

The Effect of The Sense of Belonging to the Family on Junior High School Students Learning Engagement

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Abstract. The junior high school stage is the stage when students initially form career and future plans and are dominated by their academic life. Academic achievement among junior high school students is somewhat predicted by their level of learning engagement. Both internal and external variables impact middle school students, who are going through a time of fast physical and psychological growth. Among the external factors, family factors are one of the influential factors that have attracted much attention. In this study, the author took the sense of belonging to the family as the independent variable of family factors and junior high school students learning engagement as the dependent variable and used quantitative research questionnaires to assess the students' degree of family belongingness and learning engagement. The study's findings indicate a beneficial relationship between junior high school students' levels of learning engagement and their sense of family belonging, but the influence of family belongingness on learning engagement is not significant, indicating that learning engagement may be affected by other factors in the process.

Keywords: the sense of belonging to the family, learning engagement, junior high school students.

1. Introduction

In recent years, the area of education has focused its scholarly attention on learning engagement. In the past five years, the study of the concepts, measurements, and related variables of learning engagement has received the attention of many researchers. Learning engagement is the stable and lasting contribution of students in learning activities, the active, lasting and fulfilling state shown in learning activities and learning tasks, characterized by vigor, dedication and absorption. Learning engagement not only has a positive predictive effect on students' academic performance but also affects the school educational environment and teaching quality [1]. Students' learning engagement is affected by many factors, including external and internal influences, among which, school and family factors are external factors that have been widely concerned in recent years. The People's Republic of China's Family Education Law, promulgated in 2021, explicitly puts forward that family education has a far-reaching impact on the comprehensive development of minors. Existing research on family factors and learning engagement focused on the effects of family factors such as parental involvement and parental support on learning engagement and the effects of family sense of belonging on students' adaptability, academic performance, and future expectations. However, the direct effect of the sense of belonging to the family on learning engagement has not received enough attention. Family is the earliest external environment to which an individual is exposed in his or her development, and children's physical and psychological development is directly impacted by the ties that bind family members.

For example, children who have a strong sense of family belongingness usually have parents who respect their children's decisions, are less likely to use negative and interventionist parenting styles, and are more likely to interact with their children. As a result, children with a stronger sense of family belonging have more positive attitudes and a safer psychological environment, which influences the level of participation, activity and concentration in learning activities.

The middle school stage is the stage when students initially form their future and career plans, and also the stage when they begin to take the lead in their academic life. During this period, helping students to create a harmonious family environment, increasing the interaction between family members and students, and positive parental guidance will help students to create a safe psychological

environment during adolescence. A healthy psychological environment can help students to increase the degree of positive contribution to learning activities, improve the degree of concentration in learning and stimulate learning vigour can help students to realize the importance of transition in education. Based on the above analysis, this study takes junior high school students as the research objects and investigates the relationship between the sense of belonging to the family and learning engagement. This study is of great significance for schools to pay attention to students' family emotional status, to provide regular psychological counselling for families with a low family sense of belonging, and to help parents master correct parenting styles and give positive guidance to their children. At the social level, the relevant departments could provide basic educational protection for children of migrant employees, and provide educational support and supervision based on the needs of different types of family education.

2. Literature Review

Scholars at home and abroad have put forward different definitions of learning engagement: learning engagement is the energy that learners pay for learning that can promote learning [2]; based on this, some scholars further propose that learning engagement is continuous and variable input, and is not static [3]. Learning engagement is also defined differently in different dimensions, of which the three-dimensional and four-dimensional are applied more frequently in academia; the three-dimensional are emotional engagement, behavioral engagement and cognitive engagement [4]; the four-dimensional are skill engagement, emotional engagement, performance engagement, and interactive engagement [5]. Existing studies have examined students' engagement in learning based on family factors: the relationship between parental involvement and kids' learning engagement [6], demonstrating that parental involvement in student's education positively impacts their learning engagement, but the study has not examined the relationship between the type of parental involvement and basic family circumstances and students' engagement in learning; According to research on the connection between high school kids' learning engagement and parental autonomy support [7], parents' ability to feel, accept, and respect their children's ideas and willingness is positively related to student's engagement in learning. The implication of this study is that parents should respect their children's autonomy and abandon negative parenting styles such as psychological control and excessive intervention.

The sense of belonging belongs to the social needs in the third level in Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory. People need to have the feeling of belonging to a certain group, to get love and support, and to be a member of the group, which is closely related to the social attributes of junior high school students. The need for belonging is also a basic human need, which is an individual's need to establish a stable and lasting relationship with others in a social environment and to gain acceptance, respect, and support [8]. The hierarchy of needs theory suggests that the lack of a sense of belonging affects an individual's social and psychological function. A related study on belongingness and engagement in learning suggests that belongingness is key to engagement in learning, and it has an impact on both affective engagement (positive emotions while at school, interest in coping with academic challenges, and negative emotions) and behavioral engagement (participation in classroom interactions and completion of homework assignments) associated with a student's presence in school [9]. According to studies, late adolescence and adulthood see high levels of academic engagement among students who have a strong feeling of belonging [10].

3. Method

In this study, two junior high schools were selected from Nanchang City, Jiangxi Province, through the method of whole cluster sampling, and a total of 240 students from three classes in each school (first, second, and third grade) will participate in this study. The respondents of this study will be balanced between males and females to ensure that this study is not influenced by demographic

variables. In this study, the Learning Engagement Scale [11] and the Family Belongingness Scale [12] were made into questionnaires and the questionnaires were administered to the respondents.

4. Results

4.1. Descriptive Statistics

As shown in Table 1, a total of 201 valid questionnaires were collected, of which 90 (44.8%) were boys and 111 (55.2%) were girls. The subjects were mainly third year students (49.25%). The age of the subjects was concentrated at 13-15 years old (90.6%), with the largest number of subjects being 14 years old (37.8%). In addition, most of the subjects were from nuclear families (82.1%) and 80.6% of the subjects were non-only children and were predominantly nonresident students (98.0%).

Table 1. Demographic information

		Number	Percentage
Gender	Male	90.00	44.78%
	Female	111.00	55.22%
Grade	First grade	50.00	24.88%
	Second grade	52.00	25.87%
	Third grade	99.00	49.25%
Age	12	18.00	8.96%
	13	57.00	28.36%
	14	76.00	37.81%
	15	49.00	24.38%
	16	1.00	0.50%
Whether or not an only child	Only child	39.00	19.40%
	Non-only child	162.00	80.60%
Enrollment Methods	Off-campus	197.00	98.01%
	On-campus	4.00	1.99%
Family structure	Nuclear Family	165.00	82.09%
	Extended Family	15.00	7.46%
	Single-Parent Family	19.00	9.45%
	Others	2.00	1.00%

As shown in Table 2, the mean value of learning engagement of the respondents was 4.32 (SD = 1.31), while the mean value of a sense of belonging to the family was 3.71 (SD = 0.60), indicating that, the middle school students' learning engagement were in the upper-middle level and they fell into the upper-middle of the range in terms of feeling like they belonged to the family.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
Learning engagement	201	1.30	6.89	4.3159	1.30835	1.712
The Sense of Belonging to the Family	201	1.64	5.54	3.7149	.59741	.357
Valid N (listwise)	201					

Table 3 shows the descriptive analysis of the subjects' learning engagement, where the mean of the vigor dimension is 4.07 (SD=1.54), the mean of the dedication dimension is 4.55 (SD=1.39), and the mean of the absorption dimension is 4.07 (SD=1.42), which indicates that the junior high school students have moderately high levels of vigor, dedication, and absorption. As far as the differentiation dimension is concerned, the mean values of learning engagement are ranked as: dedication, absorption and vigor. It indicates that middle school students have a higher level of effort in learning and willingness not to retreat when encountering difficulties as compared to their learning engagement and willingness for learning.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Vigor	201	1.00	7.00	4.0672	1.53950
Dedication	201	1.00	7.00	4.5473	1.38701
Absorption	201	1.00	7.00	4.3333	1.42215
Valid N (listwise)	201				

4.2. Reliability Analysis

First, the authors validated the reliability of the Learning Engagement Scale and the Sense of Belonging to the Family Scale used in this study (Table 4 & Table 5)

Table 4. Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.943	17

Table 5. Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.927	17

As shown in Table 4, the Cronbach's coefficient of the Learning Engagement Scale is 0.943; as shown in Table 5, the Cronbach's coefficient of the Sense of Belonging to the Family Scale is 0.927, and the coefficients are all greater than 0.7, then all the scales used in this study have good reliability.

4.3. Correlation Analysis

As shown in Table 6, in order to explore the relationship between the sense of belonging to the family and learning engagement, the Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated in this research:

Table 6. Correlations

		Learning engagement	The sense of belonging to the family
Learning engagement	Pearson Correlation	1	.412**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	201	201
The sense of belonging to the family	Pearson Correlation	.412**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	201	201

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

There is a positive correlation between learning engagement and sense of belonging to the family ($r=0.412$, $p<0.01$), indicating that students with a stronger sense of belonging to the family usually show higher learning engagement level. However, despite the significance of the correlation, the coefficient only indicates a moderately strong relationship, suggesting that learning engagement may be influenced by other factors besides the sense of belonging to the family (e.g., individual personality, teacher-student relationship, peer relationship, etc.)

4.4. Regression Analysis

As shown in Tables 7 & 8, the author further used regression analysis to explore the predictive role of sense of belonging to the family on learning engagement, with the following results:

Table 7. Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.412a	.170	.166	1.19511

a. Predictors: (Constant), the sense of belonging to the family

Table 8. Regression Analysis of Family Sense of Belonging to Learning Engagement

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1					
	(Constant)	.963	.532	1.810	.072
	The sense of belonging to the family	.902	.141	6.380	.000

a. Dependent Variable: learning engagement

In Table 7, R^2 is 0.170, which means that student's sense of belonging to the family explains 17% of the variation in learning engagement. In Table 8, the regression coefficient ($B=0.902$, $p<0.01$), indicates that the sense of belonging to the family is a positive predictor of learning engagement, indicating that learning engagement is typically better among kids who feel a strong sense of family.

However, the constant ($p=0.072$) indicates that the sense of belonging to the family does not have a significant effect on learning engagement, which may indicate that the study failed to adequately control for other influential variables.

Although the effect is limited, learning engagement is positively impacted by the sense of family belonging, and further research is needed to investigate other influencing factors.

5. Discussion

The results of the above research show that junior high school students' learning engagement is at the upper-middle level, and their sense of family belonging is also at a medium-high level. Secondly, although the regression analysis shows no significant connection, there is a beneficial relationship between learning engagement and a sense of family belonging.

There are several restrictions on this study. First, just 240 junior high school pupils participated in the study.

All the students are from Nanchang City, Jiangxi Province, and did not involve students from other regions. There are differences in the family structures, family relationships, educational resources and family education styles of students in different regions, so the regional limitations and the number of samples may have contributed to the bias of the results of this survey. Second, the questionnaire was distributed in the form of paper questionnaires, and in the process of filling out the questionnaires, the respondents may be subject to certain external environmental disturbances and self-perception differences, for example, there may be cognitive differences in the attitudes of family members in the family relationships and the filling out process may be affected by other respondents. Finally, this study used only the sense of belonging to the family as the independent variable and did not include other control variables, which may also cause a certain degree of limitation.

In terms of the significance of the research, this study has found that learning engagement and a feeling of family belonging are significantly correlated, and in the subsequent study, the family structure can be included as a control variable for further investigation, and the reasons for the gap. Secondly, this study is an empirical study and the findings indicate that junior high school students' levels of family sense of belonging and learning engagement are in the median range.

Therefore, it is crucial for ways to increase the level of sense of belonging to the family and, thus, the level of learning engagement. At the level of school education, schools can make regular home visits to students with a low sense of belonging to the family, and after understanding the basic family situation of the students, they can help their parents master positive parenting styles through psychological counselling and psychological counselling conducted by psychologists. At the family education level, parents can increase the time for parent-child communication with their children,

fully understand their children's inner thoughts, and increase the time for participation in their children's educational activities. At the social level, the authorities concerned provide educational protection for the children of migrant employees, for example, by arranging for them to go to school near their homes and arranging for flexible working hours to ensure sufficient family interaction.

6. Conclusion

Through the study, the author found that there is a positive correlation between the sense of belonging to the family and junior high school students' learning engagement, that is to say, students with a strong sense of belonging to the family usually have higher learning engagement. Therefore, at the family level, parents should learn the correct way of parenting, form a positive educational philosophy, and create a harmonious and warm family environment for junior high school students; at the school level, schools should be equipped with psychologists to carry out mental health education for junior high school students of different ages, as well as the psychological lessons and family psychological counselling. However, there was a moderately strong correlation between junior high school students' learning engagement and their sense of family connection and the sense of belonging to the family could only explain 17% of the changes in learning engagement. Therefore, there are other influencing factors in the relationship between them that need to be further explored. This research fills the gap of the direct influence of family factors on junior high school students' learning engagement to a certain extent, facilitates the study of the relationship between the sense of belonging to the family and learning engagement, and lays a certain foundation for future research on the mechanism of the sense of belonging to the family's role in learning engagement under the role of other influencing factors (e.g., peer relationship, teacher-student relationship). However, this study has some geographical limitations and does not include other variables for analysis. In the future, researchers can expand the geographical scope and include other control variables in the study.

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