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Class participation points and postgraduate business students' engagement: the case of a UK university

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ABSTRACT

This article seeks to demonstrate how class participation points enhance students' engagement in response to the increasing quest for pedagogic practices to enhance engagement. This investigation is based on a six-week field study of three tutorial classes of postgraduate business management students and six semi-structured interviews with two students from each tutorial class in a UK university. The findings suggest that class participation points are useful for enhancing student engagement. Additionally, the study uncovers the role of inclusive learning strategies and autonomous support in complementing class participation points for enhancing students' behavioural, cognitive, and emotional engagement. In particular, while the methods of class participation points, inclusive learning strategies, and autonomous support facilitate students' behavioural and cognitive engagement, a supportive climate is considered to enhance students' emotional engagement. The study also identifies other relevant stakeholders who can work with lecturers to facilitate engagement rather than operating in silos.

Introduction

Student engagement has continued to attract the interest of higher education institutions (HEIs), lecturers, and regulators, as the consequences of disengagement are usually unpleasant (Bowden et al., 2021; Cassidy et al., 2021). Fredricks and McColskey (2012) argue that disengaged students often graduate with low grades and limited soft skills, which creates limited employment prospects. If graduates are unemployed after higher education, governments' attempts to recuperate its expenditure on the education of such graduates may not be achieved. Moreover, due to the commercialisation of education (Cassidy et al., 2021), HEIs may not be able to provide value for money for students, and this may adversely impact HEIs' ranking in Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) assessments, which may in turn hinder their recruitment drive.

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As a result, both educators and policymakers are increasingly seeking ways to enhance students' engagement in order to address the issues associated with low engagement levels among university students (Fredricks & McColskey, 2012). Moreover, student engagement has been linked to several success factors, such as student retention, perseverance, work readiness, good citizenship behaviour, and life-long learning (Bowden et al., 2021). Extant studies on student engagement suggest that lecturers enhance student engagement by means of various instructional activities and digital technologies, such as clickers, discussion boards, social media, and online games, which are all supported by different software packages and algorithms designed to enhance students' engagement (Bond & Bedenlier, 2019; Henderson et al., 2015; Kardes, 2020). Cassidy et al. (2021) and Kahu (2013) argue that the current approaches for assessing and measuring engagement are innovative. However, more strategies on how to engage students particularly those involving students in the effort to engage them are required to enhance engagement within the students' ecosystem (Cassidy et al., 2021). According to Kahu and Nelson (2018), involving students in the effort to engage them is strategic, as individual student engagement occurs dynamically at the intersection of the students and their characteristics and the institution and their instructional practices.

Existing studies on class participation points and student engagement (e.g. Bean & Peterson, 1998; Gainor & Precourt, 2017; Girgin & Stevens, 2005; Holly et al., 2023; Paff, 2015) give insights on how to grade class participation objectively by students and tutors; award 5–10% of the end of semester assessment grade to attendance, frequency of participation, and how to provide timely feedback to encourage participation. While these studies suggest that class participation points can enhance student engagement, it is still unknown which aspects of student engagement (behavioural, emotional, or cognitive) are improved by class participation points and how (Bond & Bedenlier, 2019; Cassidy et al., 2021; Kahu & Nelson, 2018). Therefore, more research is required on how lecturers (including other HEI professional actors) use instructional activities such as class participation points to enhance the different aspects of student engagement (Cassidy et al., 2021; Paff, 2015), particularly those that are useful for increasing students' awareness and involvement on how they can drive their own engagement (Kahu, 2013; Kahu & Nelson, 2018).

Drawing on self-determination theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 1985) to make sense of class participation points and student engagement among postgraduate business students, the present study considers the influence of class participation points on students' motivation and thus their cognitive, behavioural, and emotional engagement. The study thus contributes to pedagogical practice by providing insights into how class participation points can enhance student engagement. Additionally, the study uncovers the role of inclusive teaching strategies, autonomous support, and efforts to balance studies and non-academic life among students. Overall, the study highlights the conditions in which students may fail to engage behaviourally and emotionally, despite the rewards designed to stimulate their engagement and acknowledge other key professional actors who can work with lecturers to drive engagement in the students' ecosystem (Cassidy et al., 2021).

Conceptualisation of student engagement

The extant literature on student engagement contains various definitions of the term 'student engagement' (Kahu & Nelson, 2018). Kahu (2013) suggests that student engagement is a psychological process influenced by individual student factors and institutional factors embedded in the wider social context. Consistent with this perspective, we define student engagement as referring to the reactions to teaching and learning activities in a psychological, cognitive, emotional, and behavioural sense, both in class and out of class, to achieve successful learning outcomes (Gunuc & Kuzu, 2015) in a blended learning environment. Accordingly, behavioural engagement emphasises participation whereby students are expected to spend time on tasks such as the completion of their homework; attendance at tutorials and lectures; and participating in class activities (Bowden et al., 2021; Fredricks & McColskey, 2012). The emotional dimension involves the extent of positive (or negative) reactions to peers and tutors (Bowden et al., 2021). Notably, positive emotion endears students to their institutions and influences them to do their academic work (Bowden et al., 2021; Fredricks & McColskey, 2012). Students' cognitive engagement centres on their investment of considerable time in learning (Kahu & Nelson, 2018). It involves being strategic, thoughtful, and willing to invest the necessary effort required to master complex concepts and difficult skills (Fredrick et al., 2004). Finally, psychological engagement involves a less observable but more internal relationship with peers and teachers as well as feelings of belonging (Appleton et al., 2006). According to Kahu (2013), there is usually an overlap between the different types of engagement. For example, behavioural and emotional engagement lead to cognitive engagement.

Students' engagement has been broadly categorised as campus engagement or class engagement by Gunuc and Kuzu (2015). Campus engagement involves participation in social activities following an interest in university education, which is considered important for achieving student engagement and rich learning outcomes (Kahu, 2013). Campus engagement centres on a sense of belonging (psychological engagement) and participation (social engagement) (Gunuc & Kuzu, 2015). Clearly, participation in this case focuses on out-of-class activities. Within class context, participation refers to students' involvement with pre-session tasks as well as asking and answering questions and working with peers during lectures and/or tutorials (Bean & Peterson, 1998). By contrast, class engagement refers to students' behavioural, cognitive, and emotional reactions to in-class and out-of-class teaching and learning activities (Appleton et al., 2006). We discuss participation in the current study as in-class or pre-class instructional activities undertaken within the scope of class engagement (Gunuc & Kuzu, 2015). Students' positive involvement with the different dimensions can enhance the development of their academic abilities and competencies. Kahu (2013) and Kahu and Nelson (2018) note that student engagement is the product of student and institutional interaction driven by the students' self-belief, relationships with their institutions, enthusiasm, and an absence of stress. The challenge, however, is how to get unmotivated students to engage in their academic work and take it seriously enough to learn meaningfully, which is often achieved through engagement but cannot be delivered to students without them making their own effort through the co-

creation of knowledge in an active learning environment (Cassidy et al., 2021; Kahu, 2013).

Self-determination theory, class participation points, and student engagement

Earlier efforts by education researchers to understand student engagement have focused on SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2009). The theory can be traced to the works of Ryan and Deci (2000). This theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) posits that students have a need for autonomy, relationships, and competence, and if these needs are met by HEIs, students engage constructively in teaching and learning activities. Students' engagement may be thwarted if these needs are not met by the HEIs.

Self-determination theory is rooted in the intrinsic motivation of students, but Fredricks and McColskey (2012) assert that if the need for autonomy, relationships, and competence are satisfied by lecturers, students' motivation to engage increases. Consistent with the position of Appleton et al. (2006), motivation does not equal engagement. Grolnick et al. (1991) contend that lecturers have great power to accentuate and reinforce students' autonomous behaviours in order to motivate them. Similarly, drawing on the extrinsic motivation perspectives of SDT, Pink (2009) asserts that lecturers can facilitate students' self-motivation to engage by providing opportunities for them to satisfy their need for competence, autonomy, and relationships.

We contend that class participation points can be deployed by lecturers to fulfil the abovementioned needs. Following Bean and Peterson (1998), class participation points linked to clear outcomes can enhance students' engagement levels. Here, the term 'class participation points' refers to marks earned (awarded to them by tutors) by students (which contribute to their end-of-semester grade) for completing pre-session tasks as well as for asking and answering questions and working with peers during lectures and/or tutorials. Grading participation involves moving from a stick to a carrot approach in order to help students interact with their institutions (Kahu & Nelson, 2018) in order to remain engaged (Girgin & Stevens, 2005; Paff, 2015). Building on the study of Bean and Peterson (1998) and Girgin and Stevens (2005), we argue that assigning points or marks for students' participation in well-designed tasks and giving students clear information on how to achieve outcomes can stimulate their interest and motivation to engage behaviourally, emotionally, and cognitively (Paff, 2015). Through active engagement/interaction driven by self-motivation/efficacy, students develop and thus fulfil their needs for competencies (Bond & Bedenlier, 2019; Kahu & Nelson, 2018; Paff, 2015).

In line with the principles of SDT (Grolnick et al., 1991), class participation points alone may not stimulate enough interest and motivation among students to ensure their engagement in active learning activities (Appleton et al., 2006). Wolters and Taylor (2012) theorise that class participation points should be flanked by inclusive classroom practices in order to fulfil students' needs for autonomy and relationships. For example, pair and share and waiting longer than normal for students to process information before asking them to respond (to questions) will help students overcome feelings of shyness, intimidation, and nervousness, which are some of the reasons why students do not participate in class (Paff, 2015). Grolnick et al. (1991) suggest that student engagement can also be achieved by enhancing students' opportunities in decision-making and other authentically autonomous experiences. A widely

documented classroom practice that helps to fulfil students' need for autonomy is autonomy support, which can be achieved by lecturers adopting students' perspectives and providing them with opportunities for self-direction, consistent with the pedagogical practice of co-creation (Cassidy et al., 2021). Students can be given the necessary leeway to complete certain tasks in their own way (where possible) where the outcomes and alternative ways of achieving them have been stated explicitly (Cassidy et al., 2021; Pink, 2009).

Fredricks and McColskey (2012) and Kahu and Nelson (2018) theorise that students engage more when classroom contexts meet their need for relationships. As a result, class participation points (with clear instructions on how to achieve outcomes) should be complemented by a caring and supportive environment (both academic and interpersonal), enabling all learners to enhance their behavioural, cognitive, and emotional engagement levels (Fredricks & McColskey, 2012). Moreover, peer support among students should also be encouraged in order to enhance student engagement (Cassidy et al., 2021). This is achieved by encouraging students to exercise a high level of compassion towards each other. A limitation of the external perspective of SDT, according to Deci and Flaste (1995) is that although it can stimulate students' interest, the students may not feel like 'captains in their own ship' (p. 9). By implication, some students may find it difficult to develop the self-interest and motivation required to engage at an optimal level. The aim of this article is noted in the research questions below.

(1) *How do class participation points facilitate engagement among postgraduate business students?*
(2) *Which factors complement participation points in enhancing student engagement?*
(3) *What factors may inhibit student engagement despite class participation points?*

Methodology

In response to a call by Cassidy et al. (2021) for more qualitative studies on student engagement, the present study uses a qualitative case study research design to understand the relationship between class participation points (complemented by inclusive teaching strategies) and student engagement among postgraduate business students. The use of qualitative methods is recommended for capturing the diverse experience and dynamic process that is student experience (Kahu, 2013). Moreover, a qualitative approach is appropriate for the present investigation given the exploratory nature of the study and its potential to facilitate a holistic exploration of the research questions and obtain rich in-depth insights from the perspectives of the study participants (Yin, 2014). The qualitative research approach is also preferable as it helps to develop useful questions, to probe the responses of participants, and to generate detailed answers to 'why' and 'how' questions about the issue under investigation (Yin, 2009). The case study design helped the researchers to collect and analyse high-quality data and social processes in depth based on genuine and specific natural contexts (Yin, 2014) involving postgraduate business students. Three different tutorial groups of postgraduate business students (mainly international students) studying the same module were investigated. Scholars have previously established that the case study research design helps build theories or

extend an existent theory by exploring more answers to the type of questions asked in the current study (Yin, 2009).

Sampling and data-collection techniques

The study employed a purposive sampling strategy (Campbell et al., 2020) in selecting the three tutorial groups (with 25 students in each tutorial group) of business postgraduate students (studying the same module) who benefited from class participation points for their studies. The researchers used the purposive sampling strategy to ensure that only the specific cases that could possibly be included in the study and those that were most likely to yield relevant information formed the final sample for the study (Campbell et al., 2020). The initial sampling frame comprised all tutorial groups (for both modules in which students received class participation points and those in which they did not receive such points) to which one of the researchers (as part of the teaching team) had access. This process led to the identification and selection of the three tutorial groups of postgraduate students on the same module. On this module, students receive 10 points for asking and answering questions in class during tutorials and another 10 points for submitting a 750-word report on why any article of their choice is relevant to their understanding of the module, and their grades for these activities count towards their end-of-semester grades. Table 1 below shows the details of the participants, observations thereof, and the interviews.

The study used a multi-method data-collection strategy. Requirement for ethical approval was waived, as the study was initially conducted to enhance teaching practice at the university where the study was conducted. The first stage of the data collection was the observation of the three tutorial groups of postgraduate students for a period of six weeks, from the first week of February to mid-March 2020. While facilitating the tutorials, one of the authors observed the students' behaviour. The researchers argue that the type of research questions asked in this study required direct access to the social actors of the phenomenon (Yin, 2014). McKechnie (2008) promote observation in qualitative research as the 'most fundamental research methods approach' (p. 573), especially when reinforced by interviews with research participants (Smit & Onwuegbuzie, 2018). Students' attendance and task behaviours were observed as indicators of behavioural, emotional,

Table 1. Participants information.

General information	Number of students observed	Duration of the observation	Number of interviews	Participant cohort	Number of years in the university	Level of education
Tutorial Group 1 (TG1)	25 (with 97% attendance from week 1–4) (77% attendance in week 5–6)	**6 weeks**	**2**	Postgraduate students only	1–2 years	MSc in view
Tutorial Group 2 (TG2)	25 (with 97% attendance from week 1–4 (77% attendance in week 5–6)	**6 weeks**	**2**	Postgraduate students only	1–2 years	MSc in view
Tutorial Group 3 (TG3)	25 (with 97% attendance from week 1–4) (77% attendance in week 5–6)	**6 weeks**	**2**	Postgraduate students only	1–2 years	MSc in view
Total: 3	**Total**: 75 students (less 3% from week 1–4) (less 23% in week 5–6)	**Total: 6 weeks**	**Total: 6**			

and affective engagement. Extensive notes were taken during and after the observations for each of the six-week period by one of the authors. Considering the need to reinforce the data from the observations (Smit & Onwuegbuzie, 2018), the six students in the three tutorial groups were subsequently selected by means of the convenience sampling technique and were interviewed using the semi-structured interview technique, one of the most useful techniques for providing a detailed and rich understanding of a social phenomenon from the point of view of the research participants (Yin, 2014). The need to further engage the selected students via interviews is consistent with the suggestion of Smit and Onwuegbuzie (2018) that 'as qualitative researchers, we should be open to lessons from our research participants and privilege the voices as we conduct our scholarly work' (p. 2). The semi-structured interview method thus gave the researchers the opportunity to ask the students pertinent questions and to further probe for more answers where necessary (See Appendix 1 for the interview schedule). For instance, through the semi-structured interview method, the researchers gave us information on why some students did not engage despite being given class participation points that would count towards their end-of-semester grade and how class participation points stimulated students' interest in learning. The interviews lasted between 30 and 45 minutes on average, and each was recorded digitally (with the students' consent). The recorded interviews were later transcribed by the researchers.

Data analysis

The interview transcripts and the extensive notes from the researchers' observations of the tutorial sessions were analysed thematically with the assistance of NVivo 12 software. The thematic analysis technique is widely accepted as an appropriate method of data analysis for understanding thoughts, behaviours, and experiences across a dataset (Gioia et al., 2013). The researchers have considerable experience in using NVivo and independently read and coded the transcripts and notes to identify comments related to how class participation points and inclusive teaching strategies facilitate engagement among postgraduate business students. A three-step coding process (following Gioia et al., 2013) was chosen, as it is often rigorous and transparent. The initial step involved rereading the interview transcripts and notes and identifying the comments relevant to the study objectives. Next, the comments identified (coded) from the initial (or first) coding as being similar were grouped together (second-order coding). The last step was based on the second-order coding and the researchers' inference, by means of which the main themes were derived. The researchers then compared and discussed the similarities and differences observed among the independent stages of coding the transcripts and observation notes, and a consensus was achieved.

Findings

This section presents the results of the empirical case study on the influence of class participation points (accompanied by autonomous support, inclusive teaching strategies, and a supportive climate) on student engagement.

Class participation points and engagement

The data from tutorial observation and semi-structured interviews suggest that class participation points – like blended learning strategies (Frick et al., 2020) – enhance behavioural, cognitive, and emotional engagement levels among postgraduate business students. This finding is consistent with the finding of the study of Bean and Peterson (1998), who found that class participation points significantly enhance student engagement.

Theme: Behavioural engagement

During the researchers' observations of the tutorials, the students became excited when they were informed in their first tutorial that they would receive points that would contribute to their overall assessment marks for attending tutorials and engaging with their peers and tutors during tutorials. Correspondingly, the attendance levels were high (remained at 97%) throughout the first four weeks of the observation period, higher than the levels of attendance at tutorials for other modules led by the first author where students do not receive points for participation. This point was corroborated by the findings from the interviews, as follows.

> I felt highly motivated knowing that I was going to earn close to 20 marks for engaging during tutorials. (Participant 2)

> I know a lot of students who are not attending tutorials for the other modules, but they show up for this tutorial because of the points they will earn from participation. (Participant 1)

Thus, class participation points enhance behavioural engagement among students.

Theme: Cognitive engagement

Observations of the tutorials revealed that students not only attend tutorials, but they also take their time to study the preparatory material before the tutorials. Most of these students will not undertake these pre-class activities before tutorials without participation points. The participant students confirmed this point, as follows.

> To be able to answer questions in class, I now read case studies and watch YouTube videos before attending tutorials. The reason for this is to ensure that I can take part in class discussions to earn the relevant marks. (Participant 3)

> I try to complete my homework to prepare for the next tutorial session after every session. I cannot afford to lose participation points. They are a huge encouragement. (Participant 5)

Participation points therefore both drive attendance and encourage student engagement with the learning materials.

Theme: Emotional engagement

The interview data suggests that some students engage in group activities involving their peers in whole-class discussions, as evidenced below.

> Initially, I was not confident about interacting in class, as you may be aware from last semester. I used to feel very shy speaking in front of the class. This semester, as you know, I now speak in class to earn points for participation. (Participant 1)

I had to engage my peers respectfully during tutorials to earn points. (Participant 6)

The participants' views show that the class participation points act as a stimulus for students to engage with peers and tutors to earn class participant points. The researchers' observation of the tutorials showed that some shy students were still reluctant to contribute to class discussions. Such students were found only to engage with their peers following the provision of clear instructions and tasks; a supportive environment; and autonomous support provided by tutors.

The factors that complement class participation points in enhancing student engagement

Theme: A supportive environment

During tutorial observations, it emerged that a supportive environment, enabled by the tutors, created a relaxed atmosphere wherein the students felt very comfortable to ask and answer questions. This relaxed environment was achieved with aid from the tutors' constant reassurance that there was no need for the students to worry about getting the answers to questions wrong. The interview data corroborates the views.

> You were very friendly, and this made many of us relaxed and willing to contribute by answering and responding to questions. (Participant 5)

> The friendly environment you created also encouraged many of us to contribute to whole-class discussions, especially when you tell us that there are no wrong or right answers. (Participant 2)

Theme: Inclusive teaching strategies

Students were also encouraged to engage through group tasks.

> The use of videos and group activities also helped in stimulating conversations among group members and the entire class. (Participant 2)

Students were encouraged to work together in group activities. Additionally, code calling was used to encourage students to participate in whole-class discussions by asking them to comment on the answers provided by their peers after seeing a video. Students were also asked to provide peer feedback at times.

Shy students with limited English-language skills were encouraged to speak up by asking them to write their answers on a sheet of paper before reading them out to the class. The interview data corroborates this point as follows.

> In the first tutorial, you told us that shy students who are not comfortable speaking in class could write their answers on a sheet of paper and read them before the class. But I thought it was going to be a bit embarrassing for me to do that, while other students felt confident to stand up and answer questions. I took the initiative to start speaking in class, and it worked. (Participant 1)

> Many students wrote their responses to questions and decided to read them out, and I believe that this really helped. (Participant 6)

Theme: Autonomous support

The students are also given the freedom to select any article of their choice and write a 750-word report on why they think the chosen article is relevant to the module. The observation data suggests that the students were not under any kind of pressure to prepare the work. It was observed that the students felt highly independent and confident to prepare the reports of their own accord.

> I liked the approach, because I had the opportunity to select articles and topics that were of great interest to me. As such, the motivation was there to complete the assessment quickly and to a good standard, as suggested by my 10 points. (Participant 2)

In combination, these practices enhanced engagement for all types of learners (Frick et al., 2020).

Factors that inhibit student participation despite participation points

The interview data, however, suggests that transportation issues, ill health, part-time work, and the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions all inhibited student engagement to a certain extent.

Theme: Part-time work

It emerged from the interviews that students working night shifts could not attend 9:00 a.m. tutorials, as evidenced below.

> I work at night. Hence, it is a bit difficult for me to make the 9:10 a.m. tutorial session. (Participant 3)

9:00 a.m. sessions are a bit difficult for students working night shifts. (Participant 5).

Thus, students' part-time work was found to hinder engagement levels if a conscious effort was not made by the students and timetabling department to help students create some balance between their work life and their studies. During the observations, some students within this category requested to be moved to different tutorials.

Theme: Transportation issues

The study data shows that some students showed up late to tutorials because of transportation problems. These students live outside the university environment and struggle to make the 9–10 a.m. tutorials because of the poor public transport system.

Buses plying . . . and . . . route departs every hour. (Participant 4)

Failure to catch the correct bus requires the student to wait for another hour, and this was not good for students attending 9–10 a.m. classes.

> The experience was not very good for those of us who had to travel this route to attend 9 a.m. tutorials. (Participant 4)

Theme: Ill health

Unsurprisingly, it was observed that some students (around 20%) were unable to attend tutorials for a couple of weeks because of ill health (in relation to COVID-19). Sadly, these were students who were very serious about their studies – students who would normally

turn up for tutorials, even without being given class participant points. Very few students showed up for tutorials in the week commencing 9 March 2020.

> During the last couple of weeks, there was a lot of fear. We were no longer bothered about points and assessment, because it was 'safety first'. (Participant 2)

Data from the tutorial observations shows that prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, very few students (around 3% in each tutorial) – regardless of class participation points – failed to turn up for tutorials. Together, these factors (disregarding class participation points) inhibited behavioural engagement among some students.

Discussion

The central aim of this work is to examine how class participation points impact students' behavioural, cognitive, and emotional engagement, which has rarely been studied empirically (Cassidy et al., 2021; Paff, 2015). The data analysis reveals that by offering class participation points, all the participant students were involved in behavioural and cognitive engagement. According to Ryan and Deci (2009) students need for autonomy, competence and relationship can enhance their constructive engagement when fulfilled by HEIs through pedagogic practices. Our work extends this literature in that it unpacks how class participation points drive self-interest and commitment to enhance the different dimensions of student engagement among participant students. Interestingly, not all the participant students were found to be emotionally engaged because of class participation points. By means of giving class participation points, students who are not shy or feel intimidated were found to easily engage with their peers and tutors. Unsurprisingly, class participation points were not enough to completely address the important factors that hinder engagement, such as shyness and feelings of intimidation (Paff, 2015).

Together with class participation points, we found that inclusive teaching and learning strategies; autonomous support strategies; and a supportive climate help all learners (particularly shy students and those who feel intimidated) to feel confident enough to express themselves. Kahu and Nelson (2018) and Paff (2015) argue that these strategies are useful for encouraging class participation, particularly among shy students, who feel intimidated or nervous speaking in front of their peers. We uncover that while class participation points motivate students to participate (Bean & Peterson, 1998), autonomous support; an inclusive teaching and learning environment; and a conducive teaching environment help students to overcome any hindrances to engagement caused by shyness, intimidation, and nervousness (Bond & Bedenlier, 2019; Paff, 2015). While class participation points, inclusive learning strategies, and autonomous support facilitate students' behavioural and cognitive engagement, a supportive climate was found to enhance students' emotional engagement. The findings therefore extend the tenets of SDT (by Ryan & Deci, 2009; Grolnick et al., 1991, who argued that carefully crafted HEI initiatives can motivate students to engage constructively) by articulating how a conducive teaching environment, inclusive teaching strategies, and autonomous support complement class participation points in driving self-motivation and thus different types of engagement among students.

Kahu and Nelson (2018) contend that sociocultural factors can hinder student engagement despite institutional efforts to drive engagement. Similarly, the present

study data shows that students' part-time work, ill health (including illness related to COVID-19), and transportation challenges inhibit students' attendance and thus behavioural engagement despite tutors giving class participation points and using inclusive teaching practices. This finding shows that while efforts to enhance engagement through class participation points, inclusive teaching strategies, autonomous support, and a conducive teaching environment are all important, wider institutional factors (as suggested by Kahu & Nelson, 2018), such as timetabling effectively to accommodate poor transportation issues and supporting working students' work-life balance, are critical for enhancing behavioural engagement. Therefore, HEIs must ensure that the professionals responsible for timetabling and wellbeing should collaborate with lecturers to effectively develop strategies for improving student engagement. According to Cassidy et al. (2021) non-academic team should be involved in the development of strategies designed to address students' engagement.

Appleton et al. (2006) suggest that class participation points alone may not drive self-motivation. The present study supports this finding in that class participation points were not found to stimulate self-motivation among another category of students (9% of the total students). These students did not turn up for tutorials for around five weeks of the data-collection period. This finding suggests that while tutors can stimulate self-motivation among students through their actions (Pink, 2009), not all students will develop self-motivation and an interest to engage in learning through external factors. According to Kahu and Nelson (2018), we anticipate that these may be due to wider socio-cultural issues that the students couldn't manage.

Conclusion

The study set out to examine the impact of class participation points in combination with inclusive learning strategies on students' engagement. Based on insights from observations and interviews, the study data shows that class participation points accompanied by inclusive teaching strategies and autonomous support can positively influence students' behavioural, cognitive, and emotional engagement. However, transportation issues, health challenges, and part-time work can hinder behavioural engagement and engagement more generally despite points awarded for class participation. Overall, the study findings highlight the importance of additional support through effective timetabling and sessions designed to help students balance non-academic life and studies as well as take advantage of class participation points. Thus, the researchers suggest that effective student engagement requires more than efforts from the lecturers. University administrators (timetabling, engagement, and wellbeing support) must support the process, especially for working international students struggling to balance their work and their studies. The present study extends the findings of the extant literature by providing insights into how participation points facilitate different types of student engagement in response to calls by Ryan and Deci (2009), Paff (2015) and Cassidy et al. (2021) for studies linking educational practices to student motivation and to different dimensions of engagement. The extant literature on participation points and students' engagement has not much explored other factors and actors that may be important in the process (Cassidy et al., 2021). The

study findings confirm the role of inclusive teaching strategies, autonomous support, and a conducive learning environment discussed in the extant literature (Kahu & Nelson, 2018; Paff, 2015) as facilitators of student engagement. The current study also extends this literature by highlighting the role of professional staff as relevant potential actors in the process of crafting effective students' engagement strategies in response to the call by Cassidy et al. (2021) for further studies identifying new actors relevant for driving the different dimensions of student engagement.

Implications for practice

This study highlights how lecturers can design and implement class participation points to motivate students to engage in class, drawing on SDT (Ryan and Deci, 2000). Since many students do not participate in class because of feelings of shyness, nervousness, and intimidation (Paff, 2015), lecturers should buttress the method of giving class participation points with inclusive teaching strategies, autonomous support, and a conducive teaching environment to reduce their adverse implications. Despite being offered class participation points, some students may not be able to attend classes (behavioural engagement) because of ill health, poor transportation, and poor work-study balance. By implication, the responsibility to enhance student engagement in HEIs is not that of classroom lecturers alone. Rather, HEIs must ensure that their timetabling departments work well with lecturers to ensure that students' timetables are personalised in order to promote effective engagement (Cassidy et al., 2021). Moreover, work-study balance is equally important for students, particularly among international students working to support themselves in the UK during their studies. Additionally, HEIs' health and wellbeing teams must work with timetabling departments and students on how to balance work and studies.

While the present study has made some contributions to the field, it does have limitations. The low number of interview participants limited the researchers' ability to gain more insights from the students themselves. However, the six weeks of observation produced significant insights into student engagement. As a result, in particular, it was difficult to interview students who did not show up for tutorials throughout the five weeks, despite being offered class participation points. Future studies should interview both engaged students and those students who failed to engage. This approach will uncover other reasons for disengagement despite the offering of class participation points. Such studies could focus on the role of a higher number of participation points on student engagement. Moreover, while this study makes both theoretical and practical contributions, the findings cannot be generalised beyond the context of this study, as the sample was drawn from a single institution. Studies in different contexts should be undertaken to refute or confirm and extend the findings of this study.

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Funding

Notes on contributors

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Data availablity statement

Data is available for review on request.

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