide. For policymakers, the insights can inform the design of higher education policies that promote meaningful student engagement – particularly through investment in research-based learning, targeted student support systems, and curriculum frameworks that align with diverse learner needs. Thus, the study provides valuable guidance for accounting educators and higher education policymakers aiming to enhance student success and retention.

Methodologically, this research highlights the importance of incorporating more qualitative research approaches, as Gilardi and Guglielmetti (2011) and Igwe et al. (2020) emphasised. Previous studies in this field have primarily relied on student surveys (e.g. Herrmann et al., 2017), raising concerns about the validity of responses (Kahu, 2013). To address this, our study takes a step forward by integrating respondents' commentaries from multiple data sources, enabling a comprehensive and contextually grounded interpretation of the issues surrounding students' engagement in the UK. In doing so, it contributes to the existing literature, which predominantly employs quantitative research designs, by providing a more nuanced insight through a close-up approach.

From a practical standpoint, this study offers valuable insights that address the pressing concerns of key stakeholders regarding the factors contributing to the steady decline in students' engagement with their Research Project Modules in the UK higher education sector (Advance HE, 2022). The findings of this study stimulate debate regarding policy development initiatives for supporting students' re-engagement, a topic of interest to policymakers and organisations operating at a global level, e.g. United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, OECD, United Nations, the European Education Area and the Advance HE. Besides, we recommended that policy improvements should encompass a holistic approach that addresses both structural and psychosocial aspects of student engagement. Collaboration among stakeholders and the inclusion of students' voices in decision-making processes are crucial for effective policy implementation and improvement of student engagement in higher education. For HEIs, this study offers insights into the factors militating against students' engagement with their modules. With this insight, HEIs can develop a more effective support mechanism enabling students to engage with their modules. By doing that, HEIs will likely experience an improvement in students' achievement, grades, completion rates, retention statistics and success.

Although our contributions are valuable, we acknowledge the limitations of our study, particularly that the data were collected during the COVID-19 lockdown, which may impact the generalisability of our findings due to the unique circumstances influencing students' experiences. Additionally, our sample size is small and limited to the UK and the case university. However, the use of qualitative interviews allowed us to generate rich, context-specific data, which provided valuable insights into Kahu's integrated theory of student engagement. This approach enabled us to revise the framework based on students' perceptions of their educational environments and experiences, offering a more practical foundation for curriculum development and improvement (Igwe et al., 2020). Future research could explore the applicability of the revised framework to final-year accounting students in similar European and international contexts. Such investigations would further validate and enhance the framework, contributing to the advancement of pedagogical knowledge.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

References

- Advance HE. (2022). UK Engagement Survey 2022 | Advance HE [online] Available at: <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/uk-engagement-survey-2022>
- Asare, S., Nicholson, H., & Stein, S. (2017). You can't ignore us: What role does family play in student engagement and alienation in a Ghanaian university? *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 39(6), 593–606. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1360080X.2017.1377968>
- Astin, A. W. (1984). Student involvement: A developmental theory for higher education. *Journal of College Student Personnel*, 25(4), 297–308.
- Bacher-Hicks, A., Goodman, J., & Mulhern, C. (2021). Inequality in household adaptation to schooling shocks: COVID-induced online learning engagement in real time. *Journal of Public Economics*, 193, 104345. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpubeco.2020.104345>

- Bagley, P. L., Dalton, D. W., Eller, C. K., & Harp, N. L. (2021). Preparing students for the future of work: Lessons learned from telecommuting in public accounting. *Journal of Accounting Education*, 56, 100728. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaccedu.2021.100728>
- Barnett, R., & Coate, K. (2004). *Engaging the curriculum*. McGraw-Hill Education (UK).
- Bentley, K. A., Brewer, P. C., & Eaton, T. V. (2009). Motivating students to prepare for class and engage in discussion using the hot seat. *Journal of Accounting Education*, 27(3), 155–167. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaccedu.2010.07.001>
- Blondeel, E., Everaert, P., & Opdecam, E. (2023). Does practice make perfect? The effect of online formative assessments on students' self-efficacy and test anxiety. *The British Accounting Review*, 56(4), 101189. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bar.2023.101189>
- Bond, M. (2020). Facilitating student engagement through the flipped learning approach in K-12: A systematic review. *Computers & Education*, 151, 103819. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2020.103819>
- Boud, D., & Molloy, E. (2013). Rethinking models of feedback for learning: The challenge of design. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 38(6), 698–712. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2012.691462>
- Bowden, J. L. H., Tickle, L., & Naumann, K. (2021). The four pillars of tertiary student engagement and success: A holistic measurement approach. *Studies in Higher Education*, 46(6), 1207–1224. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2019.1672647>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp0630a>
- Brown, M., Hughes, H., Keppell, M., Hard, N., & Smith, L. (2015). Stories from students in their first semester of distance learning. *International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning*, 16(4), 1–17.
- Bryson, C., & Hand, L. (2007). The role of engagement in inspiring teaching and learning. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, 44(4), 349–362. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14703290701602748>
- Buck, S. (2016). In their own voices: Study habits of distance education students. *Journal of Library & Information Services in Distance Learning*, 10(3-4), 137–173. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1533290X.2016.1206781>
- Byrne, M., Flood, B., Hassall, T., Joyce, J., Montano, J. L. A., González, J. M. G., & Tournar-Germanou, E. (2012). Motivations, expectations and preparedness for higher education: A study of accounting students in Ireland, the UK, Spain and Greece. *Accounting Forum*, 36(2), 134–144. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.accfor.2011.12.001>
- Carini, R. M., Kuh, G. D., & Klein, S. P. (2006). Student engagement and student learning: Testing the linkages. *Research in Higher Education*, 47(1), 1–32. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11162-005-8150-9>
- Carless, D., & Boud, D. (2018). The development of student feedback literacy: Enabling uptake of feedback. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 43(8), 1315–1325. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2018.1463354>
- CERP. (2017). The Data Buddies Project [online]. Center for Evaluating the Research Pipeline (CERP). <https://cra.org/cerp/data-buddies/>
- Chand, P., Cummings, L., & Patel, C. (2012). The effect of accounting education and national culture on accounting judgments: A comparative study of Anglo-Celtic and Chinese culture. *European Accounting Review*, 21(1), 153–182. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09638180.2011.591524>
- Cheng, P., & Ding, R. (2021). The effect of online review exercises on student course engagement and learning performance: A case study of an introductory financial accounting course at an international joint venture university. *Journal of Accounting Education*, 54, 100699. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaccedu.2020.100699>
- Chiu, T. K. (2021). Digital support for student engagement in blended learning based on self-determination theory. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 124, 106909. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2021.106909>
- Choi, B. K., & Rhee, B. S. (2014). The influences of student engagement, institutional mission, and cooperative learning climate on the generic competency development of Korean undergraduate students. *Higher Education*, 67(1), 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-013-9637-5>

- Creswell, J. W., Hanson, W. E., Clark Plano, V. L., & Morales, A. (2007). Qualitative research designs: Selection and implementation. *The Counselling Psychologist*, 35(2), 236–264. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011000006287390>
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2016). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Sage publications.
- Crosling, G., Heagney, M., & Thomas, L. (2009). Improving student retention in higher education: Improving teaching and learning. *The Australian Universities Review*, 51(2), 9–18.
- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2000). The “What” and “Why” of goal pursuits: Human needs and the self-determination of behavior. *Psychological Inquiry*, 11(4), 227–268. https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327965PLI1104_01
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.). (2011). *The Sage handbook of qualitative research*. sage.
- Diamond, M. (2005). Accounting education, research and practice: After Enron, where do we go? *European Accounting Review*, 14(2), 353–362. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09638180500124855>
- Dishaw, M. T., & Strong, D. M. (1999). Extending the technology acceptance model with task–technology fit constructs. *Information & Management*, 36(1), 9–21. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0378-7206\(98\)00101-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0378-7206(98)00101-3)
- Dong, T., Eugster, F., & Nilsson, H. (2023). Business school education, motivation, and young adults’ stock market participation? *Journal of Accounting and Public Policy*, 42(2), 106958. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaccpubpol.2022.106958>
- DuPaul, G. J., Pinho, T. D., Pollack, B. L., Gormley, M. J., & Laracy, S. D. (2017). First-year college students with ADHD and/or LD: Differences in engagement, positive core self-evaluation, school preparation, and college expectations. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 50(3), 238–251. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022219415617164>
- Earley, M. A. (2013). Graduate students’ expectations of an introductory research methods course. *Educational Research Quarterly*, 37(1), 48–59.
- Eisenhardt, K. M., & Graebner, M. E. (2007). Theory building from cases: Opportunities and challenges. *Academy of Management Journal*, 50(1), 25–32. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2007.24160888>
- Emerson, R. W. (2015). Convenience sampling, random sampling, and snowball sampling: How does sampling affect the validity of research? *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness*, 109(2), 164–168. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0145482X1510900215>
- Etikan, I., Musa, S. A., & Alkassim, R. S. (2016). Comparison of convenience sampling and purposive sampling. *American Journal of Theoretical and Applied Statistics*, 5(1), 1–4. <https://doi.org/10.11648/j.ajtas.20160501.11>
- Farrell, O., & Brunton, J. (2020). A balancing act: A window into online student engagement experiences. *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education*, 17(1), 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41239-020-00199-x>
- Fazey, D. M., & Fazey, J. A. (2001). The potential for autonomy in learning: Perceptions of competence, motivation and locus of control in first-year undergraduate students. *Studies in Higher Education*, 26(3), 345–361. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075070120076309>
- Fredricks, J. A., Blumenfeld, P. C., & Paris, A. H. (2004). School engagement: Potential of the concept, state of the evidence. *Review of Educational Research*, 74(1), 59–109. <https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543074001059>
- Frey, J. (2015). The importance of learning experience design for higher education. *Getting Smart*, 25. <https://www.gettingsmart.com/2015/04/25/the-importance-of-learning-experience-design-for-higher-education/>
- Gibbs, R., & Poskitt, J. (2010). Student engagement in the middle years of schooling (Years 7–10): A. *Report to the Ministry of Education*.
- Gilardi, S., & Guglielmetti, C. (2011). University life of non-traditional students: Engagement styles and impact on attrition. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 82(1), 33–53. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.2011.11779084>
- Gioia, D. A., Corley, K. G., & Hamilton, A. L. (2013). Seeking qualitative rigor in inductive research: Notes on the Gioia methodology. *Organisational Research Methods*, 16(1), 15–31. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1094428112452151>

- Gravett, K., & Winstone, N. E. (2019). 'Feedback interpreters': The role of learning development professionals in facilitating university students' engagement with feedback. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 24(6), 723–738. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2018.1498076>
- Greene, T. G., Marti, C. N., & McClenney, K. (2008). The effort-outcome gap: Differences for African American and Hispanic community college students in student engagement and academic achievement. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 79(5), 513–539. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.2008.11772115>
- Harrington, K., Sinfield, S., & Burns, T. (2021). Student engagement. *Higher Education*, 106, 1–19.
- Hattie, J., & Timperley, H. (2007). The power of feedback. *Review of Educational Research*, 77(1), 81–112. <https://doi.org/10.3102/003465430298487>
- Heinicke, X., & Guenther, T. W. (2020). The role of management controls in the higher education sector: An investigation of different perceptions. *European Accounting Review*, 29(3), 581–630. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09638180.2019.1619603>
- Herrmann, K. J., Bager-Elsborg, A., & McCune, V. (2017). Investigating the relationships between approaches to learning, learner identities and academic achievement in higher education. *Higher Education*, 74(3), 385–400. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-016-9999-6>
- Holmes, A. F., & Rasmussen, S. J. (2018). Using Pinterest to stimulate student engagement, interest, and learning in managerial accounting courses. *Journal of Accounting Education*, 43, 43–56. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaccedu.2018.03.001>
- Huang, Y., & Wang, S. (2023). How to motivate student engagement in emergency online learning? Evidence from the COVID-19 situation. *Higher Education*, 85(5), 1101–1123. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-022-00880-2>
- Igwe, P. A., Rahman, M., Ohalehi, P., Amaugo, A., & Anigbo, J. A. (2020). Responsible education: What engages international postgraduate students—evidence from UK. *Journal of Global Responsibility*, 11(4), 363–376. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JGR-03-2020-0036>
- Ishiyama, J. (2002). Does early participation in undergraduate research benefit social science and humanities students? *College Student Journal*, 36(3), 381–387.
- Jackling, B., & Calero, C. (2006). Influences on undergraduate students' intentions to become qualified accountants: Evidence from Australia. *Accounting Education: an international journal*, 15(4), 419–438. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09639280601011115>
- James, W., Oates, G., & Schonfeldt, N. (2024). Improving retention while enhancing student engagement and learning outcomes using gamified mobile technology. *Accounting Education*, 34(3), 366–386. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09639284.2024.2326009>
- Jiang, J., & Tanaka, A. (2022). Autonomy support from support staff in higher education and students' academic engagement and psychological well-being. *Educational Psychology*, 42(1), 42–63. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01443410.2021.1982866>
- Kahu, E. R. (2013). Framing student engagement in higher education. *Studies in Higher Education*, 38(5), 758–773. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2011.598505>
- Kahu, E. R., & Nelson, K. (2018). Student engagement in the educational interface: Understanding the mechanisms of student success. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 37(1), 58–71. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2017.1344197>
- Keller, J. M. (2008). *Motivational design for learning and performance: The ARCS model approach*. Springer.
- Kiernan, L., Ledwith, A., & Lynch, R. (2020). Comparing the dialogue of experts and novices in interdisciplinary teams to inform design education. *International Journal of Technology and Design Education*, 30(1), 187–206. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10798-019-09495-8>
- Krause, K. L., & Coates, H. (2008). Students' engagement in first-year university. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 33(5), 493–505. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02602930701698892>
- Kuh, G. D., Cruce, T. M., Shoup, R., Kinzie, J., & Gonyea, R. M. (2008). Unmasking the effects of student engagement on first-year college grades and persistence. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 79(5), 540–563. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.2008.11772116>
- Lee, J. J., & Castiello-Gutiérrez, S. (2019). Engaging international students. In S. J. Quaye, S. Harper, & S. L. Pendakur (Eds.), *Student engagement in higher education: Theoretical perspectives and practice* (pp. 107–129). Routledge.

- Lim, N. (2017). Improving student engagement in higher education through mobile-based interactive teaching model using Socrative. In 2017 *IEEE Global Engineering Education Conference (EDUCON)* (pp. 404–412). IEEE.
- Llorens, S., Schaufeli, W., Bakker, A., & Salanova, M. (2007). Does a positive gain spiral of resources, efficacy beliefs and engagement exist? *Computers in Human Behavior*, 23(1), 825–841. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2004.11.012>
- Malan, M. (2020). Engaging students in a fully online accounting degree: An action research study. *Accounting Education*, 29(4), 321–339. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09639284.2020.1787855>
- Mardini, G. H., & Mah'd, O. A. (2022). Distance learning as emergency remote teaching vs. Traditional learning for accounting students during the COVID-19 pandemic: Cross-country evidence. *Journal of Accounting Education*, 61, 100814. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaccedu.2022.100814>
- Markle, G. (2017). Factors influencing achievement in undergraduate social science research methods courses: A mixed methods analysis. *Teaching Sociology*, 45(2), 105–115. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0092055X16676302>
- Mearns, K., Meyer, J., & Bharadwaj, A. (2007). Student engagement in human biology practical sessions. *Student Engagement*.
- Mortensen, T., Fisher, R., & Wines, G. (2012). Students as surrogates for practicing accountants: Further evidence. *Accounting Forum*, 36(4), 251–265. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.accfor.2012.06.003>
- Mullins, M. H. (2017). Actively teaching research methods with a process oriented guided inquiry learning approach. *Journal of Teaching in Social Work*, 37(4), 309–321. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08841233.2017.1347122>
- Navarro-Abal, Y., Gómez-Salgado, J., López-López, M. J., & Climent-Rodríguez, J. A. (2018). Organisational justice, burnout, and engagement in university students: A comparison between stressful aspects of labour and university organisation. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 15(10), 2116. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph15102116>
- Newmann, F. M. (1992). *Student engagement and achievement in American secondary schools*. Teachers College Press.
- Nzekwe-Excel, C. (2022). A qualitative study on the experiences and challenges of MBA students' engagement with a business research methods module. *Journal of Work-Applied Management*, 14(1), 46–62. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JWAM-08-2020-0040>
- OECD. (2000). Student engagement at school. A sense of belonging and participation executive. <https://www.oecd.org/education/school/programme-for-international-student-assessment-pisa/33689885.pdf>
- Ogundana, O. M., Simba, A., Dana, L. P., & Liguori, E. (2021). Women entrepreneurship in developing economies: A gender-based growth model. *Journal of Small Business Management*, 59(sup1), S42–S72. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00472778.2021.1938098>
- Olwage, D., & Mostert, K. (2014). Predictors of student burnout and engagement among university students. *Journal of Psychology in Africa*, 24(4), 342–350. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14330237.2014.978087>
- O'Shea, S., Stone, C., & Delahunty, J. (2015). “I ‘feel’ like I am at university even though I am online.” Exploring how students narrate their engagement with higher education institutions in an online learning environment. *Distance Education*, 36(1), 41–58. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01587919.2015.1019970>
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Sage.
- Phellas, C. N., Bloch, A., & Seale, C. (2011). Structured methods: Interviews, questionnaires and observation. *Researching Society & Culture*, 3(1), 23–32.
- Pike, G. R. (2006). The convergent and discriminant validity of NSSE scalelet scores. *Journal of College Student Development*, 47(5), 550–563. <https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2006.0061>
- Pittaway, S., & Moss, T. (2006). Contextualising student engagement: Orientation and beyond in teacher education. In *9th Pacific Rim First Year in Higher Education Conference, Engaging Students*, Griffith University, Gold Coast Campus, Australia (pp. 12–14).

- Poropat, A. E. (2014). Other-rated personality and academic performance: Evidence and implications. *Learning and Individual Differences*, 34, 24–32. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lindif.2014.05.013>
- Saunders, M., Lewis, P., & Thornhill, A. (2016). *Research methods for business students* (7th ed.). Pearson Education Limited.
- Sawang, S., O'Connor, P. J., & Ali, M. (2017). IEngage: Using technology to enhance students' engagement in a large classroom. *Journal of Learning Design*, 10(1), 11–19. <https://doi.org/10.5204/jld.v9i3.292>
- Shute, V. J. (2008). Focus on formative feedback. *Review of Educational Research*, 78(1), 153–189. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654307313795>
- Smith, G. (2007). How does student performance on formative assessments relate to learning assessed by exams? *Journal of College Science Teaching*, 36(7), 28.
- Smith, J. A., & Osborn, M. (2007). Pain as an assault on the self: An interpretative phenomenological analysis of the psychological impact of chronic benign low back pain. *Psychology & Health*, 22(5), 517–534. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14768320600941756>
- Steenkamp, G., & Brink, S. M. (2024). Students' experiences of peer learning in an accounting research module: Discussion forums, peer review and group work. *The International Journal of Management Education*, 22(3), 101057. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijme.2024.101057>
- Stone, C., & O'Shea, S. (2019). Older, online and first: Recommendations for retention and success. *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology*, 35(1), 57–69. <https://doi.org/10.14742/ajet.3913>
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1994). Grounded theory methodology. In N. K. Denzin, & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 273–285). Sage.
- Tadesse, T., Manathunga, C. E., & Gillies, R. M. (2018). The hidden lacunae in the Ethiopian higher education quality imperatives: Stakeholders' views and commentaries. *Ethiopian Journal of Education and Sciences*, 14(1), 75–94.
- Taylor, L., & Parsons, J. (2011). Improving student engagement. *Current Issues in Education*, 14(1), 2.
- Thiry, H., Weston, T. J., Laursen, S. L., & Hunter, A. B. (2012). The benefits of multi-year research experiences: Differences in novice and experienced students' reported gains from undergraduate research. *CBE—Life Sciences Education*, 11(3), 260–272.
- Tight, M. (2020). Student retention and engagement in higher education. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 44(5), 689–704. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2019.1576860>
- Tinto, V. (1993). *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition*. University of Chicago Press.
- Toledano-O'Farrill, R. (2017). Professional application projects: Work-based learning in the curriculum. *Higher Education, Skills and Work-Based Learning*, 7(1), 21–34. <https://doi.org/10.1108/HESWBL-07-2016-0047>
- Trowler, V. (2010). Student engagement literature review. *The Higher Education Academy*, 11(1), 1–15.
- Ward, A. M., Brennan, N. M., & Wylie, J. (2023). Enrolment motivation of accounting doctoral students: Professionally qualified and non-professionally qualified accountants. *Accounting Forum*, 47(1), 99–122. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01559982.2021.2001127>
- Welter, F. (2011). Contextualising entrepreneurship—Conceptual challenges and ways forward. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, 35(1), 165–184. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6520.2010.00427.x>
- Wertz, F. J. (2011). *Five ways of doing qualitative analysis: Phenomenological psychology, grounded theory, discourse analysis, narrative research, and intuitive inquiry*. Guilford Press.
- Xu, B., Chen, N. S., & Chen, G. (2020). Effects of teacher role on student engagement in WeChat-based online discussion learning. *Computers & Education*, 157, 103956. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2020.103956>
- Yin, R. K. (2009). How to do better case studies. In Leonard Bickman & Debra J. Rog (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of applied social research methods*, 2 (pp. 254–282). Sage.

- Yorke, M., & Knight, P. (2004). Self-theories: Some implications for teaching and learning in higher education. *Studies in Higher Education*, 29(1), 25–37. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1234567032000164859>
- Yorke, M., & Longden, B. (2004). *Retention and student success in higher education*. McGraw-Hill Education (UK).
- Zepke, N., & Leach, L. (2010). Improving student engagement: Ten proposals for action. *Active Learning in Higher Education*, 11(3), 167–177. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1469787410379680>
- Zepke, N., Leach, L., & Butler, P. (2014). Student engagement: Students' and teachers' perceptions. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 33(2), 386–398. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2013.832160>

Appendices

Appendix: Interview Schedule

1. How is your level of engagement with the Research Project module compared to other modules?
2. How do you rate your level of engagement with the Research Project Module compared to other modules you are currently doing?
3. What factors do you think are responsible for students' low level of engagement with the Research Project module?
4. What can improve students' engagement levels within this University research module?
5. What do you enjoy about the Research Project module at this university?
6. What do you not enjoy about the Research Project module at this university?
7. Do you have any more comments you would like to make before I release you?