

## **Digging Deep in Students` Engagement in Bahrain: Contributions From Academic Self-Efficacy and Academic Resilience**

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**Abstract-** Popular studies have outlined the prominence of psychological components like self-efficacy and resilience on individual behaviors and outcomes. Sadly, there is a severe paucity of research on how university students` wellbeing factors like engagement could be enhanced. The current study sampled 125 university students from a reputable private university in Kingdom of Bahrain whilst applying structural equation modeling to test statistical relationship between academic self-efficacy and academic resilience with students` engagement. The results revealed that both (academic self-efficacy and academic resilience) were positively related with students` engagement. The initial study addresses this critical research gap in the arena of students` engagement across the middle eastern region. The paper also presents critical explanations and potential approaches through fostering self-efficacy and resilience of the university students to enhance their engagement followed by limitations and scope for further study.

**Keywords:** University Students, Engagement, Academic Self-Efficacy, Academic Resilience, Psychological Capital, Bahrain

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### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Education and academia are becoming increasingly dynamic in the global age. Talking about higher education, Marginson and Van Der Wende (2007) have highlighted that research universities are striving hard to gain competitive advantage over one another through producing positional graduates for the job market. This means greater responsibility on the shoulders of top institutional authorities to outline how they could help their students

to enhance their outcomes and end results to sustain competitively.

University studies according to Philips and Pugh (2012) are unlike other contemporary degree programs offered by higher education institutions. They involve a variety of different features that are unique from conventional graduate and undergraduate programs. As Bayram and Bilgel (2008) have pointed out that higher education programs require a lot of individual work and efforts. The authors also mention that this self-effort is

important for students in the higher education to be capable of working independently to enhance their connectivity with the studies and hence, obtain good grades.

According to Han (2005), that university students are generally expected to work independently with little support and assistance, which is why the degree program becomes complex and critical in nature. Hence, the difference in the nature and context of the university program makes it important for students to pay individual attention on them as the empirical results of studies conducted on students from other university or school level programs could not be generalized.

Notably, empirical studies have delineated 'engagement as a psychological state of mind that helps an individual to work with high energy, vigor, and dedication' (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Accordingly, scholarly work has also highlighted that individuals engaged in their job, tasks, roles and/or assignments tend to produce far better results compared to the ones who aren't. This, hence, indicates towards the critical significance of examining students, who enroll for degree studies in particular. Regrettably, there is little known as to what potentially or how, university students' engagement could be enhanced (e.g. Šehidić & Junuz, 2016; Jayakumar, 2016; Yanga & Yenb, 2016; Mohammadian & Dolatabadi, 2016; Alhawiti & Abdelhamid, 2017; Dandan & Marques, 2017; Frima and Ghina, 2017 ; 2018; Ahmed, Umrani, Pahi & Shah, 2017; Anyi, 2017; Muthuselvi & Ramganes, 2017; Adedoyin & Okere, 2017; Houcine & Sofiane, 2018).

As engagement is concerned with bringing energy, vigor, and dedication; there are evidences, suggesting lack of student engagement in different academic and learning activities. For instance, Pointius and Harper (2006) in their review have indicated towards the lack of graduates and further degree level students' engagement

in studies. The authors have also highlighted it as an urgent issue to resolve. Similarly, Hannon and D'Netto (2007) have underlined that student engagement in online communication technologies. Accordingly, Adams et al., (1996) empirically highlighted lack of student engagement in education, learning, and feelings of no responsibility. Similarly, the issue of poor engagement amongst university level students can also be traced. Cardona (2013) has outlined towards the notion of lack of students' engagement due to variety of different reasons. The empirical findings have outlined that since degree level students are not showing engagement within their program, they result in lack of motivation towards the courses/modules. Thus, the issue pertaining to university students and their engagement is apparently lacking robust empirical studies to outline the possible features of value in this regard.

Importantly, studies in the commercial sector have outlined that psychological resources like self-efficacy and resilience can significantly enhance engagement (Ahmed, Phulpoto, Umrani & Abbas, 2015; Xanthopoulou et al., 2009). However, there exists hardly any empirical evidence, examining about the role of such factors on university level students' engagement as per our knowledge, particularly in this part of the world. This study was thus initiated to examine how students' academic efficacy and academic resilience can be of great value and significance in nurturing the engagement of degree level university students.

## **2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Student Engagement**

In general, engagement is a psychological state of mind and mental connectivity that brings energy, absorption, and dedication (Ahmed, Majid & Zin, 2016b; Christenson et al., 2012; Rothbard, 2001). Review of the literature has underlined several

commonly used terms when referred to engagement. Popular empirical studies have mainly termed and investigated the concept as employee engagement (Crawford, LePine, & Rich, 2010; Saks, 2006; Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002) and work engagement (Mozammel & Haan, 2016; Schaefer et al., 2008; Bakker, Gierveld, & Rijswijk, 2006; Sonnentag, 2003).

Student engagement as defined by Newmann, Wehlage, and Lamborn (1992) is 'psychological involvement and investment of a student towards learning and acquiring the necessary skills.' Engaged people invest their full selves into work roles whereby they don't even realize how times passes by (Bakker, 2011). Based on this, it can be said that students' engagement would be their psychological connection and energetic absorption towards their learning. Student engagement has empirically found to be enhanced through numerous components such as classroom climate, academic achievement, instruction and teaching, teacher behavior etcetera (e.g. Reyes et al., 2012; Denny, 2013; Dreher, 2013; Skinner & Belmont, 1993).

Accordingly, student engagement can bring multiple benefits such as learning (Karini, Kuh, & Klein, 2006), achievement and grades (Akey, 2007; Kuh et al., 2008), student motivation (Skinner & Belmont, 1993). Hence these empirical evidences have ascertained that students' engagement in academia can be robust significance in numerous ways.

Notably, there have been studies, exploring how students' research quality could be improved at the university level (Waldinger, 2010) or how their motivation towards projects could be enhanced. Yet, how university students' engagement could be nourished remains dominantly uninvestigated. Henceforth, the present study identified strong reasons to see how the engagement of university level students could be enhanced in particular.

## **2.2 Academic Self-Efficacy**

Bandura (1977) has referred academic self-efficacy as 'individual's beliefs about their abilities to produce designated level of academic outcomes. According to Luthans (2004) that self-efficacy can help individuals to boost their potential and abilities for encountering challenges. Notable authors (McTigue et al., 2009; Zimmerman et al., 1992) have highlighted the importance of academic self-efficacy for academic success. In the views of Schunk and Meece (1992) that students who perceive high efficacious behaviors are able to engage themselves in class lectures and activities. Self-efficacy in academics concerns with the views and beliefs of students as whether they can perform some class work/academic responsibilities or not. Prominently, self-efficacy enhances individual willingness towards the tasks (Bandura, 1997) whereby it is important to note that the general self-efficacy levels of an individual may not be same in all other tasks in specific (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2003). This argument in line with the current study hence suggests that it is not necessary that the general efficacy levels of the students would yield equally positive behaviors in relation with their studies. Students perceive their academic self-efficacy and how it is contributing towards their engagement with studies. Additionally, university students have to do a lot of individual work (Bayram & Bilgel, 2008)), it would be more important to outline how these psychological prospects could enhance their engagement. Study by Xanthopoulou et al. (2009) found a positive association between self-efficacy and work engagement amongst 163 employees from an engineering company in Netherlands. Maslach and Leiter (2008) have also stated that individuals who are engaged with their tasks have found to be high in self-efficacy.

***H1: Academic Self-Efficacy will be positively related with student engagement.***

### **2.3 Academic Resilience**

Resilience is a psychological condition which entails 'a person's ability to handle stress, complication, and adversity'. (Hobfoll, Johnson, Ennis, & Jackson, 2003). Accordingly, academic resilience refers to the ability of student to 'sustain motivation and focus despite of stressful and adverse occurrences in studies' (Alva, 1991). The idea of academic resilience dated back to early 90s when Alva discussed as to how students can handle and manage hardships and adverse situations in their studies to obtain better results. Borman and Overman (2004) have suggested that the extent to which students' need for resilient behavior depends upon the nature of stress and complications faced by them in their studies. Dunn, Iglewicz, and Moutier (2008), in their study, has empirically outlined that students experience numerous stresses during their studies which damages their performance. Academic resilience therefore enables students to tackle these stressors responsively and enhance their psychological wellbeing.

Studying at university level is generally more complicated since they involve a lot of writing, assessments, activities and extensive examinations (Clark, 1998), which hence requires a lot of individual work with little support from other prospects (Han 2005); the importance and necessity of the students being academically resilient can be evidently noticed. Moreover, resilience enables individuals to handle stressors so that they do not affect individuals behaviors like engagement (Bakker, Gierveld, & Rijswijk, 2006) whereas in academics, resilient behavior can help students to proactively handle challenges and hurdles

and constantly reengaging in their studies (Skinner & Pitzer, 2012). Thus, it would be interesting to find how academic resilience could be of great prominence towards students' engagement.

***H2: Academic resilience will be positively related to students' engagement.***

There is a severe gap in the research pertaining to the influence and significance of academic self-efficacy and academic resilience on students' engagement globally as well as across the GCC region. Recently, Bahrain is considered to be a highly attractive educational destination with many foreign universities partnering with the local universities in the country (OBG, 2017). Thus, the findings of the current study can be responsively beneficial for higher education universities and institutions to uplift their students' capabilities for better academic performance. Following the explanations of Conservation of Resources theory (COR) (Hobfoll, 1989), the current study aimed to test how resources may significantly enhance individual behaviors and outcomes. Xanthopoulou et al. (2009) have empirically outlined that self-efficacy and resilience are crucial psychological resources to foster individual behaviors (engagement).

## **3.0 METHODOLOGY**

### **3. Population and Sampling Technique**

Students from a Private university in Bahrain were selected to respond. Reason behind choosing a private university was that they have more research and development facilities and expertise due to which, they attract more foreign graduates from across the globe compared to public universities (Hansen, 2013). The unit of analysis was kept individual since the engagement is an individual level component and can only be outlined by the individual itself (Kahn, 1990).

Through using simple random sampling technique and self-administered data collection approach, students enrolled during the Spring 2018 session were targeted. Krejcie and Morgan table was used for outlining the sample size for 478 enrolled students during that session. The table suggested 159 as the minimum number of responses for effective analysis and research generalization. A total of 139 questionnaires were received back out of which 18 were not properly filled and hence, were discarded. Conclusively 125 responses were taken further for findings and analysis. Table 1 provides key demographic details of the respondents.

### **3.2 Measures**

9-item Utrecht University engagement scale (UWES) was adapted to measure students' engagement (Schaefeli et al., 2006). The scale is widely used and significantly validated across several countries (Ahmed, Majid & Zin, 2016a). Recent study (Balducci, Fraccaroli, & Schaufeli, 2015) reported cronbach alpha of .92 for the UWES scale. The scale included questions that questioned students about their energy, dedication, and absorption towards studies. Accordingly, 5-item academic Self-efficacy scale was adapted from Patterns for adaptive learning scales (PALS). Midgley et al., (2000) reported cronbach alpha .78 for the scale in their study. Lastly, 6-item scale on academic resilience was adapted from Martin and Marsh (2006). All the constructs were assessed on 5-point likert scale where, 5 referred to strongly agree and 1 denoted as strongly disagree.

### **3.3 Findings**

Hypothesized relationships were tested through using structural equation modeling (SEM) (Wold, 1975, 1985). Accordingly, the study deployed Smart PLS 3.0 (Ringle, Wende, & Becker, 2015) for the purpose

of data analysis. Through this, bootstrapping approach was used to underscore the significance of path coefficients (Hair, Hult, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2014).

Before testing the hypothesized relationships, reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity were assessed. Table 2 outlines details in this regard which highlights that loadings of all items were higher than the accepted threshold (Chin, 1998; Barclay, Thompson, & Higgins, 1995) of 0.5. Accordingly, average variance extracted (AVE) of all the variables has also found to be above the customary threshold (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988), of 0.5. Similarly, composite reliability has also resulted higher than the accepted cut-off (Hair et al., 2013), of 0.7. Hence, the results have assured the convergent validity.

### **3.4 Discriminant Validity**

For the purpose of ascertaining discriminant validity of the current study, Fornell and Larcker (1981)'s criterion was applied. According to them, the square root of AVE of each construct should be higher than the values of correlation within as well as with others. Table 3 displays significant results of each of the construct, having greater square root in this regard and hence assuring the discriminant validity.

### **3.5 Structural Model**

In order to assess the structural model of the present study, bootstrapping procedures with 500 subsamples were applied to obtain level of significance of the hypothesized relationships. Results on table 4 indicates a positive relationship between academic self-efficacy and students' engagement ( $\beta=0.346$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). Accordingly, academic resilience is also found positively related with students' engagement ( $\beta=0.359$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). With the

R-square value of 0.332, both the hypothesized relationships were hence supported.

#### **4.0 DISCUSSION**

The main objective of this study was to explore, understand, and thereby statistically test the relationship between academic self-efficacy and academic resilience in fostering students' engagement. PLS results have outlined that academic self-efficacy is significant to enhance their engagement (H1). In line with the core explanation of academic self-efficacy, the study has statistically found that students having positive and strong beliefs about their abilities can considerably exert responsive academic behaviors. This finding suggests that the students' who perceived their efficacy higher were also found highly engaged, hence showing the significance of academic-self efficacy in this regard. Similar to studies that have emphasized on the significance of self-efficacy in work roles (Xanthopoulou et al., 2009), the present study has also ensured its importance in academics, particularly for university students.

Similarly, findings have also outlined that students who perceived high resilience in academics (H2) were able to enhance their engagement. This also outlines the importance of mental capability to handle stressful events in academics in order to enhance and maintain engagement. The findings have pin pointed that University students who are capable of sustaining their motivation and focus towards studies will be more absorbed and engaged in their studies. This also possesses towards the prominence of psychological wellbeing in the academics, similar to conventional workplaces. Drawing upon COR theory the current study has empirically outlined that academic self-efficacy and academic resilience can play an important role in fostering student engagement and

encourages for further empirical attention on the importance of these factors upon University students' engagement.

#### **4.1 Conclusion and Practical Implications**

As the literature discussed that the doctoral research requires a lot of individual work and support which is why it becomes necessary for University students to be more psychologically resourceful. This is due to the reason that it helps them to be confident about their abilities and handle stressful situations in academics responsively for better academic wellbeing (engagement). In view with that, the findings of the current study have concluded that academic self-efficacy and resilience are important and can significantly boost University level students' engagement. The study has also outlined that the students, who were viewing themselves more efficacious and resilient academically, felt more engaged as well. The findings have strengthened the explanations of COR theory through signifying the positive impact of psychological resources on individual wellbeing (engagement). Similar to study conducted at workplaces, examining the role of self-efficacy and resilience (Xanthopoulou et al., 2009), the current study has also highlighted the importance of these factors in higher education, particularly for University level students.

Several suggestions could be forwarded for future implications. In order to enhance the productivity and performance of the mature students, universities and higher education institutions may work on fostering their academic self-efficacy and resilience. Training interventions have been significantly concluded to enhance self-efficacy (Howe, Smajdor, & Stockl, 2012; Tokzadeh & Dyke, 2002) and resilience (Meiklejohn et al., 2012; Pollock et al., 2003); hence training programs focused to enhance students' academic

self-efficacy and academic resilience would be a healthy initiative to facilitate engagement. According to Pajares and Schunk (2001) teachers can play a significant role in enhancing academic self-efficacy hence, universities may focus on encouraging teachers to play an active part towards encouraging, motivating and fostering the psychological well-being of their students.

#### 4.2 Limitation and Scope for Further Studies:

The present study was conducted through cross sectional means hence, future studies may be carried out to investigate the impact of academic self-efficacy and academic resilience on university students' engagement over a longer period. Accordingly, the current study only accounted for two individual psychological aspects (self-efficacy and resilience) suggesting 0.33 percent variance. Hence, other aspects such as optimism and self-esteem may also be investigated to see how they relate to university students' engagement.

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*Table1. Respondent`s Demographics*

<b>Component</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Gender	Male	94	75.2
	Female	31	24.8
Age	<30	14	11.2
	30-40	87	69.6
	41-50	23	18.4
	51 and above	1	0.8
Nationality	International Students	28	22.4
	Local Students	97	77.6

Source: The Researcher

*Table 2. Measurement Model*

<b>Construct</b>	<b>Item</b>	<b>Loadings</b>	<b>AVE</b>	<b>CR</b>
<b>Academic Self- Efficacy</b>	AC3	0.731	0.559	0.792
	AC4	0.759		
	AC5	0.753		
<b>Academic Resilience</b>	AAR2	0.681	0.504	0.835
	AAR3	0.679		
	AAR4	0.708		
	AAR5	0.744		
	ARR6	0.735		
<b>Student Engagement</b>	SN01	0.757	0.504	0.859
	SN02	0.717		
	SN03	0.681		
	SN5	0.690		
	SN7	0.701		
	SN8	0.710		

Source: The Researcher

Table 3. Discriminant Validity

Construct	Academic Efficacy	Academic Resilience	Student Engagement
Academic Efficacy	<b>0.748</b>		
Academic Resilience	0.340	<b>0.710</b>	
Student Engagement	0.468	0.476	<b>0.710</b>

Note: Values in the BOLD face outlines square root values of each construct for discriminant values confirmation

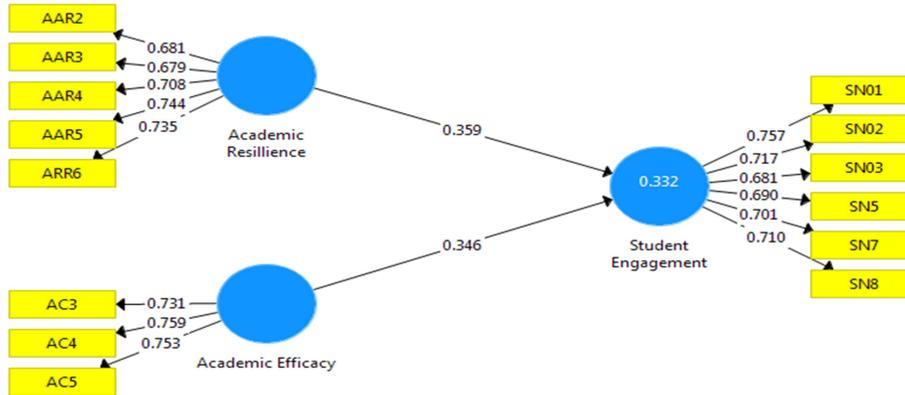


Figure 1. Measurement Model

Table 4. Hypothesis Results

Hypothesis	Beta	SE	T Value	P Values	Result
Academic Self-Efficacy -> Student Engagement	0.346	0.123	2.814**	0.005	Supported
Academic Resilience -> Student Engagement	0.359	0.120	2.985**	0.003	Supported

\*\*Significance at 1-tailed