

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.57125/FED.2024.12.25.05>

How to cite: Olatunbosun, S. O., & Pillay, J. (2024). Self-Esteem, Academic Engagement and Fatigue among Undergraduates: Assessing the Role of School Support. *Futurity Education*, 4(4). 78-94.
<https://doi.org/10.57125/FED.2024.12.25.05>

Self-Esteem, Academic Engagement and Fatigue among Undergraduates: Assessing the Role of School Support

Stella Oluwakemi Olatunbosun*

Dr., PhD, Postdoctoral fellow, Department of Educational Psychology, Faculty of Education, University of Johannesburg, South Africa, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3103-9544>

Jace Pillay

Professor, Department of Educational Psychology, Faculty of Education, University of Johannesburg, South Africa, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9432-6014>

***Correspondence email:** stellao@uj.ac.za

Received: June 12, 2024 | **Accepted:** September 6, 2024 | **Available online:** September 29, 2024

Abstract: The academic success or failure of students is influenced by various factors, including psychological elements like self-esteem, academic engagement, and academic fatigue. There is anecdotal evidence to suggest that the support from schools plays a crucial role in shaping these psychological aspects in students. The proposed study examined this contention through quantitative survey research using 314 university students selected using purposive and simple random sampling techniques from two Nigerian public universities. Google Forms were used to survey the sampled respondents' views on the role of school support in self-esteem, academic engagement, and academic fatigue using the "School Support and Undergraduates' Self-esteem, Academic Engagement, and Fatigue Questionnaire." The data obtained for the

study were analysed using descriptive statistics (frequency counts and percentages), correlation, and regression analysis at a 5% significance level. The results indicate that high school support for undergraduates positively predicts their self-esteem, academic engagement, and academic fatigue. These findings underscore the effectiveness of diverse school support mechanisms, particularly within the university context, in fostering a positive and productive academic environment for undergraduates. Such support enhances students' self-esteem and academic engagement while significantly reducing academic fatigue. Consequently, expanding the availability and accessibility of university support services would promote self-esteem and academic engagement while alleviating levels of fatigue among undergraduates. This study holds practical importance for the Nigerian university system and other institutions across Sub-Saharan Africa, highlighting the critical role of school support in improving students' academic outcomes. Recommendations are provided.

Keywords: Academic commitment, Academic exhaustion, School endorsement, Self-confidence, Students.

Introduction

The school offers a pathway for students to gain essential knowledge, skills, and behaviours that facilitate functional living, adaptation to life, and comprehensive development in areas such as engagement, self-esteem, and resilience in facing life's challenges to prevent fatigue. School support is crucial in influencing students' self-esteem, academic engagement, and levels of fatigue. Implementing effective support systems within schools can empower students to manage the difficulties of academic life, strengthen their self-esteem, increase their involvement in learning, and reduce the impact of fatigue. The support can come in various forms, including academic advising, mental health services, extracurricular activities, and a supportive learning environment, where parents, teachers, school heads, owners, and students' peers provide one or more support. Navigating the challenges of academic life, boosting the self-esteem, enhancing engagement in learning, and mitigating the effects of fatigue among undergraduate students is essential, this highlights the importance of evaluating the role of school support in order to understand how educational institutions can more effectively address the diverse needs of their students. Universities can implement targeted interventions that foster a positive academic environment, with complete school support mechanisms that shape students' self-esteem, academic engagement, and fatigue.

Nurturing educational environments provide students with essential resources, motivation, and opportunities for success. Studies indicate that students who feel supported by teachers, classmates, and their educational institution experience heightened self-esteem, greater engagement in academic pursuits, and diminished feelings of fatigue (Hoferichter et al., 2021; Tennant et al., 2015; Wang et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2024). Teachers and peers are the primary sources of perceived social support for higher-education students (Liu et al., 2016). For instance, Jia and Cheng's (2024) study indicated that school support (social support from teachers) positively predicted students' classroom engagement. This, in turn, could lead to improved student outcomes and can boost the student self-esteem.

The self-esteem, which refers to a person's overall subjective emotional judgement of their value, is a crucial aspect of mental health and general well-being, especially in the setting of higher education (Henriksen et al., 2017; Osiesi & Fajobi, 2019). The self-esteem expresses a person's entire subjective emotional assessment of their value. It includes self-beliefs and emotional states, including pride,

humiliation, despair, and triumph (Henriksen et al., 2017). Fostering self-esteem is crucial for undergraduates' success in both academics and personal life. Research has shown that higher self-esteem is associated with improved mental health, stronger social connections, enhanced academic performance, and increased engagement with coursework (Acosta-Gonzaga, 2023). Academic engagement and outcomes are significantly impacted by the relationship between self-esteem and educational assistance (Hoferichter et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2024).

A student's active participation in school-related tasks or activities is called academic engagement (Reeve, 2012), encompassing the attention, interest, investment, and effort students put into their learning (Marks, 2000). When students are learning or receiving instruction, the academic engagement is defined as their level of focus, curiosity, enthusiasm, optimism, and passion. It extends beyond mere participation and includes the intrinsic motivation to learn and achieve. The academic engagement is positively linked to school learning support, quality teaching, and quality school (Guo et al., 2023). Students who are engaged are more likely to achieve academic success, overcome challenges, and maintain a positive outlook on their education. Clynes et al. (2020) have reported a close relationship between academic engagement and burnout (Barratt & Duran, 2021). In a university context, student involvement is a negative predictor of academic burnout (Wang et al., 2021). Within the framework of higher education, a student's involvement in college life significantly influences their cognitive development and acquisition of knowledge, as well as improving their academic and personal progress. The fatigue may develop if students are not sufficiently involved in their education.

The fatigue is a common challenge among undergraduates, often resulting from the demands of balancing academic responsibilities, academic life, social activities, personal responsibilities, and personal life (Li et al., 2022; Osiesi et al., 2024). It is characterised by physical and mental exhaustion that can significantly impair academic performance and overall well-being (Li et al., 2022; Osiesi et al., 2024). Chronic fatigue can result in reduced concentration, memory issues, diminished motivation, lower academic performance, increased dropout rates, and poor mental health, all of which hinder students from fully engaging in their studies (Salgado et al., 2021). Understanding the factors contributing to student fatigue is vital to developing an effective intervention for fostering their general academic outcomes.

Students' academic emotions are becoming an item of interest to scholars and researchers in instructional communication and education psychology (Jia & Cheng, 2024), as these affect students' tactical and strategic pursuit of mastery, learning performance, and general mental health are their emotions and their perceptions of the learning environment (Pekrun et al., 2023). The self-esteem, academic engagement, and fatigue are interrelated factors likely to impact undergraduate emotions, experience, and academic pursuits significantly. School support is a critical buffer that can enhance self-esteem, boost engagement, and alleviate fatigue (Henriksen et al., 2017; Hoferichter et al., 2021; Li et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2024). This can assist undergraduate students in managing stress, fostering a sense of belonging, and achieving a healthy balance between their academic and personal lives. It is essential to comprehend how self-esteem, academic engagement, and fatigue interact, as well as the role of school support in these dynamics. This understanding is crucial for formulating policies and practices that enhance the success and well-being of undergraduate students. Against this backdrop, this study examined the role of school support on self-esteem, academic engagement, and academic fatigue among undergraduate students in Southwest universities in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Several psychological factors can significantly impact undergraduates' academic performance and overall well-being. Among these factors, the self-esteem, academic engagement, and fatigue are critical in directing undergraduates' educational experiences and outcomes. Elevated self-esteem is frequently linked to greater academic involvement and lower levels of fatigue, which contribute to better academic performance and overall well-being. Conversely, low self-esteem can lead to decreased academic engagement and heightened fatigue, adversely affecting students' academic success and mental health. Also, school support, encompassing academic, emotional, and social dimensions, plays a crucial role in shaping these factors. Adequate support from the school, teachers, parents, counsellors, and peers can enhance undergraduate self-esteem, foster greater academic engagement, and mitigate the fatigue.

However, the specific mechanisms through which the school support influences self-esteem, academic engagement, and fatigue still need to be fully understood. Despite the recognition of these elements in educational research, there remains a gap in understanding how school support can be leveraged to optimise the self-esteem and academic engagement and reduce fatigue among undergraduate students. The existing literature clearly indicates that research on the influence of school support on students' psychological factors related to their educational pursuits is limited. This study aimed to assess the effectiveness of various school support mechanisms in promoting a positive and productive academic environment for undergraduates. It will fill this gap by examining the role of school support on undergraduates' self-esteem, academic engagement, and fatigue.

Purpose of the Study

The current study investigated the role of school support mechanisms in enhancing the self-esteem, academic engagement, and fatigue among undergraduate students. The study specifically examined the impact of school support on undergraduate students' self-esteem, academic engagement, and fatigue, offering valuable insights for educational institutions on enhancing their support for students. By examining the influence of school support mechanisms on these factors, the study aims to contribute to developing effective interventions and support systems that promote student success and well-being in higher education settings.

Research Questions

What is the level of school support for undergraduates in the sampled university?

Theoretical Framework

This study is underpinned by two theories that concern the relationship between motivation, engagement, and self-esteem. The expectancy-value theory proposed by Pintrich and de Groot (1990) is foundational in understanding how motivation influences the completion of tasks or goal attainment. In this context, self-esteem plays a crucial role in shaping students' beliefs in their ability to succeed in educational activities, as well as their perception of control and responsibility for their performance. This, in turn, significantly impacts their academic achievement. This component, known as expectation, is associated with students' self-efficacy and attitudes about their influence over their education, a strong indicator of their self-esteem (Bandura, 1997). The other factor was identified as value, which encompasses internal and extrinsic motivation for the goal and the value that a student places on the assignment (which may impact students' academic engagement).

According to Ryan and Deci (2000), the second theory, self-determination theory, posits that students possess psychological needs that are fulfilled by the motivational strategies they utilize to exhibit their strong academic commitment (Kus'nierz et al., 2020; Urhahne & Wijnia, 2023). This theory serves as a conceptual framework for understanding factors related to self-esteem. Furthermore, it highlights the relationships among academic success, motivation, and engagement. Additionally, it clarifies how enhancing one's level of engagement can positively influence motivation and improve the overall learning environment.

Literature Review

Self-Esteem and School Support

Silber and Tippet (1965) termed the self-esteem as a person's degree of satisfaction with themselves, representing the relationship between their ideal and personal self-images. It has been considered a crucial variable in psychological research. The self-esteem can be categorized into two main types: specific self-esteem and general self-esteem. General self-esteem is more closely associated with psychological factors, whereas specific self-esteem, such as academic self-esteem, is more directly connected to behaviour and serves as an indicator of academic performance (Rosenberg et al., 1995). People typically develop either a high or low sense of self-worth over time. People with high self-esteem believe they are unique and different from others, and they have ideals of beauty and brilliance, which makes them deserving of respect and admiration (Alghamdi et al., 2023).

A high sense of self-worth has been linked to many advantageous consequences, such as improved scholastic achievement, increased life satisfaction, and decreased stress and depressive symptoms (Orth & Robins, 2014). High self-esteem results from or contributes to academic accomplishments and achievements; it is not entirely responsible for them. However, it does foster perseverance and effort after failure (Baumeister et al., 2003; Osiesi & Fajobi, 2019). On the other hand, a low self-esteem may result in a variety of detrimental effects, including poor academic performance, anxiety, and depression, which may have an impact on students' academic engagement. These consequences include academic disengagement, mental health problems, and a decrease in overall life satisfaction (Sowislo & Orth, 2013). A contradiction between one's ideal and actual selves, for instance, might result in low self-esteem, psychological frailty, and a lack of confidence, which can lead to issues and risky behaviour (Baumeister et al., 2003). The low self-esteem is one of the risk factors for drug misuse, eating disorders, aggression, depression, and anxiety (Baumeister et al., 2003).

Research indicates that elevated self-esteem is associated with enhanced motivation, improved academic performance, and greater levels of academic engagement (Orth & Robins, 2014). Conversely, low self-esteem can lead to academic disengagement and poor performance (Marsh & Martin, 2011). Educational support, including academic, emotional, and social support provided by schools, plays a crucial role in enhancing self-esteem among students. Supportive educational environments can foster a sense of belonging, competence, and autonomy, which are essential for developing healthy self-esteem (Guse, et al., 2022; Hoferichter et al., 2021; Kahu & Nelson, 2018). Bofah and Ntow's (2017) findings have reiterated that school support provided by teachers and parents positively predicts students' self-esteem. From literature insights, we assume and hypothesise that:

H1: School support will significantly predict undergraduates' self-esteem.

Academic Engagement and School Support

Academic engagement extends beyond mere participation; it embodies the intrinsic motivation to learn and achieve (Amerstorfer & Freiin von Münster-Kistner, 2021; Urhahne & Wijnia, 2023). This concept is characterised by the levels of focus, curiosity, interest, optimism, and passion that students demonstrate in their learning experiences. It is a pivotal element for both academic success and overall well-being. Academic engagement includes students' emotional, behavioral, and cognitive involvement in their educational pursuits. Research indicates that students' future academic success and well-being are positively related to their level of engagement in school (Upadyaya & Salmela-Aro, 2013). Christenson et al. (2012) further describe student engagement as being marked by a commitment to learning and educational goals, as well as active involvement in both academic and extracurricular activities. Mamani-Benito et al. (2024) assert that engagement relates to how students actively participate in learning and use digital tools to improve their academic performance.

To positively impact educational practices, it is imperative to have a thorough understanding of academic engagement (Hendrick et al., 2023). Academic engagement is multifaceted, consisting of three primary aspects: cognitive, emotional, and behavioural engagement. These dimensions capture students' focus, zeal, and energy for their studies (Van der Ross et al., 2023). Several variables affect students' academic engagement, such as individual interests, pedagogical approaches, and the larger educational context. Kahu (2013) highlighted that various factor, including motivation, self-esteem, and the educational environment, can influence students' academic engagement. Similarly, Li et al. (2022) demonstrated that engaged students are more likely to persist in their studies, achieve higher scores, and maintain a positive attitude toward learning.

Supportive educational environments also boost academic engagement and reduce academic-related stress and fatigue (Guse et al., 2022; Hoferichter et al., 2021; Kahu & Nelson, 2018). Studies have explored the relationship between school support and academic engagement, highlighting the positive impacts of supportive educational environments on student engagement (Esi & Posteucă Eşi, 2023; Roorda et al., 2011). Meta-analytic reviews consolidate findings from multiple studies, confirming that school support significantly predicts academic engagement (Roorda et al., 2011). Given these arrays of literature, we assume and hypothesise that:

H2: School support will significantly predict undergraduates' academic engagement.

Academic Fatigue and School Support

The fatigue is prevalent among undergraduate students, affecting their academic performance, mental health, and overall well-being (Kahu & Nelson, 2018). Empirical evidence underscores the significant role of school support in mitigating fatigue among undergraduate students (Guse et al., 2022), and it manifests as physical exhaustion, mental fatigue, and a general sense of burnout. Other research provides valuable insights into students' personal experiences, emphasizing that school support plays a crucial role in alleviating fatigue through both practical and emotional assistance (Larcombe et al., 2013). Additionally, a study by Yin et al. (2023) confirmed that there is an inverse relationship between school support and students' academic support. In contrast, the research conducted by Mohammadi et al. (2023) found no evidence linking academic fatigue to academic support.

Dreyer (2017) found that the support provided to students to advance learning needed to be higher in several South African schools. The study by Li et al. (2018) asserts that social support, a component of

school support, enhances students' self-esteem and academic performance and lessens their academic fatigue. Fu (2024) and Liu et al. (2023) show that social support directly improves student engagement and negatively correlates with academic fatigue. Self-esteem and educational support are interrelated and significantly impact academic engagement and outcomes (Chaudhry et al., 2024). Academic, emotional, and social support systems play a vital role in assisting undergraduate students in navigating the challenges of higher education while lessening the prevalence of fatigue. By cultivating supportive educational environments, institutions can bolster student well-being, enhance academic success, and encourage a healthier, more sustainable approach to student life (Hammoudi et al., 2023). Based on the insights gained from the literature review, we propose and hypothesize that:

H3: School support will significantly predict the undergraduates' academic fatigue.

Methodology

Research Design

The study utilised a cross-sectional quantitative research design of a non-experimental nature.

Population, Sampling Techniques and Sample

The study focused on undergraduate students enrolled in degree programs at two public universities in Southwest Nigeria: The Federal University Oye-Ekiti and Ekiti State University. A purposive sampling technique was employed to choose these two institutions out of the three public universities in the region, based on the perception that they offered superior support and services. Subsequently, a simple random sampling method was utilized to select 314 undergraduate students from various faculties and departments through a Google form. Participants willingly took part in the study after being briefed on its objectives. An online survey was conducted during the second semester of the 2023–2024 academic session. The participants' ages ranged from 19 to 21, with 75.8% (238) identifying as female and 24.2% (76) as male.

Instruments

A data collection instrument titled “School Support and Undergraduates’ Self-Esteem, Academic Engagement, and Fatigue Questionnaire” was utilized. It comprised five sections: A, B, C, D, and E, which collected information on respondents' gender, age, self-esteem, academic engagement, and fatigue levels. The study incorporated the 10-item Rosenberg (1965) Self-Esteem Scale, designed to assess individuals' perceptions of their self-worth. There are an equal number of positive and negative questions on this scale. “Overall, I am satisfied with myself” is an example of a positive question; “I feel like I don't have much to be proud of” is an example of a negative one. A lower score on the scale denoted a more significant level; negative questions were recorded. The Likert scale was used to rate the items from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (0). The measure has been validated in this context ($\alpha=0.78$) and has been extensively examined in several past research, demonstrating strong psychometric qualities.

The Academic Engagement Questionnaire (AEQ), developed by Osiesi et al. in 2024, was as well embraced and used. The questionnaire gauges students' participation in social and intellectual activities. A 5-point Likert scale was used to evaluate the scale; 5 represented very often, 4 represented often, 3 represented occasionally, 2 represented rarely, and 1 represented never. This scale's piloted Cronbach alpha in the study's setting was 0.81.

The study employed the School Support Questionnaire (SSQ), modified by Reyes et al. (2022). The three dimensions of teacher, peer, and family support are used in the questionnaire to quantify school support. The responses to the questionnaire were measured using a five-point Likert scale, where 5 represented strong agreement, 4 indicated agreement, 3 signified indecision, 2 denoted disagreement, and 1 reflected strong disagreement. The pilot testing of this scale revealed a Cronbach's alpha of 0.88 in the study's context.

Students' academic weariness was assessed using the Academic Fatigue Scale (AFS), modified from Chalder et al. (1993). It consisted of seven items designed to gauge undergraduate students' levels of weariness. The instrument utilised a five-point Likert scale for responses, where a score of five indicated strong agreement, four represented agreement, three denoted neutrality, two indicated disagreement, and one signified strong disagreement. The Cronbach's alpha for the scale, as piloted in the study context, was 0.89.

Data Analysis

The data in this study were analysed using SPSS Version 6 software, employing descriptive statistics (including frequency counts and percentages), regression analysis, and correlation, with a significance level set at 5%.

Results

Research Questions

RQ1. What is the level of school support for undergraduates in the sampled university?

Table 2

The level of School Support for Undergraduates

Variable	Category	N	%
Teacher Support	Low	50	15.9
	Moderate	108	34.4
	High	156	49.7
Peer Support	Low	56	17.8
	Moderate	104	33.1
	High	154	49.0
Parent Support	Low	70	22.3
	Moderate	152	48.4
	High	92	29.3
School Support	Low	86	27.4
	Moderate	94	29.9
	High	134	42.7

Table 2 shows the levels of support undergraduates received from teachers, peers, parents, and the school. As indicated, teacher, peer, and school support were high, while parent support was at a moderate level. This suggests that most of the undergraduates enjoyed valuable support from the school.

Hypotheses Testing

Table 3

The Correlation Matrix of School Support, Academic Engagement, Academic Fatigue, Self-Esteem

Variables	1	2	3	4
1. School Support	-			
2. Academic Engagement	.789**	-		
3. Academic Fatigue	.603**	.464**	-	
4. Self-esteem	.882**	.599**	.533**	-

** $p < 0.01$

Table 3 indicates that there were statistically significant positive relationships among the variables. The school support was correlated with the academic engagement ($r=0.789$, $p<0.05$), academic fatigue ($r=0.603$, $p<0.05$), and self-esteem ($r=0.882$, $p<0.05$). Also, academic engagement correlates with academic fatigue ($r=0.464$, $p<0.05$) and self-esteem ($r=0.599$, $r<0.05$). In addition, the academic fatigue correlated with the self-esteem ($r=0.533$, $p<0.05$). These suggest that the significant positive relationship implied that undergraduates who enjoyed the school support would undoubtedly be academically engaged, stimulating a high self-esteem and academic fatigue. Hence, the school support is associated with the academic engagement, self-esteem, and academic fatigue.

H1. The school support will significantly predict undergraduates' self-esteem.

Table 4

Regression of Association Between School support and Undergraduates' Self-Esteem

Variable	B	SE	t	p	95% CI
School Support→Self-esteem	0.349	.011	33.058	.000	0.328 – 0.370
R = .882; R ² = .778; F=1092.684; $p<0.05$					

Table 4 presents the results of the regression analysis examining the relationship between school support and undergraduates' self-esteem. The model assessed the impact of school support as the independent variable on undergraduates' self-esteem, the dependent variable. After controlling for other variables, the regression coefficient for school support was found to be statistically significant ($B=0.349$; $t=33.058$; $p<0.05$; 95% CI [0.328, 0.370]). A unit increase in school support was linked with a 0.349-point improvement in undergraduate self-esteem. This implies that a major determinant of undergraduates' self-esteem might be the school support. This means that the school support will significantly predict undergraduates' self-esteem after adjusting for the other factors in the model. In addition, considering the effects of the independent variables (school support) on undergraduates' self-esteem, with $R=.882$ and $R^2=.778$, the model summary statistics show a large overall effect size indicating that the model explained over 77.8% of the variation in the undergraduates' self-esteem. The general model was statistically significant ($F=1092.684$, $p<0.05$), and the undergraduates' self-esteem was significantly predicted by it.

H2. The school support will significantly predict the undergraduates' academic engagement.

Table 5*Regression of Association Between School support and Undergraduates' Academic Engagement*

Variable	B	SE	t	p	95% CI
School Support→Academic Engagement	0.662	.029	22.707	.000	0.604 – 0.719
R = .789; R ² = .623; F=515.596; p<0.05					

Table 5 presents the results of the regression analysis exploring the relationship between school support and undergraduates' academic engagement. The model evaluated the impact of school support as the independent variable on undergraduates' academic engagement as the dependent variable. The regression coefficient for school support was found to be statistically significant (B=0.662; t= 22.707; p<0.05; 95% CI [0.604, 0.719]) when all other variables were held constant. Undergraduate academic engagement improved by 0.662-point for every unit increase in school support. This suggests that the school support may significantly influence undergraduates' academic engagement. This means that the school support will be a significant predictor of undergraduates' academic engagement even after controlling for the other variables in the model. Furthermore, considering the impact of the independent variables (school support) on the academic engagement of undergraduates, the model summary statistics demonstrate a sizeable overall effect size, meaning that the model accounted for over 62.3% of the variation in the academic engagement of undergraduates (R =.789 and R² =.623). The overall model significantly predicted the undergraduates' academic engagement and was statistically significant (F=515.596, p<0.05).

H3. The school support will significantly predict undergraduates' academic fatigue.

Table 6*Regression of Association Between School Support and Undergraduates' Academic Fatigue*

Variable	B	SE	t	p	95% CI
School Support→Academic Fatigue	0.213	.016	13.360	.000	0.182 – 0.245
R = .603; R ² = .364; F=178.490; p<0.05					

The results of regression analysis of the relationship between the academic fatigue in undergraduate students and school support are shown in Table 6. The dependent variable in the model was the academic fatigue among undergraduate students, while the independent variable was school support. The regression coefficient for school support was statistically significant (B=0.213; t=13.360; p<0.05; 95% CI [0.182, 0.245]) when all other variables were held constant. The degree of academic fatigue among undergraduates improved by 0.213-point for every unit increase in school support. This suggests that the school support may be a significant factor that influences undergraduates' academic fatigue. This means that the school support will significantly predict undergraduates' academic fatigue after controlling for other model factors. Furthermore, considering the impact of the independent variables (school support) on the academic fatigue of undergraduates, the model summary statistics demonstrate a large overall effect size, meaning that the model accounted for more than 36.4% of the variation in the academic fatigue of the undergraduates (R =.603 and R² =.364). The undergraduates' academic fatigue was significantly predicted by the general model, which was statistically significant (F=178.490, p<0.05).

Discussion

This research explored the role of school support in predicting undergraduates' self-esteem, engagement, and fatigue levels. The findings indicate that teacher and peer support at the study site were high, while parental support was at a moderate level. This suggests that most undergraduates received substantial support from the school. Given the strong support systems available to these students, their academic and emotional outcomes could be positively influenced. This finding supports the findings of Liu et al. (2023) that indicated that teachers and peers were the primary sources of perceived social support for students in higher education; however, the findings of Dreyer (2017) found that the level of support provided for students was low in several South African schools is not in tandem with this current study. The findings indicate a strong association between school support and students' academic engagement, self-esteem, and fatigue levels. This reinforces the notion that the presence of school support in universities positively influences these aspects of student well-being. When school support is readily available, students tend to experience a heightened sense of belonging and security (Jia & Cheng, 2024; Wang et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2024).

The study's findings indicate that the undergraduates' self-esteem, academic engagement, and academic fatigue were significantly predicted by the school support. A supporting learning environment can positively affect students' self-worth, which would drive their social relations and interactions with peers and the school community at large. School support serves as a critical buffer that can enhance self-esteem, boost engagement, and alleviate fatigue (Henriksen et al., 2017; Hoferichter et al., 2021; Li et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2024). The high school support boosts students' confidence and feelings of self, which translate into enhanced school interest and engagement. The finding agrees with those of previous research (Esi & Postecă Eşi, 2023; Guse et al., 2022; Hoferichter et al., 2021; Kahu & Nelson, 2018; Roorda et al., 2011).

However, the data from this study revealed that school support also positively predicts undergraduates' academic fatigue. Despite the support available to these students, factors outside the school environment – particularly those related to economic challenges – may be contributing to their academic fatigue. Additionally, while previous research often focused primarily on the social aspect of support, this study considered school support across four dimensions: teacher, peer, parent, and overall school support. This finding contrasts those of studies that revealed a negative association between school support and students' academic fatigue (Fu, 2024; Guse et al., 2022; Li et al., 2018; Liu et al., 2023; Richardson et al., 2012; Yin et al., 2023), and those of Mohammadi et al. (2023) found no evidence of a relationship between school support and academic fatigue.

Limitation of the Study

This study was quantitative in nature and may not have fully captured the contextual and subjective experiences of the undergraduates surveyed. The sample size used in this study could be considered limited, as it may not be representative of the broader population. Additionally, self-reporting bias and the purposive sampling of only two public universities out of the many in the region and country could have influenced the findings and may have impacted the generalizability of the results.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The achievement of students' academic goals is influenced by both personal and school-related factors. School support has a positive impact on undergraduates' self-esteem, academic engagement, and academic fatigue. Therefore, an increase in the availability and accessibility of school support in universities would foster their self-esteem, academic engagement, and fatigue levels among undergraduates. Based on the findings and discussions of this study, it can be recommended that university management provide mechanisms that promote high self-esteem and academic engagement among undergraduates. There should be increased funding for universities to enhance the provision and sustenance of school support measures in universities. Social and academic engagement groups should be created in universities to boost students' self-esteem, academic interest, and engagement. Regarding the academic fatigue, governments and university management should provide economic stability, such as financial support in the form of scholarships, grants, and bursaries to students to facilitate their academic fatigue levels.

Suggestions for Future Research

For future research, we recommend using alternative research designs, such as qualitative or mixed methods, to gain deeper insights into the variables studied. Expanding the study to include a larger sample size and broader contexts would also be beneficial. Additionally, investigating the impact of school support on both students' and staff's psychological well-being and academic adjustment would further contribute to the existing literature.

Contributions from Authors

Every author has made a significant contribution to the paper and agreed with the conclusions.

Conflict of Interest

No conflict of interest is declared by the authors.

Ethics Declaration

This paper does not require an Ethics Committee Approval.

Funding

This work was supported by the South African Research Chairs Initiative of the Department of Science and Innovation and National Research Foundation of South Africa, South African Research Chair in Education and Care in Childhood, Faculty of Education, University of Johannesburg, South Africa.

References

- Acosta-Gonzaga, E. (2023). The effects of self-esteem and academic engagement on university students' performance. *Behavioural Science*, 13(4), Article 348. <https://doi.org/10.3390/bs13040348>
- Alghamdi, S. A., Aljaffer, M. A., Alahmari, F. S., Alasiri, A. B., Alkahtani, A. H., Alhodayris, F. S., & Alhusaini, B. A. (2023). The impact of low self-esteem on academic achievement and the behaviors related to it among medical students in Saudi Arabia. *Saudi Medical Journal*, 44(6), 613–620. <https://doi.org/10.15537/smj.2023.44.6.20230055>

- Amerstorfer, C. M., & Freiin von Münster-Kistner, C. (2021). Student perceptions of academic engagement and student-teacher relationships in problem-based learning. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, Article 713057. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.713057>
- Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. New York, NY, USA: W. H. Freeman / Times Books / Henry Holt & Co.
- Barratt, J. M., & Duran, F. (2021). Does psychological capital and social support impact engagement and burnout in online distance learning students?. *The Internet and Higher Education*, 51, Article 100821. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.iheduc.2021.100821>
- Baumeister, R.F., Campbell, J.D., Krueger, J.I., & Vohs, K.D. (2003). Does high self-esteem cause better performance, interpersonal success, happiness, or healthier lifestyles?. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, 4(1), 1–44. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1529-1006.01431>
- Bofah, E. A., & Ntow, F. D. (2017). Perceived social support from parents and teachers' influence on students' mathematics-related self-beliefs. *African Journal of Educational Studies in Mathematics and Sciences*, 13, 41–62. <https://www.ajol.info/index.php/ajesms/article/view/169279/158734>
- Chalder, T., Berelowitz, G., Pawlikowska, T., Watts, L., Wessely, S., Wright, D., & Wallace, E. P. (1993). Development of a fatigue scale. *Journal of Psychosomatic Research*, 37(2), 147–153. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0022-3999\(93\)90081-P](https://doi.org/10.1016/0022-3999(93)90081-P)
- Chaudhry, S., Tandon, A., Shinde, S., & Bhattacharya, A. (2024). Student psychological well-being in higher education: The role of internal team environment, institutional, friends and family support and academic engagement. *PloS ONE*, 19(1), Article e0297508. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0297508>
- Christenson, S. L., Reschly, A. L., & Wylie, C. (Eds.). (2012). *Handbook of research on student engagement*. Springer New York, NY: Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4614-2018-7>
- Clynes, M., Sheridan, A., & Frazer, K. (2020). Student engagement in higher education: A cross-sectional study of nursing students' participation in college-based education in the republic of Ireland. *Nurse Education Today*, 93, Article 104529. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nedt.2020.104529>
- Dreyer, L.M. (2017). Constraints to quality education and support for all: A Western Cape case. *South African Journal of Education*, 37(1), 1–11. <https://dx.doi.org/10.15700/saje.v37n1a1226>
- Esi, M. C., & Posteucă Eşi, N. L. (2023). The relationship between engagement and academic burnout. *International Journal of Social and Educational Innovation (IJSEIro)*, 10(20), 7-16. <https://journals.aseiacademic.org/index.php/ijsei/article/view/266>
- Fu, L. (2024). Social support in class and learning burnout among Chinese EFL learners in higher education: Are academic buoyancy and class level important?. *Current Psychology*, 43, 5789–5803. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-023-04778-9>
- Guo, J. P., Lv, S., Wang, S. C., Wei, S. M., Guo, Y. R., & Yang, L. Y. (2023). Reciprocal modeling of university students' perceptions of the learning environment, engagement, and learning outcome: A longitudinal

study. *Learning and Instruction*, 83, Article 101692.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.learninstruc.2022.101692>

Guse, J., Harvey, R., Leong, R. M., & Kennedy, G. (2022). Predictors of academic-related fatigue in undergraduate students. *Journal of American College Health*, 70(3), 835–844.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/07448481.2020.1821281>

Hammoudi, H. D., Soltani, A., Dalli, R., Alsarraj, L., & Malki, A. (2023). Understanding and fostering mental health and well-being among university faculty: A narrative review. *Journal of Clinical Medicine*, 12(13), Article 4425. <https://doi.org/10.3390/jcm12134425>

Hendrick, L., Opdenakker, M.-C., and Van der Vaart, W. (2023). Students' academic engagement during COVID-19 times: A mixed-methods study into relatedness and loneliness during the pandemic. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 14, Article 1221003. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1221003>

Henriksen, I. O., Ranøyen, I., Indredavik, M. S., & Stenseng, F. (2017). The role of self-esteem in the development of psychiatric problems: A three-year prospective study in a clinical sample of adolescents. *Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Mental Health*, 11, Article 68.
<https://doi.org/10.1186/s13034-017-0207-y>

Hoferichter, F., Kulakow, S., & Hufenbach, M. C. (2021). Support from parents, peers, and teachers is differently associated with middle school students' well-being. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, Article 758226. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.758226>

Jia, M., & Cheng, J. (2024). Effect of teacher social support on students' emotions and learning engagement: A U.S.-Chinese classroom investigation. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 11, Article 158. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-024-02634-0>

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>

Kus'nierz, C.; Rogowska, A.M.; & Pavlova, I. (2020). Examining gender differences, personality traits, academic performance, and motivation in Ukrainian and polish students of physical education: A cross-cultural study. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 17(16), Article 5729. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17165729>

Larcombe, W., Tumbaga, L., Malkin, I., Nicholson, P., & Tokatlidis, O. (2013). Does an improved experience of law school protect students against depression, anxiety and stress? An empirical study of wellbeing and the law school experience of LLB and JD students. *Sydney Law Review*, 35, 407–432.
<https://search.informit.org/doi/10.3316/informit.448721769854848>

Li, W., Chen, J., Li, M., Smith, A. P., & Fan, J. (2022). The effect of exercise on academic fatigue and sleep quality among university students. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, Article 1025280.
<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.1025280>

- Li, J., Han, X., Wang, W., Sun, G., & Cheng, Z. (2018). How social support influences university students' academic achievement and emotional exhaustion: The mediating role of self-esteem. *Learning and Individual Differences*, 61, 120–126. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lindif.2017.11.016>
- Liu, X., Zhou, M., & Guo, J. (2023). Effects of EFL learners' perceived social support on academic burnout: the mediating role of interaction engagement. *Sage Open*, 13(4). <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440231212725>
- Liu, W., Mei, J., Tian, L., & Huebner, E. S. (2016). Age and gender differences in the relation between school-related social support and subjective well-being in school among students. *Social Indicators Research*, 125(3), 1065–1083. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-015-0873-1>
- Mamani-Benito, O., Esteban, R. F. C., Huayta-Meza, M. V., Castillo-Blanco, R., Chaparro, J. E. T. & Morales Garcia, W. C. (2024). Emotional fatigue, academic engagement, and satisfaction with studies during the return to post-pandemic university attendance. *Frontiers in Education*, 9, Article 1297302. <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2024.1297302>
- Marks, H. M. (2000). Student engagement in instructional activity: patterns in the elementary, middle, and high school years. *American Educational Research Journal*, 37(1), 153–184. <https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312037001153>
- Marsh, H. W., & Martin, A. J. (2011). Academic self-concept and academic achievement: Relations and causal ordering. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 81(1), 59–77. <https://doi.org/10.1348/000709910X503501>
- Mohammadi, O. A., Heidari, A., Eftekhari, S. Z., Johari, F.R. (2023). Relationships of academic support and attitude towards future career with academic procrastination in students: The mediating role of academic burnout. *Journal of Clinical Research in Paramedical Sciences*, 12(1), Article e138612. <https://doi.org/10.5812/jcrps-138612>
- Orth, U., & Robins, R. W. (2014). The development of self-esteem. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 23(5), 381–387. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0963721414547414>
- Osiesi, M. P., & Fajobi, O. O. (2019). Fostering mathematics achievement: The impact of age, gender and self-esteem using the Rosenberg self-esteem scale on secondary school students in Southwest, Nigeria. *West African Journal of Education*, 39, 90–100.
- Osiesi, M. P., Salami, O. O., Aruleba, A. L., Akinola, O. T., Fadiya, A. A., Babalola, A. T., ... Okocha, S. N. (2024). Undergraduates' educational life and academic engagement in Southwest Universities in Nigeria: The role of gender and perceived poverty. *Journal of Poverty*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10875549.2024.2338175>
- Pekrun, R., Marsh, H. W., Elliot, A. J., Stockinger, K., Perry, R. P., Vogl, E., ... Vispoel, W. P. (2023). A three-dimensional taxonomy of achievement emotions. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 124(1), 145–178. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pspp0000448>
- Pintrich, P. R., & de Groot, E. V. (1990). Motivational and self-regulated learning components of classroom academic performance. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 82, 33–40.

<https://www.rhartshorne.com/fall-2012/eme6507-rh/cdisturco/eme6507-eportfolio/documents/pintrich%20and%20degroodt%201990.pdf>

- Reeve, J. (2012). A self-determination theory perspective on student engagement. In S. Christenson, A. Reschly, & C. Wylie (Eds.), *Handbook of Research on Student Engagement* (pp. 149–172). Boston, MA: Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4614-2018-7_7
- Reyes, B., Martínez-Gregorio, S., Galiana, L., Tomás, J. M., & De los Santos, S. (2022). Validation of Perceived Academic Support Questionnaire (PASQ): A study using a sample of Dominican Republic high-school students. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 31(12), 3425–3434. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-022-02473-0>
- Roorda, D. L., Koomen, H. M., Spilt, J. L., & Oort, F. J. (2011). The influence of affective teacher–student relationships on students’ school engagement and achievement: A meta-analytic approach. *Review of Educational Research*, 81(4), 493–529. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654311421793>
- Rosenberg, M. (1965). *Society and the adolescent self-image*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Rosenberg, M., Schooler, C., Schoenbach, C., & Rosenberg, F. (1995). Global self-esteem and specific self-esteem: Different concepts, different outcomes. *American Sociological Review*, 60(1), 141–156. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2096350>
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist*, 55(1), 68–78. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.55.1.68>
- Salgado, S., & Au-Yong-Oliveira, M. (2021). Student burnout: A case study about a Portuguese Public University. *Education Sciences*, 11(1), Article 31. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci11010031>
- Silber, E., & Tippet, J. S. (1965). Self-esteem: Clinical assessment and measurement validation. *Psychological Reports*, 16(3, Pt. 2), 1017–1071. <https://doi.org/10.2466/pr0.1965.16.3c.1017>
- Sowislo, J. F., & Orth, U. (2013). Does low self-esteem predict depression and anxiety? A meta-analysis of longitudinal studies. *Psychological Bulletin*, 139(1), 213–240. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0028931>
- Tennant, J. E., Demaray, M. K., Malecki, C. K., Terry, M. N., Clary, M., & Elzinga, N. (2015). Students' ratings of teacher support and academic and social-emotional well-being. *School Psychology Quarterly*, 30(4), 494–512. <https://doi.org/10.1037/spq0000106>
- Upadaya, K., & Salmela-Aro, K. (2013). Development of school engagement in association with academic success and well-being in varying social contexts. *European Psychologist*, 18(2), 136–147. <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1027/1016-9040/a000143>
- Urhahne, D., & Wijnia, L. (2023). Theories of motivation in education: An integrative framework. *Educational Psychology Review*, 35, Article 45. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-023-09767-9>
- Van der Ross, M. R., Olckers, C., & Schaap, P. (2023). Crossover of engagement among academic staff and students during COVID-19. *Psychology Research and Behavior Management*, 16, 3121–3137. <https://doi.org/10.2147/PRBM.S416739>

- Wang, Y., & Li, M. (2021). The effect of perceived social support on learning burnout of normal university students: A moderated mediating model. *Chinese Journal of Special Education*, 11, 90–96.
- Wang, X., Yang, L., Chen, K., & Zheng, Y. (2024). Understanding teacher emotional exhaustion: Exploring the role of teaching motivation, perceived autonomy, and teacher-student relationships. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 14, Article 1342598. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1342598>
- Yin, Y., Toom, A., & Parpala, A. (2022). International students' study-related burnout: Associations with perceptions of the teaching-learning environment and approaches to learning. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13, Article 941024. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.941024>
- Zhang, B., Yin, X. & Ren, Z. (2024). Can perceived social support influence academic achievement of master's students? Evidence from a University in China. *Education and Information Technologies*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-024-12693-0>