
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Expression of Adolescent's School Engagement

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| ABSTRACT

The article focuses on the analysis of adolescent's engagement in school life including in the process of education. The conducted theoretical analysis allows the conclusion that school students, who remain school disengaged, are distinguished by low academic achievements, behavioural problems and other learning problems. They have special educational needs learning disorders and they tend to abandon an educational institution early. The method of quantitative research is applied employing the international Student Engagement Instrument, which targets at emotional and cognitive engagement. The conducted data analysis revealed gender-based differences in adolescent's school engagement and particularly evident differences between school students in state and private educational institutions.

| KEYWORDS

Adolescent's school engagement, emotional and cognitive engagement, state and private educational institutions

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

The aim of contemporary school is associated with self-directed learners, who consciously engage in the process of education. Lately school engagement has been widely elaborated in searching for the answer to the question what factors predetermine school student's engagement in the educational process (Macklem 2015; Kizildag, Demirtas-Zorbaz, Zorbaz 2017). Allen, McGregor, Pendergast et al. (2019) provide the following reasons for non-engagement in school life: negative interaction with teachers and peers; school routine; academic failures; insufficient education on the issues that are of utmost importance in adolescence: personal, social, psychological, psychical and physical maturity, health education, including sexual education; bullying and manifestations of aggressive behaviour; unanswered special educational needs; learning difficulties and disorders; lesson and school absenteeism; problems of curriculum relevance and failure to properly evaluate the level of school learner's academic achievements and abilities. However, behavioural problems are usually the strongest evidence of disengagement and often a precursor to leaving school (Engaging Schools. Fostering High School Students' Motivation to Learn 2004). Adolescent's school engagement is particularly significant because positive adolescent's development, to a large extent, depends on their school engagement, which ensures overall education embracing cognitive, emotional and behavioural dimensions (Stovall 2003). The environment, which promotes independence, responsibility, personal self-expression and provides possibilities for self-cognition and adequate assessment, is particularly important for coping with adolescence problems, development of adolescent's self-respect and motivation for learning and positive behaviour. The adolescents, who consciously perceive the value of education, are characterized by self-efficacy, self-regulation, emotional engagement in self-expressive process of education and community as well as full participation in school activity. They also show higher academic achievements and personal accomplishments, which reinforce sense of belonging to school community, enhance their striving for experiencing success and strengthen their self-esteem (Bomia, Beluzo et al. 1997; Krause and Coates 2008; Wara, Aloka, Odongo 2018; Allen, McGregor, Pendergast, Ronksley-Pavia et al. 2019). Moreover, according to Macklem (2015), engagement in school life is related to the personality's stability in adolescence and also has influence on positive self-assessment. Engagement in school's life can be regarded as a protective factor from negative

effects emerging during the adolescence. Considering the presented theoretical insights *the problem question is formulated: what is the expression of adolescent engagement in school life?*

The object of research : expression of adolescent's engagement in school life.

The goal of research: to investigate the expression of school engagement of 6th-8th formers in Lithuanian general education institutions.

The objectives of research:

1. to conduct the analysis of scholarly literature on the analysed theme.
2. to investigate the expression of 6th-8th former's engagement in school life in Lithuanian general education institutions.

The research methods. The quantitative research strategy was employed to identify the expression of adolescent's engagement in school life and statistical differences among various indicators (gender, age, type of institution, etc.). The international Student Engagement Instrument targeted at emotional and cognitive engagement was used in the research. Statistical methods were applied to process the obtained data.

2. Theoretical tendencies in school learner's engagement

Bascia, Fine, and Levin (2017) state that engagement is relevant to the whole school community: school students, parents, peers and school administration. The school learners, who do not engage in school life, tend to possess only extrinsic motivation. Therefore, they attend lessons and complete assignments seeking to avoid punishment, bad academic evaluation or just seeking a reward. If a schoolchild makes every effort only to make an impression on others or to receive a reward, his/her motivation is weakening because a relevant element, i.e. an interest and pleasure to gain new knowledge and experience, is lost. The researchers (Connell and Wellborn 1991; Johnson, Crosnoe, and Elder 2001; Newmann 1992; Skinner and Belmont 1993; Smerdon 1999; Meyer, Turner 2002; Hu, Ching, Chao 2012) distinguish the factors that predetermine school student's engagement in school life and the process of education.

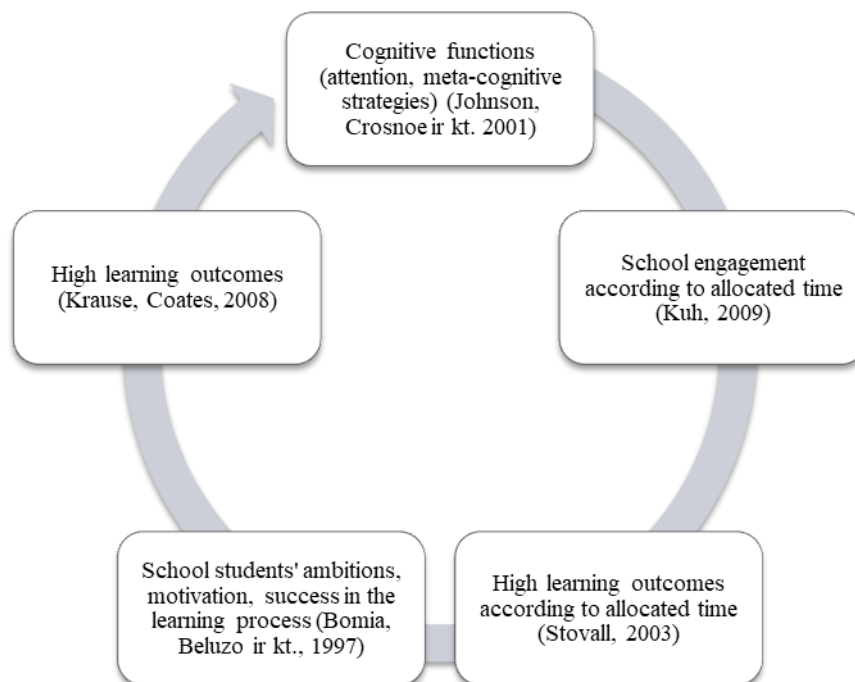


Fig. 1. Theoretical aspects of learner's school engagement

The researchers (Krause, Coates et al. 2008) emphasise that school student's engagement in learning and school life is predetermined by specific indicators, i.e. their high academic achievements (Krause, Coates 2008). Thus, if a child achieves high academic results, she/he is engaged in school and school life. However, the researchers (Allen, McGregor, Pendergast et al. 2019) suggest different interpretations emphasising that learner's engagement can forecast academic achievements as an outcome of school engagement. On the other hand, school student's engagement in learning activities is determined by their cognitive abilities (concentration, ability to solve problems employing meta-cognitive strategies) (Johnson, Crosnoe, Elder 2001). One more attitude prevails when school engagement is measured according to the allocated time (Kuh 2009) and is even related to high learning outcomes (Stovall 2003). Hence, by dedicating more time to learning, school students attain higher learning outcomes and this results in school engagement and involvement in life. A broader approach prevails in scientific research, which serves as basis explaining the concept of student's engagement. The researchers (Bomia, Beluzo, Demeester 1997) emphasise not only the eagerness of school students to take part in educational activities but also stress the learner's needs, possibilities and the success they experience in the process of education. This concept expands the understanding of engagement in school life from the child's individual desire or achievements to a broader context of family, school community, or peers.

The analysis of previous scientific research clearly discloses the structural parts of learner's school engagement. Following the insights of Allen, McGregor, Pendergast et al. (2019), Table 1 presents a detailed description of every component of school engagement.

Table 1. The structural parts of learner's school engagement and their components (compiled according to Allen, McGregor, Pendergast et al. 2019)

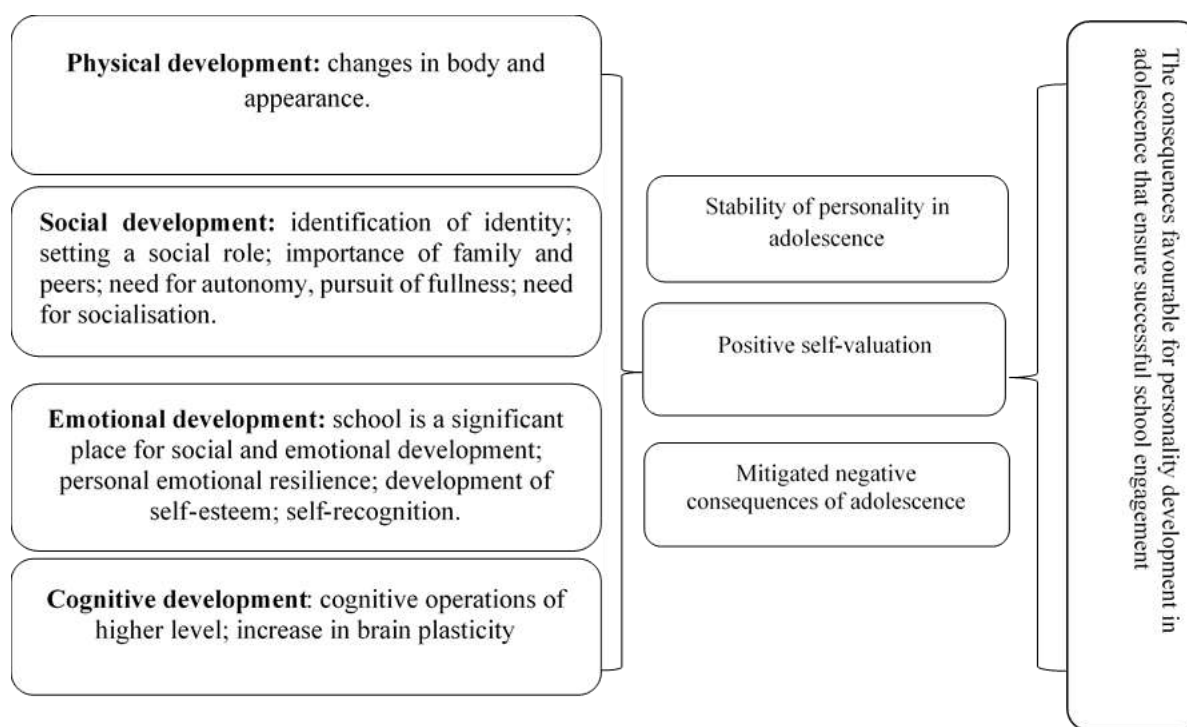
Cognitive engagement	Emotional engagement	Behavioural engagement
Volition learning (learning by choice); Efforts; Thoughtfulness (applying the process of deep thinking); Self-regulation; Goal setting; Use of meta-cognitive strategies; Preference for challenges; Resiliency and persistence; Mastery orientation.	Positive and negative reactions to teachers, classmates, academic activities and school; School student attitude; Perception of the value of learning; Interest and enjoyment; Happiness; Identification with school; Sense of belonging within school	Participation; Presence; Behaviour; Compliance with rules; effort, persistence, concentration, attention, Striving for quality or progress; involvement in school related activities.

The researchers (Jimerson, Campos, Greif 2003; Allen, McGregor, Pendergast et al. 2019) refer to cognitive, emotional and behavioural components linked with school engagement and the process of education. Macklem (2015) emphasises that cognitive engagement and emotional engagement are closely linked with evaluation of learning activities, their meaningfulness and their perception of values. According to Allen, McGregor, Pendergast et al. (2019), cognitive engagement embraces volition, self-regulation and personal efforts. Emotional engagement is based on school learner's emotions, and feelings and is related to constantly developing learner's motivation, which conditions cognitive and social engagement (Johnson, Crosnoe, Elder 2001; Newmann 1992; Macklem 2015). In this way, school students can socially engage in extra-curricular activities, communicating and collaborate at school, feel a sense of community and loyalty and share a joint trust in school and its community. Promotion of social engagement can be of high value because it serves as basis for motivation to attend and successfully finish school and link life perspectives with it. On the other hand, in the course of time, strengthening motivation results in cognitive or behavioural engagement, i.e. participation in various educational activities. It was established that 7th-10th formers experience positive emotions in the process of learning and successfully cope with academic challenges and evoking difficulties (Macklem 2015).

3. The importance of adolescence to engagement in school life

The goal of school is to ensure that every learner is rather actively engaged in the conducted activities, school life and ready to link own career perspectives with school. The previously conducted scientific research proved that the school engagement is strongest in primary school and then tends to weaken in secondary school. The divide between the school students, who are engaged and disengaged, considerably increases from the 8th to 10th forms (Macklem 2015). It was established that children most frequently start attending school with positive attitudes and they evaluate themselves quite high. However, school student's emotional well-being is daily influenced by school environment, teachers, friends and family members. Due to various academic and social roles, which are imposed on school learners, they have to evaluate their knowledge and skills again and to compare himself or herself with others. At the same time, the period of adolescence is marked by the crisis of learning, when an adolescent perceives himself or herself and own abilities anew, experiences considerable changes in physical, cognitive and psycho-social development. In the period of physiological changes adolescents are particularly sensitive to their body changes and concerned about their appearance and also emotionally react to remarks from adults and peers about their appearance and this may lead to certain discomfort while communicating with with peers and adults and require additional intentions trying to retain the wish to attend school.

Fast psycho-physical development that occurs in the period of adolescence leads to internal contradictions and balancing between aspirations and possibilities, striving for autonomy and socialisation needs, belonging to a group of peers and becoming a full member of society, acknowledgment of the Self and a sense of uncertainty that encourages the search for personal identity. Allen, McGregor, Pendergast et al. (2019) present the areas of development, which fall under responsibility of educational institutions (Fig. 3).



The factors that predetermine adolescents' successful engagement in school life (compiled according to J. Allen, G. McGregor, D. Pendergast et al., 2019).

The presented figure shows that physical, social, emotional and cognitive development presupposes the individual's stability in adolescence, positive self-evaluation and mitigation of negative consequences of adolescence, which, according to Allen, McGregor, Pendergast et al. (2019), are important for school engagement. Social development, when the main role is played by the family or peers, is considered to be of high relevance. The relations with parents, teachers, friends and other environments, which are important to the adolescent, provides him/her with a sense of security, self-confidence and confidence in own inner powers. On the contrary, absence of such relations may lead to anxiety, vulnerability and alienation. At the same time, adolescence is a period, when children are gradually getting more and more independent from parents and when the relations of adolescents

with their family undergo certain transformations. Transformations manifest themselves in limited sociability - friendship with adults is not acceptable to them because adults do not always tend to acknowledge their autonomy and a wish to act independently. Various motives may encourage adolescents to affiliate themselves with a group. Most frequently in a group, an adolescent seeks to satisfy his/her emotional needs: community, acknowledgment and absence of control. The researchers, who analysed the influence of peer group on adolescents (Sukkyung 2011, Biesta 2014), put emphasis on the role of group as a significant mediator between the personality and society, which can also enhance or weaken school engagement.

As it was pointed out in the figure above, positive self-evaluation plays a significant role in adolescent's school engagement. The research studies show that a relatively clear and stable identity make people more resistant, reflective and more independent implementing important life decisions and simultaneously strengthen a sense of competence (Kroger, Martinussen, Marcia 2010).

Conducting the research on adolescence, Jones, Deutsch (2013) point out a significant factor for school student's engagement: adolescents have to feel safe while experimenting and making mistakes. Adolescence is accompanied by new experience, trials and errors. To understand who you are and to express yourself requires courage and this may lead to a risk and discomfort. Favourable school climate, which promotes adolescent's self-expression, can encourage adolescents to assume risk, cope with discomfort and emerging challenges.

4. The research methodology

The quantitative method was used to conduct the research. The international Student Engagement Instrument, which consisted of 35 questions focusing on two blocks, i.e. on emotional and cognitive engagement and six areas that make up them, was used.

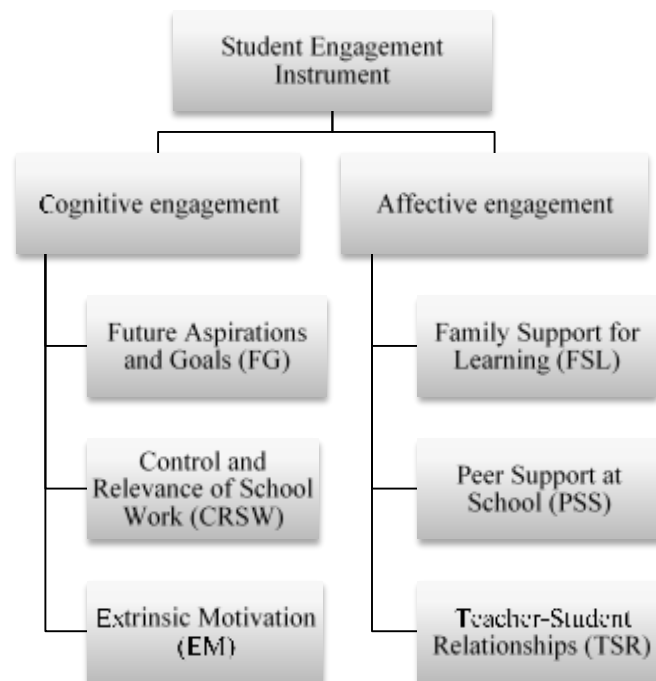


Fig. 4. The research instrument of school student's engagement

The group of emotional engagement comprises three essential components: teacher-learner relations; peer support at school; family support in learning. Cognitive engagement consists of the following components: importance and control of school activity; future aspirations and goals; extrinsic motivation.

Seeking to identify correlations between adolescent school engagement and their academic achievements, the research instrument was also supplemented with a form of demographic variables, which targeted at the age, gender, the average mark of study subjects and the number of missed lessons of the participants. The qualitative research data were processed applying the methods

of descriptive statistics, the Mann–Whitney U test as an instrument of non-parametric comparison of two independent samples, and the Kruskal–Wallis test for two or more independent samples.

5. Empirical insights of adolescent's school engagement

Processing the data obtained during the research on the adolescent's engagement in school life, the the aspect of gender was considered (Table 2).

Table 2. School engagement of 6th-8th formers: the aspect of gender

Scales	Gender	N	Mean rank values	Mann-Whitney U	P value
Emotional engagement. Family Support for Learning.	Girl	121	137,25	8319	NS
	Boy	145	130,37		
Emotional engagement. Teacher-Student Relationships.	Girl	121	126,33	7904,5	NS
	Boy	145	139,49		
Emotional engagement. Peer Support at School.	Girl	121	125,79	7840	NS
	Boy	145	139,93		
Cognitive engagement. Control and Relevance of School Work.	Girl	121	133,60	8761	NS
	Boy	145	133,42		
Cognitive engagement. Future Aspirations and Goals.	Girl	121	140,62	7910,5	NS
	Boy	145	127,56		
Cognitive engagement. Extrinsic Motivation.	Girl	121	120,23	7167	0,008
	Boy	145	144,57		

Note: NS – statistically not significant difference

The analysis of research data in terms of gender disclosed only one statistically significant difference. As can be seen from the presented table, the cognitive engagement of boys (mean rank – 144.57; Mann-Whitney U = 7167; $p < 0.01$), which is related to extrinsic motivation, is more expressed. This shows that boys tend to link learning with extrinsic motivation (rewards and praises) from teachers and family more than girls.

The boy's school engagement was further studied considering the sector of state and private schools (Table 3).

Table 3 . School engagement of boys attending state and private schools

Scales	School	N	Mean rank values	Mann-Whitney U	p value
Emotional engagement. Teacher-Student Relationships.	Private	51	95,36	1256	<0,05
	State	94	60,87		
Emotional engagement. Peer Support at School.	Private	51	87,51	1657	<0,05
	State	94	65,13		
	Private	51	92,46	1404	

Cognitive engagement. Future Aspirations and Goals.	State	94	62,44		<0,05
Cognitive engagement. Extrinsic Motivation.	Private	51	58,08	1636	<0,05
	State	94	81,10		
Statistically significant difference was not identified:	Emotional engagement. Family Support for Learning				
	Cognitive engagement. Control and Relevance of School Work				

Note: NS – statistically not significant difference

The research data reveal that the emotional engagement of boys attending private schools is higher in the following respects. The teacher-student relations that promote engagement in school life prevail in private schools and peer support provided at school is also strongly expressed among boys learning in non-state educational institutions. The differences were also established in cognitive engagement, when future ambitions and goals are strongly expressed in private schools, whereas students of state schools, as it has been mentioned above, tend to be driven by extrinsic reinforcement of learning more.

It is necessary to note that no statistically significant differences were identified referring to family support in learning and to importance and control of school activity.

School engagement of girls was analysed in terms of all the parameters. The research results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. School engagement of girls attending state and private schools

Scales	School	N	Mean rank values	Mann-Whitney U	p value
Emotional engagement. Teacher-Student Relationships.	Private	33	86,53	609	<0,05
	State	88	51,43		
Cognitive engagement. Future Aspirations and Goals.	Private	33	73,17	1050	<0,05
	State	88	56,54		
Cognitive engagement. Extrinsic Motivation.	Private	33	41,62	812	<0,05
	State	88	68,27		
Statistically significant difference was not identified:	Emotional engagement. Family Support for Learning.				
	Emotional engagement. Peer Support at School.				
	Cognitive engagement. Control and relevance of school work.				

Elaborating on the girl's engagement in school life, it should be noted that fewer statistically significant differences were established compared to the boy's engagement. The data in Table 2 show that girls from private schools lay more emphasis on the importance of teacher-student relations as well as on future aspirations and goals/life/career perspective, which are related to

the perception of the importance of education. A bigger number of girls from state schools prefer extrinsic reward, which, in their opinion, promotes further learning.

Since school learners attending 6th-8th forms fall under different groups of adolescence, i.e. they are attributed to early and middle periods, significant differences should be analysed comparing the aforesaid groups. The research results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. School engagement of early and middle adolescents

Scales	Forms	N	Mean rank values	Kruskal Wallis Test	p value
Emotional engagement. Family Support for Learning.	6th	87	156,45	12,262	<0,05
	7th	64	121,35		
	8th	115	122,90		
Emotional engagement. Teacher-Student Relationships.	6th	87	162,93	20,315	<0,05
	7th	64	110,38		
	8th	115	124,11		
Emotional engagement. Peer Support at School.	6th	87	140,77	6,446	<0,05
	7th	64	112,37		
	8th	115	139,76		
Cognitive engagement. Control and Relevance of School Work.	6th	87	156,76	11,997	<0,05
	7th	64	119,56		
	8th	115	123,66		
Cognitive engagement. Extrinsic Motivation.	6th	87	117,44	11,874	<0,05
	7th	64	123,33		
	8th	115	151,31		
Statistically significant difference was not identified	Cognitive engagement. Future Aspirations and Goals.				

Note: NS – statistically not significant difference

A big number of statistically significant differences were identified analysing the obtained data according to school forms. It is obvious that 6th formers are strongly engaged in school life compared to 7th or 8th formers. Analysing the data that reflect emotional engagement, it can be seen that 6th formers emphasise the family support in learning (mean rank – 156.45), stress the importance of teacher-student relations. Moreover, peer support in learning is important not only for 6th formers but also for 8th formers because the mean ranks of sixth formers (140.77) and the eighth formers (139.76) are higher than that of 7th formers (mean rank – 112.37) (chi square - 6.446; $p < 0.01$). The statistical research data show a very small difference between the 7th formers and 8th formers (chi square - 12.262; $p < 0.01$). Cognitive engagement, as an understanding of importance of own learning and its controlling, is more characteristic of sixth formers, whereas issues related to intrinsic motivation are emphasised more by eighth formers. Extrinsic motivation, which is an indicator of learner's engagement, is stronger expressed among eighth formers (mean rank – 151.31) than among sixth (mean rank – 117.44) or seventh (mean rank – 123.33) formers (chi square – 11.997; $p < 0.01$).

Generalising these data, it is obvious that sixth formers are more engaged in school life both in the context of personal learning control and in that of support received from family and teachers.

Having taken into account the fact that the issues of state and private schools as well as possibilities and learning conditions that they provide, evoke numerous discussion in contemporary society, school learner's engagement was studied according to the type of school attended by the students in the research (Table 6).

Table 6. School engagement of school learners attending state and private schools

Scales	School	N	Mean rank values	Mann-Whitney U	p value
Emotional engagement. Teacher-Student Relationships.	Private	84	181,39	3621	<0,05
	State	182	111,40		
Emotional engagement. Peer Support at School.	Private	84	154,21	5904	<0,05
	State	182	123,94		
Cognitive engagement. Future Aspirations and Goals.	Private	84	164,35	5053	<0,05
	State	182	119,26		
Cognitive engagement. Extrinsic Motivation.	Private	84	102,24	5018	<0,05
	State	182	147,93		
Statistically significant difference was not identified:		Emotional engagement. Family Support for Learning.			
		Cognitive engagement. Control and Relevance of School Work.			

Note: NS – statistically not significant difference

This research data also shows that the emotional engagement of schoolchildren from private schools is particularly obvious. The adolescents from private schools emphasise the teacher-student relations more (mean rank – 181.39) than students from state schools (111.40) (Mann – Whitney U = 7167; $p < 0.01$) and stress peer support more (mean rank – 154.21) compared to their peers from state educational institutions (123.94) (Mann – Whitney U = 5904; $p < 0.01$). Cognitive engagement predetermined by future aspirations and goals is also more typical of learners from private schools (mean rank – 164.35) compared to the ones from state schools (mean rank – 119.26) (Mann – Whitney U = 5053; $p < 0.01$). The learning of adolescents from state schools is more often driven by extrinsic motivation (mean rank – 147.93) compared to learners from private schools (mean rank – 102.24) (Mann – Whitney U = 5018; $p < 0.01$).

6. Conclusions

The article analyses a relevant topic, i.e. school learner's engagement in school life and, at the same time, in the process of education in its broad sense. The conducted theoretical analysis allows concluding that school students, who remain school disengaged, are distinguished by low academic achievements, behavioural problems and face other learning problems. They have special educational needs, learning disorders and they tend to abandon an educational institution early.

The research data show that engagement of learners in school life in adolescence is most difficult and the ones, who distance themselves from school, encounter limited social links. Their psychosocial developmental is disturbed. Human interaction is understood as the primary plane for the individual's self-discovery and establishment because while communicating people always expect feedback, which can be identified as a need to consider various impulses received from others. Every individual has a referential group, which is of utmost importance for adolescents in particular - the more they feel necessary for the group and believe in their own contribution to the well-being of the group. The deeper is their sense of social interest and engagement in

school life. On the other hand, when a learner succeeds in meeting the prevailing standards of school and fulfil own aspirations, s/he experiences a sense of self-pride, his/her motivation and self-efficacy are enhanced.

Stronger school engagement of sixth formers can be explained by the fact that this age represents the early adolescence, which is more characterised by physiological changes. They experience smaller cumulation of psychical changes compared to middle adolescents, i.e. 7th and 8th formers. It is in the middle adolescence, when considerable changes in cognitive and psychosocial development occur and evaluations from social requirements become highly significant.

The research results disclosed only one significant difference between the gender and school engagement. The boy's learning and meta-cognitive functions are more conditioned by extrinsic motivation.

Emotional engagement of boys learning in private schools was higher from the perspective of teacher-learners relations and stronger expressed adolescent support. The differences were also identified in cognitive engagement, when future ambitions and goals were strongly expressed among boys learning in private schools. As mentioned above, students from state schools are more influenced by extrinsic reinforcement for learning.

It is necessary to note that statistically significant changes were not identified referring to the family support in learning and to the importance and control of school activity. The present research also considered the issue of state and private schools. The school students from private schools tend to be more engaged in school life, whereas extrinsic motivation is more characteristic of school students from state schools.

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Summary

The aim of contemporary school is associated with self-directed learners, who consciously engage in the process of education. The research revealed that engagement in school life tends to weaken namely in the period of adolescence. At the same time it is acknowledged that positive adolescent development, to a large extent, depends on their school engagement, which ensures overall education that embraces cognitive, emotional and behavioural dimensions. The adolescents, who consciously perceive the value of education, are characterized by self-efficacy, self-regulation, emotional engagement in self-expressive process of education and community as well as by full participation in school activity, show higher academic achievements and personal accomplishments, which reinforce senses of belonging to school community, enhance their striving for experiencing success and strengthen their self-esteem. Involvement in school's life can be regarded as if a protective factor from negative effects emerging during the adolescent period. Considering the relevance of the analysed theme, the problem question is formulated: what is the expression of adolescent engagement in school life? *The goal of research:* to investigate the expression of school engagement among Lithuanian adolescent learners. The research sample included 288 school learners of 6-8 forms from Lithuanian state and private schools. The quantitative method was used to conduct the research. The international Student Engagement Instrument, which consisted of 35 questions focusing on two blocks, i.e. on emotional and cognitive engagement, was used. The group of emotional engagement is determined by three essential components: teacher-learner relations; peer support at school; family support in learning. Cognitive engagement embraces the following components: importance and control of school activity; future aspirations and goals; extrinsic motivation. Seeking to identify correlations between adolescent school engagement and their academic achievements, the research instrument was also supplemented with a form of demographic variables, which targeted at the age, gender, the average mark of study subjects and the number of missed lessons of the participants. The qualitative research data were processed applying the methods of descriptive statistics, the Spearman's correlation analysis and regressive analysis. The research data revealed only one significant difference between the gender and school engagement. Cognitive learning and meta-cognitive functions of boys were more dependent on extrinsic motivation. Emotional engagement of boys learning in private schools was higher from the perspective of teacher-learners relations and stronger expressed adolescent support. The differences were also identified in cognitive engagement, when future ambitions and goals were stronger expressed in private schools. As it has been mentioned above, learners from state schools are more influenced by extrinsic reinforcement for learning. It should be noted that statistically significant differences were not established referring to family support in learning and to importance and control of school activity. The presented research also touched upon the issue of private and state schools. The processed results revealed that school engagement was stronger expressed among learners from private schools. More adolescents, who tend to ground their learning on extrinsic motivation, were found in state schools.

