

Beyond the Classroom: Understanding Male Students' Academic Engagement Journeys

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
Article type: Research Article	Academic motivation and engagement are critical factors influencing students' academic achievement, and understanding students' perspectives and lived experiences can provide insights for improving educational outcomes. This study aimed to explore academic engagement among male lower secondary school students in Tehran, Iran. Ten male students were purposively selected during the 2024-2025 academic year, and semi-structured interviews were conducted to capture detailed accounts of their experiences and perceptions. The data were analyzed using Corbin and Strauss's (2015) thematic analysis approach, which enabled the identification of key patterns, themes, and subthemes related to academic engagement. The analysis revealed four main themes, eight subthemes, and thirty-two initial codes, indicating that academic engagement is a multidimensional and dynamic process shaped by internal, social, environmental, and practical factors. Academic disengagement was found to extend beyond the classroom, involving broader social, familial, and individual contexts. Students' attitudes and behaviors were strongly influenced by teachers, parents, peers, and life experiences, while a sense of self-efficacy and confidence in their abilities enhanced active participation and further strengthened engagement. These findings suggest that academic engagement plays a vital role in students' learning, fostering constructive participation and improving performance. Schools should therefore implement programs that simultaneously enhance self-regulation, self-efficacy, and belief in personal abilities, while providing a supportive social environment for students.
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Introduction

Although multiple factors influence academic achievement in education, academic motivation and engagement are considered among the most influential factors ([How et al., 2024](#)). Motivation has been defined in terms of being moved to act: "To be motivated means to be moved to do something. A person who feels no impetus or inspiration to act is thus characterized as unmotivated, whereas someone who is energized or activated toward an end is considered motivated ([Ryan & Deci, 2000](#)). Students who lack motivation to succeed will not make additional efforts to attain rewards or recognition ([How et al., 2024](#)). According to [Zhang \(2021\)](#), learning motivation is the most critical factor affecting academic performance and learning outcomes. Enhancing motivation not only improves students' performance but also increases their enthusiasm for learning. Accordingly, teachers, by recognizing students' mindsets and motivations, can create a more effective and supportive learning environment that emphasizes mastery goals, values growth and effort, and provides opportunities to experience success and competence. Such an approach can strengthen self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation without relying on external rewards or pressures, ultimately leading to improved learning outcomes and the cultivation of lifelong learning ([How et al., 2024](#)). It is argued that one of the essential determinants of students' overall success in education is the extent of their academic engagement ([Derakhshan et al., 2021](#)). It is widely accepted that students who actively participate in the learning process and show interest in their education experience higher levels of learning ([Wang et al., 2021](#)). For this reason, educational institutions encourage students to utilize their abilities and learning opportunities, making use of available resources to participate actively in learning ([Xie & Derakhshan, 2021](#)). Conversely, dissatisfaction, boredom, negative experiences, and even school dropout are among the consequences of low academic engagement ([Derakhshan et al., 2021](#)). Research has shown that academic engagement is directly and indirectly associated with intelligence, interest, motivation, and enjoyment of learning across different domains ([Yin, 2018](#)). Indeed, academic engagement is a multidimensional construct shaped by perceptions, emotions, and motivation, and it is closely associated with self-determination theory in the domain of motivation ([Mercer & Dörnyei, 2020](#)). Moreover, motivation is a key factor in fostering learning, since the greater the students' motivation, the higher their likelihood of success ([Halif et al., 2020](#)). From a psychological perspective, motivation and academic engagement are closely intertwined ([Han & Wang, 2021](#)). However, motivation is a psychological phenomenon that is less directly observable, whereas academic engagement manifests itself through observable behaviors ([Reeve, 2012](#)). In other words, teachers cannot directly measure students' intrinsic motivation, but they can observe behavioral indicators of engagement in classroom activities such as problem-solving. Thus, unlike motivation, academic engagement appears to be a more tangible and concrete phenomenon ([Kong, 2021](#)). In response to traditional teacher-centered methods ([Che et al., 2021](#)) and with the growing tendency toward active and collaborative learning environments, educational institutions have increasingly shifted toward approaches that enhance participation, interest, and dynamic involvement among students ([Kong, 2021](#)). Both research and theory emphasize the significance of intrinsic motivation, autonomy, and a sense of competence in promoting long-term learning and psychological well-being ([Li & Wang, 2024](#)). Teachers can foster students' intrinsic motivation and active engagement by providing opportunities for choice, granting autonomy in managing their learning pathways, and strengthening their sense of mastery and achievement ([Teixeira et al., 2020](#)). Studies have further indicated that each student's needs and motivations are unique. Thus, teaching methods should be flexible and designed in alignment with individual differences ([Li & Wang, 2024](#)). Academic motivation significantly influences educational success and is strongly associated with a range of positive outcomes, including psychological well-being ([Li & Wang, 2024](#)). Numerous studies have shown that students with higher academic motivation exhibit greater psychological health, higher self-esteem, more positive attitudes, and lower levels of anxiety and depression ([Singh et al., 2023](#)). Recent studies have also indicated that students with high levels of intrinsic motivation demonstrate more consistent learning behaviors, such as regular class attendance, systematic study habits, and seeking assistance when needed. Scholars argue that this is attributable to these students' stronger sense of autonomy and greater control over their learning processes, which allows them to make more effective decisions about study strategies ([Albulescu et al., 2023](#)). Academic engagement, as a key component of motivation, plays a

fundamental role in shaping students' academic achievement and personal development. Since early adolescence represents a critical stage in the formation of individual, academic, and social identity, exploring students' perspectives and lived experiences can provide deeper insights into the factors influencing their academic engagement. Accordingly, identifying the dimensions and challenges related to academic engagement among male lower secondary school students constitutes an essential step toward developing effective educational and pedagogical strategies. Accordingly, the central focus of the present study is to investigate the perspectives, lived experiences, and challenges of academic engagement among male lower secondary school students

Method

The present study employed the grounded theory approach. Qualitative research is a form of social inquiry designed to understand, describe, and interpret human behaviors, emotions, and experiences. This method is considered particularly significant and appropriate in studies related to psychology and allied professions, where communication and interaction are central ([Holloway & Galvin, 2017](#)). In general, quantitative researchers assume the existence of a single reality that can be measured using scientific principles, whereas qualitative researchers seek to understand multiple constructed realities—realities that may hold different meanings for different individuals ([McCann & Polacsek, 2024](#)). Qualitative researchers collect, analyze, and interpret data that cannot easily be reduced to numerical values. Such data are closely tied to the social world, as well as to individuals' concepts and behaviors within a given context ([Anderson, 2010](#)). Qualitative research methodologies are particularly valuable for exploring complex social phenomena, as they allow researchers to capture participants' lived experiences within their natural settings, thereby providing deeper insights into social realities that quantitative approaches may overlook ([Mwita, 2022](#)). One of the fundamental principles of grounded theory is the simultaneous collection and analysis of data. These two processes are intertwined from the outset of the study, proceeding in parallel and continuously influencing one another ([McCann & Polacsek, 2024](#)). To do so, ongoing constant comparative analysis is required—an analytic strategy that guides theoretical sampling and continuous data collection. Examining data from different perspectives, posing analytic questions, conducting comparisons, following leads, and extending ideas all contribute to the development of theoretical sensitivity, a core element of grounded theory ([Bobbink et al., 2024](#)).

Sample and Sampling Method

Theoretical sampling involves the iterative process of collecting, coding, and analyzing data concurrently, where the researcher's emerging conceptual categories guide further data collection to refine and saturate the developing theory ([Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021](#)). In a grounded theory study, the recruitment of participants typically begins with purposive and criterion-based sampling from a specific population and context, in accordance with the research question ([Corbin & Strauss, 2015](#)). The inclusion criteria for the present study were as follows:

1. Students must be currently enrolled in lower secondary school.
2. Students must be among the top-performing ones in their school.

As the processes of data collection and analysis progressed, theoretical sampling was employed to gather new data for the purpose of comparing emerging categories. This type of sampling is carried out in accordance with the developing theory and continues until theoretical saturation is reached, i.e., the point at which no new categories are identified ([Corbin & Strauss, 2015](#)). In the present study, data from ten lower secondary school students reached saturation, as no further significant information was obtained, and the data began to repeat. The research population comprised all male lower secondary school students in Tehran during the 2024–2025 academic year. With the progression of data collection and analysis, sampling became more refined. Theoretical sampling helps researchers accurately represent concepts and obtain coherent data ([Corbin & Strauss, 1990](#)). To achieve this goal, researchers must formulate questions that identify individuals not yet represented in any provisional categories or that contribute to the further development of a category. Interviews with participants are considered the most common source of data in grounded

theory studies, as researchers seek to explain individuals' worlds from their own perspectives. Interviews provide an insider's view of the phenomenon under investigation, since one person (the researcher) asks questions of another (the participant) ([McCann & Polacsek, 2024](#)). However, interviews should not be the sole source of data in grounded theory research; rather, the data source must align with the nature of the research question and the objectives of the study ([Chun Tie et al., 2019](#)).

Tools Used

In this study, interviews were chosen as the primary source of data, given that the aim was to understand processes and changes in a context where the phenomenon was new, underexplored, and complex. All interviews were conducted in a one-on-one format between the researcher and participants, enabling an in-depth exploration of social, emotional, and personal issues. Employing open-ended questioning enabled participants to articulate their experiences in depth, thereby yielding data rich in detail and facilitating the emergence of unanticipated themes ([DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006](#)). Following a flexible interview guide, questions progressed from general to more specific. The interview protocol began with broad, open-ended questions and gradually moved toward more focused questions. The key research questions included:

- *Tell me about a time when you faced a challenge in your studies. How did you deal with it?*
- *What could help you feel more confident in your academic studies?*

Procedure

Coding in grounded theory is a cyclical process in which the researcher moves back and forth between different stages of coding throughout data collection and analysis ([Kenny & Fourie, 2015](#)). In other words, the researcher may simultaneously engage in multiple levels of coding. The process begins with open coding, during which raw data are broken down into discrete segments and concepts are identified ([Chun Tie et al., 2019](#)). This stage requires a close examination of the data and the posing of analytic questions ([Corbin & Strauss, 2015](#)). At this point, the data are labeled with conceptual tags. In the present study, the researcher initially conducted open coding manually: highlighting sections of text while reading transcripts and listening to recorded interviews, and noting down provisional themes and phenomena in the margins. Through line-by-line analysis, the data were carefully scrutinized, questioned, and segmented into meaningful units. Axial coding was carried out concurrently with open coding. This stage involved integrating fragmented data into a coherent whole. The researcher identified relationships between categories and subcategories, with each category serving as a central axis around which conceptual coherence was established. The third stage, selective coding, led to the refinement of the core categories. The researcher identified, clarified, and integrated relationships among categories, ultimately selecting an overarching core category that unified all others and explained the variations present in the data. At this stage, theoretical memos and diagrams played a key role in refining categories and synthesizing the emerging theory. By merging different strands of analysis into an explanatory framework, the data were ultimately transformed into a substantive theory. The trustworthiness of the data was established through four evaluation criteria proposed by [Guba and Lincoln \(1994\)](#). They suggested that the term trustworthiness could serve as an alternative to validity and reliability, encompassing four sub-criteria: credibility,

transferability, confirmability, and dependability. Finally, to comply with ethical standards, written informed consent was obtained from all participants by the researcher.

Table 1. The participants' demographic characteristics

Code	Age	Grade Level	Number of Siblings	Father's education	Mother's education	Economic Status	School Type
1	13	Seventh	1 brother	High diploma school	High diploma school	Moderate	Non-profit & Public
2	14	Ninth	Only child	Middle school	High diploma school	Moderate	Public
3	15	Ninth	2 brothers	Master's degree	High diploma school	Moderate	Public
4	15	Ninth	2 sisters	High diploma school	High diploma school	Good	Non-profit & Public
5	15	Ninth	1 sister	High diploma school	High diploma school	Moderate	Public
6	14	Eighth	1 brother	Middle school	Middle school	Moderate	Public
7	16	Ninth	2 sisters	High diploma school	High diploma school	Moderate	Public
8	14	Eighth	1 sister	High diploma school	High diploma school	Good	Public
9	15	Ninth	1 brother	High diploma school	High diploma school	Moderate	Public
10	13	Seventh	1 brother	High diploma school	High diploma school	Moderate	Public

Results

Analysis of the students' perspectives, life experiences, and challenges related to academic engagement revealed 4 main themes, 8 subthemes, and 32 initial codes as detailed in Table 2:

Table 2. The themes extracted from the interviews with students

Main themes	Subthemes	Initial codes
Inner-social dynamics of academic engagement	Intrapersonal and interpersonal motivational dimensions	Having goals and motivation, receiving positive feedback on mistakes, belief in one's abilities, effective communication with others, and academic independence
	Future-oriented learning	Effort and optimism toward the future; practicality of subjects; relevance of subjects to future careers; awareness of the importance and necessity of subjects; attractiveness of subjects
Nurturing factors of academic engagement	Supportive and motivational networks	Family support and encouragement; close relationship with teachers; reinforcement and positive feedback from parents; encouragement from teachers

	Cognitive and social learning connections	Parents' academic beliefs and attitudes; friends' academic beliefs and attitudes; attention and concentration; teaching methods of teachers; discussion of future careers; regular classroom questioning
Barriers to academic engagement	Structural and cultural barriers to learning	Overcrowded classrooms; teachers' strictness and humiliation; ridicule of diligent students; stereotypical career beliefs in the community
	Academic failures	Excessive parental monitoring and control; lack of achievement despite effort
Mechanisms for academic progress	Self-regulated academic behaviors	Daily study habits; completion of homework assignments; regular and continuous study
	Goal-oriented academic development initiatives	Academic planning, participation in scientific competitions, and consulting with academic advisors

Inner–Social Dynamics of Academic Engagement

These dynamics encompass intrapersonal and interpersonal motivational dimensions and future-oriented learning.

Intrapersonal and Interpersonal Motivational Dimensions

Intrapersonal and interpersonal motivational dimensions reflect a set of traits and capabilities that form the core of students' academic engagement. These dimensions include: having goals and motivation, receiving positive feedback on mistakes, belief in one's abilities, effective communication with others, and academic independence. Overall, interpersonal and intrapersonal motivation factors reflect students' inner strength, self-efficacy, and interpersonal skills, which enhance and guide the process of academic engagement.

"I study, but I'm a bit anxious about the lesson; I might be afraid it's pointless, but if I want to study, I can do it" (Participant #5).

"Classroom questioning, encouragement, and reducing our stress can motivate students" (Participant #1).

"I care about myself; others' opinions don't matter, and I have to motivate myself" (Participant #7).

Future-Oriented Learning

The future-oriented learning reflects students' attitudes toward the value, relevance, and importance of subjects in their academic and career paths. This type of learning orientation can foster motivation and a positive vision of the future, guiding students toward purposeful and sustained learning. This orientation includes effort and optimism about the future, practicality of subjects, relevance of subjects to future careers, awareness of the importance and necessity of subjects, and attractiveness of subjects.

"I must put effort into studying and be optimistic about the future" (Participant #6).

"I study creatively and understand how this course will be useful" (Participant #9).

Nurturing Factors of Academic Engagement

These factors include supportive and motivational networks and cognitive and social learning connections.

Supportive and Motivational Networks

Supportive and motivational networks reflect the support and effective interactions from students' social environment that facilitate motivation and engagement in learning. Such networks include family and teacher support, positive reinforcement, and continuous encouragement, which play a key role in strengthening academic engagement.

“My family is ordinary, but my mother is always worried and cares a lot about my school”
(Participant #8).

“The science teacher was organized and close to us. Teachers should maintain closeness and intimacy” (Participant #6).

Cognitive and Social Learning Connections

These connections include parents' academic beliefs and attitudes, friends' academic beliefs and attitudes, attention and concentration, teaching methods, discussion about future careers, and regular classroom questioning.

“My parents say education is useless because it takes time to get a good job” (Participant #4).

“My parents help with studying, guide how to study, and discuss future careers” (Participant #9).

Barriers to Academic Engagement

These barriers include structural and cultural learning barriers and academic failures.

Structural and Cultural Learning Barriers

These barriers represent factors that limit or disrupt the process of academic engagement, reducing students' motivation, confidence, and active participation. Barriers include overcrowded classrooms, teacher strictness and humiliation, ridicule of diligent students, and stereotypical career beliefs in the community.

“Most students are lazy, and the class is crowded with many students” (Participant #2).

“Some diligent students say pursuing studies leads to better jobs, but weaker students say you need connections; otherwise, education is useless” (Participant #9).

Mechanisms for Academic Progress

These mechanisms include self-regulated academic behaviors and goal-oriented academic development initiatives.

Self-Regulated Academic Behaviors

Self-regulated behaviors include daily study habits, completing homework, and regular and consistent studying.

“I need to try harder, study more myself, and teachers should not ridicule me if I don't understand” (Participant #4).

Goal-Oriented Academic Development Initiatives

These initiatives include academic planning, participation in scientific competitions, and consulting with academic advisors.

“The academic advisor told me to study quietly in my mind; I have a daily study plan. I also want to participate in school competitions and scientific research activities” (Participant #10).

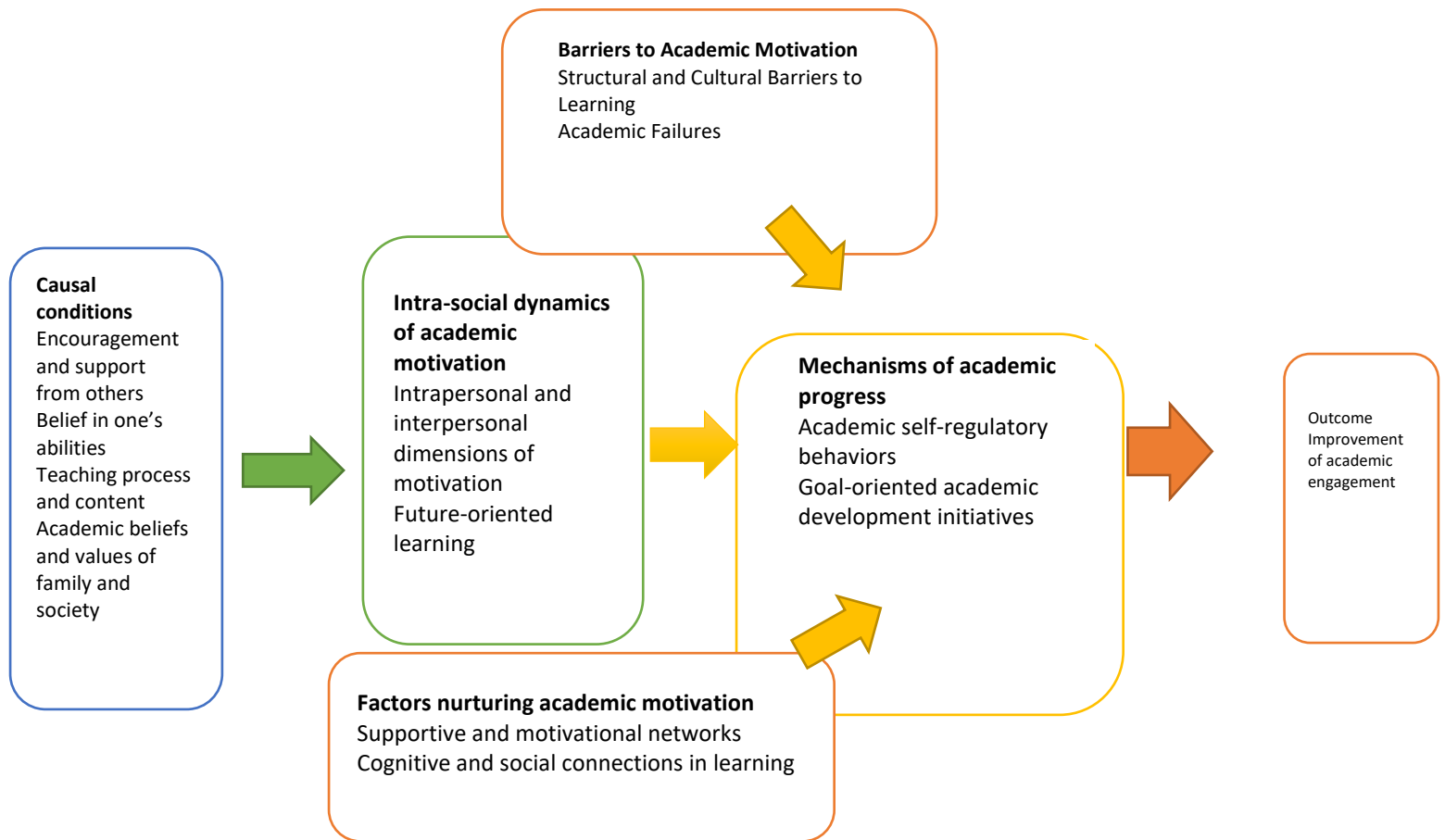


Figure 1. The conceptual model of high school students' perspectives, life experiences, and challenges related to academic engagement

Discussion

The findings from this study indicated that inner social dynamics of academic engagement involve intrapersonal and interpersonal motivational dimensions and future-oriented learning orientation. Intrapersonal and interpersonal motivational dimensions include having goals and motivation, receiving positive feedback on mistakes, belief in one's abilities, effective communication with others, and academic independence. This finding suggests that students develop engagement in learning through their internal abilities, attitudes, and perceptions rather than solely through external motivators. The presence of clear goals, intrinsic motivation, self-belief, and academic independence reflects self-efficacy and self-regulation. According to [Ryan and Deci \(2000\)](#), individuals can be inherently motivated to learn new things, and intrinsically motivated students demonstrate enjoyment and satisfaction while learning and applying their capabilities. Motivation theory identifies three fundamental psychological needs that, when fulfilled, enhance intrinsic motivation: autonomy (feeling in control of one's choices), competence (confidence in one's ability to achieve specific goals), and relatedness (feeling connected with others in the surrounding environment) ([Isik et al., 2018](#)). When students hold positive beliefs about their abilities, they are more likely to pay attention to classroom learning, strive for excellence, and pursue personal growth. Excessive

self-efficacy can sometimes lead to 'calibration error,' where students overestimate their mastery of the material. This overconfidence often results in reduced study effort and strategic preparation, ultimately impairing academic performance despite high initial confidence ([Dunlosky & Rawson, 2012](#)).

The participants in this study highlighted the importance of future-oriented learning, whereby students view learning beyond daily assignments and link it to future goals. Optimism about the future, the appeal and practicality of subjects, and the belief in their necessity for professional and social success give learning meaning for students. This search for meaning, along with the perceived importance and applicability of lessons, acts as a driving force for engaged effort. Accordingly, learning is understood as both academic study and as an investment in the future, positioning academic engagement not merely as an emotional state but as a long-term personal project. [Kusurkar et al. \(2011\)](#), in a review of related studies, also noted that motivation can be influenced by factors such as parental and teacher support, autonomy in learning, self-efficacy, and overall well-being. Other general studies similarly highlight factors such as self-efficacy, belief in control over circumstances, interest levels, classroom climate, valuing assignments, and learning objectives ([Isik et al., 2018](#)).

The findings from this study indicated that nurturing factors of academic engagement include supportive and motivational networks and cognitive and social learning connections. Moreover, supportive and motivational networks encompass family and teacher support, positive reinforcement, and continuous encouragement, all of which play a key role in strengthening academic engagement. This finding emphasizes the role of family, teachers, and peers in shaping and enhancing engagement. Family support and encouragement, teachers' positive feedback, peers' and parents' academic attitudes, and even teachers' instructional methods act as socio-emotional resources that facilitate learning. According to the findings, academic engagement is not solely the result of individual, intrinsic motivation but also requires a supportive social context. In line with this finding, [Asadpour et al. \(2025\)](#) systematically reviewed 38 studies spanning five decades and identified five teacher-related dimensions that shape students' academic motivation: support, teacher-student relationships, teaching practices and styles, teachers' own motivation, and teacher characteristics. Among these, teacher support—particularly for students' autonomy and sense of belonging—was found to be the strongest predictor of motivation, while intrinsically motivated teachers fostered better relationships and more supportive practices ([Asadpour et al., 2025](#)). Teacher-related factors encompass skills, competencies, and the ability to establish effective communication with students. In terms of content, elements such as fostering critical thinking and creating a sense of ownership and belonging in learning are important. Teaching methods are defined by positive interaction, encouragement, and constructive feedback. Finally, the learning environment is effective when it is empowering and emotionally supportive. Social support from teachers may take the form of emotional support or relate to teaching style. However, some students perceived that teacher support contributed the least to their learning process. In contrast, parental and family support has the most significant impact on students' academic motivation. This finding underscores the importance of global education efforts to provide social support from teachers, peers, and parents as a key requirement for learning ([Graciani Hidajat et al., 2020](#)). On the other hand, cognitive-social connections include parental academic beliefs and attitudes, peers' academic beliefs and attitudes, attentional focus and concentration, teaching methods, discussions about future careers, and regular classroom questioning. These cognitive-social connections reflect social valuation as well as cultural and generational beliefs that students experience in interaction with parents, peers, and teachers. They indicate that learning is not solely an individual activity but is shaped within and derives meaning from its social context, thereby influencing academic engagement. Consistent with the present study, other studies have shown that external factors, such as family and community influences, can significantly affect students' motivation and academic progress in science. Lack of parental support and negative stereotypes regarding scientific careers may reduce students' interest, while highly exam-oriented school cultures and intensive curricula can generate stress and diminish students' enjoyment of learning science ([Vedder-Weiss & Fortus, 2011](#)). Previous studies have also shown that students' perceptions of teaching quality are influenced by teachers' emotional self-regulation. Teachers who display negative emotions and distress in class are perceived to provide lower-quality instruction compared to teachers who demonstrate positive emotions. Studies indicate that teachers who express joy and enthusiasm are evaluated as delivering challenging and

conceptually rich lessons, whereas teachers showing anxiety and anger are perceived as providing inadequate and poor-quality instruction ([Rahman et al., 2024](#)). Attention to values is also critical, as it allows for the prediction of behavior ([Rahman et al., 2024](#)). One dimension of demotivation is the absence of value ([Ryan & Deci, 2000](#)). When an assignment is not important to a student or does not constitute a meaningful part of their life, demotivation arises. If an activity lacks intrinsic relevance or personal fit, the individual does not perceive their engagement as an expression of personal identity. When work tasks are perceived as incongruent with one's personal values or identity, they are often experienced as burdensome, which systematically undermines intrinsic motivation and engagement ([Ryan & Deci, 2017](#)). The present study showed that barriers to academic engagement include structural and cultural learning barriers and academic failures. Structural and cultural barriers encompass overcrowded classrooms, strictness and humiliation by teachers, mockery of high-achieving students, and societal stereotypes regarding professions. Academic failures include excessive parental control and the lack of achievements despite effort. These barriers indicate that, alongside supportive factors, there are obstacles that can weaken academic engagement. Classroom overcrowding, teacher strictness and humiliation, peer ridicule of diligent students, societal stereotypes regarding careers, and excessive parental control all reduce confidence and motivation. Experiencing failure despite effort also generates feelings of injustice and discouragement. This finding indicates that academic engagement is a vulnerable process that can be disrupted by pressures and inhibiting structures.

Finally, the findings from this study highlighted the significance of mechanisms for academic progress, including self-regulatory academic behaviors and purposeful growth-oriented initiatives. Self-regulatory behaviors include daily study, completing assignments, and consistent, structured learning. Consistent with this finding, previous studies have shown that sustainable learning strategies, such as effective time management, self-regulated learning, and seeking help when needed, are also recognized as critical factors in reducing stress, decreasing anxiety, enhancing academic engagement, and improving psychological well-being ([Li & Wang, 2024](#)). Goal-oriented academic initiatives include lesson planning, participation in scientific competitions, and consulting with academic advisors. Accordingly, students assume an active role in managing and improving their learning. Daily and systematic study, completing assignments, lesson planning, participating in competitions, and consulting with advisors are strategies that translate motivation into actionable behaviors. These strategies demonstrate that academic engagement is not merely a feeling or thought, but a deliberate and planned action, reinforced through continuous effort, structured planning, and the effective use of available opportunities. Conversely, low motivation and achievement in science among students may arise from various interrelated factors. One primary factor is students' perception that science is a difficult and abstract subject, leading them to feel incapable of mastering it. This perception is often exacerbated by ineffective teaching methods, in which teachers emphasize rote memorization rather than conceptual understanding and practical application ([Barlian et al., 2022](#)). Moreover, a lack of connection between the scientific content taught and students' everyday lives may reduce their interest and motivation. Another contributing factor is a less supportive learning environment, including inadequate laboratory facilities or limited opportunities to conduct experiments and scientific investigations ([Yuliati et al., 2022](#)). The study was limited to a small sample of male students from Tehran, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. Future studies should include larger and more diverse populations, explore female students' perspectives, and examine the long-term impact of targeted interventions on academic engagement.

Conclusion

Analysis of the perspectives, lived experiences, and challenges of academic engagement among male students in lower secondary schools revealed 4 main themes, 8 subthemes, and 32 initial codes. The results indicated that students' academic engagement is a multidimensional and dynamic process arising from the interaction of internal, social, environmental, and practical factors. Academic disengagement is a multifaceted phenomenon that extends beyond the educational domain, encompassing broader social, familial, and individual contexts. Students' attitudes and academic behaviors are strongly influenced by

tangible social factors within the learning environment and by their life experiences, with teachers, parents, and peers being particularly influential. Academic engagement plays a crucial role in the learning process. It can enhance students' participation in constructive learning activities and improve academic performance. Students who experience a sense of self-efficacy and belief in their own abilities are more likely to participate actively in class, thereby further strengthening their academic engagement. Accordingly, schools need to develop programs that simultaneously enhance students' self-regulation and self-efficacy skills, foster belief in their own abilities, and provide a supportive social environment. Such interventions can effectively promote and sustain students' academic engagement.

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