

Original Article (Qualitative)

## Designing a School Integration Model for Secondary School Students: A Qualitative Study Based on the Delphi Technique

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**Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to design a school engagement model for secondary school students through a qualitative inquiry based on the Delphi technique. In terms of purpose, the research is applicable; and in terms of implementation, it follows a qualitative approach. The statistical population consisted of 20 experts who met criteria such as having managerial experience in secondary schools, holding academic degrees in educational planning, having teaching experience in universities and secondary schools, and possessing published articles or books in the related field. The sample was selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews, continued until theoretical saturation. The Delphi method was employed for data analysis. The findings indicated that the components of school engagement for lower secondary students include seven dimensions: (1) teaching methods (12 indicators), (2) motivation (11 indicators), (3) self-efficacy (4 indicators), (4) responsibility (4 indicators), (5) parental involvement (2 indicators), (6) communication (social) skills (6 indicators), and (7) school climate (15 indicators).

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## Extended Abstract

### Introduction

The school, as the first formal social institution after the family, plays an essential role in shaping the personality, identity, and future trajectory of adolescents. In every educational system, the school is not merely a place for transmitting academic knowledge; it is also a foundation for fostering social, ethical, and developmental competencies. Among the school levels, lower secondary education holds particular importance due to its coincidence with adolescence—a period marked by significant physical, psychological, and social changes. Students at this stage experience various developmental transitions, and their interaction with the school environment can have profound and lasting effects on their academic success and mental well-being in later years (Ahadi & Mohseni, 2019).

During this period, learners face numerous academic, developmental, and social challenges that may influence their future educational and career pathways (Moradi et al., 2017). When a student perceives themselves as an integral part of the school community and actively participates in school activities, their learning motivation, academic effort, and commitment to educational goals increase (Keramati & Zare, 2024). Conversely, weak school engagement may lead to risky behaviors, academic decline, frequent absenteeism, and eventually early dropout—an alarming issue for any educational system (Seyf, 2021).

School engagement, as a key construct in educational psychology, refers to the degree of meaningful, consistent, and multidimensional participation of students in the behavioral, emotional, cognitive, and agentic aspects of the learning environment (Wang et al., 2020; Skinner et al., 2016).

In the Iranian context, the limited existing studies reveal similar, and in some cases more profound, challenges. For instance, national research indicates that factors such as high exam pressure, rote-based teaching practices, weakened teacher–student relationships, and the lack of meaningful learning tasks can reduce the cognitive and emotional engagement of Iranian students (Farhadi et al., 2016).

Accordingly, the central question of this study is: *What is the model of school engagement for secondary school students based on a qualitative study using the Delphi technique?*

## Theoretical Framework

### School Engagement

School engagement refers to a comprehensive construct encompassing students' attitudes, behaviors, and interactions with the educational environment and members of the school community. It includes elements such as academic motivation, positive relationships with teachers and peers, understanding of instructional content, and active participation in school activities (Moradi et al., 2017).

Moradi Moghadam and Badri (2024) examined the mediating role of academic support and school climate in the relationship between quality of school life and academic vitality among lower secondary students during the 2022–2023 academic year. Their findings revealed significant positive relationships among quality of school life, academic support, school climate, and students' academic vitality. Quality of school life had a positive and significant direct effect on academic vitality ( $\beta = 0.32$ ), and through the mediating variables of academic support and school climate, it also exerted an indirect and meaningful influence on academic vitality. The researchers concluded that in order to enhance students' academic vitality, schools should focus on improving quality of school life, increasing academic support, and fostering a more positive school climate.

Rezaian and Araban (2020) investigated the relationship between academic engagement and organizational well-being among teacher-education university students in Lorestan Province.

The data analysis confirmed a significant and positive association between academic engagement and its components with students' organizational well-being.

### Research Methodology

This research employs a quantitative approach in terms of its objective and a qualitative approach in terms of its implementation method. The statistical population comprises 20 experts who possess specific qualifications, including: prior management experience in secondary schools, a university degree in educational planning, a teaching background in universities and secondary schools, and published articles or books within the relevant field. The sample size was determined through purposive sampling.

### Research Findings

The data were analyzed using the Delphi method. The results indicated that the components of school engagement for lower secondary students consist of seven major dimensions, including:

1. Teaching Method (12 indicators),
2. Motivation (11 indicators),
3. Self-Efficacy (4 indicators),
4. Responsibility (4 indicators),
5. Parental Participation (2 indicators),
6. Communication (Social) Skills (6 indicators),
7. School Climate (15 indicators).

### Conclusion

This study was conducted with the aim of designing a school engagement model for lower secondary students, employing a qualitative approach based on the Delphi technique. The findings of this research are consistent with previous studies, including those by Moradi Moghadam and Badri (2024), Rezaian and Araban (2020), Rezaei (2020), Johnson (2019), Smith (2019), Harris (2019), and Moradi et al. (2017). Specifically, Moradi Moghadam and Badri (2024) demonstrated a significant positive relationship between quality of school life, academic support, school climate, and academic vitality in lower secondary students. They found that quality of school life has a direct positive effect on academic vitality, and it indirectly influences academic vitality through the mediating roles of academic support and school climate. Their conclusion emphasizes that schools should strive to improve the quality of school life, enhance academic support, and foster a positive school climate to increase students' academic vitality.

Based on the research findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Involving students in school decision-making:** This could be achieved through the establishment of authentic student councils with the authority to propose internal regulations and provide feedback on class and project formats. Such involvement fosters a greater sense of ownership and value towards the school.
2. **Project-based and collaborative learning:** Instead of solely focusing on traditional subject-based instruction, interdisciplinary projects such as creating plays, producing science podcasts, or organizing environmental campaigns should be designed. This approach ultimately enhances intrinsic motivation and establishes a meaningful connection between academic content and real-life application.