

# The Effect of Autonomy Training on Student Engagement in Junior High School Students

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## <sup>2</sup> The Effect of Autonomy Training on Student Engagement in Junior High School Students

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**Abstract.** The purpose of this study was to determine the effect of autonomy training on student engagement of junior high school in Bandung. The respondents of this study were 20 students who were selected using a purposive sampling method. The Student Engagement Instrument (SEI) measured the cognitive and affective aspects with validity criteria of 0.302- 0.877 and reliability of 0.747. Also, the Behavioral Engagement instrument was adapted from Appleton Christenson, Kim, and Reschly (2006), with validity criteria of 0.317- 0.605 only for this research. Autonomy training was adapted from the Human Autonomy theory by Weinstein, Przybylski and Ryan (2012), which was used to experiential learning method. The result showed that there was an increase in student engagement after autonomy training, with value Asymp Sig. <0.05 (N=-3.923), indicating a difference in student engagement through autonomy training. Besides, the result showed that there was an increase in aspects of student engagement, such as cognitive engagement, emotional engagement, and behavioral engagement after autonomy training, with value Asymp Sig. <0.05.

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**Keywords:** autonomy training; behavioral engagement; cognitive engagement; emotional engagement; student engagement.

### INTRODUCTION

Schools are formal educational institutions that play an essential role in helping students achieve optimal development. Education is designed for a better change in knowledge, skills, and attitudes. As educators, teachers can provide stimulation and reinforcement for learning activities and create change (Knowles et al., 2005). Learning becomes the main activity in the education process that takes place at school. Learning activities are activities carried out to find out and learn something in an effort to increase knowledge and skills.

Effective learning activities depend on the extent to which students are actively involved in learning activities. Student learning activities play an essential role in attaining academic achievement. Active student involvement in the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral learning process that aims to improve student learning outcomes and development is called student engagement (Trowler, 2010). Student engagement includes cognitive engagement, emotional engagement, and behavioral engagement, which are demonstrated through caring behavior, participating in discussions, trying to engage in classroom activities, and showing interest and motivation for learning (Marks, 2000). Students who are not involved in learning activities tend to be apathetic, lackluster, easily bored,

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anxious, chatty, and unfocused when learning takes place. Student engagement in the learning process is something that must be considered in order to achieve educational goals.

Engagement is a psychological process that involves students' attention, interest, and effort that is devoted to the learning process (Marks, 2000). Student engagement in the learning process has many positive impacts on students, teachers, and schools. In general, students who have engagement with learning activities at school look enthusiastic, full of energy, totality in carrying out their duties and roles as students and have a high sense of carrying out the rules that exist at school (Schaufeli et al., 2002).

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Increasing student engagement in learning activities in schools is one of the efforts that can be done by schools to reduce problems that occur in students. Fredricks Blumenfeld, and Paris (2004), in their literature study, explained that problems, such as low student achievement, increased student boredom, and increased cases of drop out from school, were the result of disengagement of students with learning activities at school. Appleton, Christensen, and Furlong (2008) explained that besides students involved in the teaching and learning process, there are also students who are not involved, such as being apathetic, chatting with friends, not excited, not focused, or even sleeping during the learning process.

This phenomenon is also found by researchers in junior high school in Bandung city. Through the distribution of questionnaires to 60 VII grade students, it was found that 24 (40%) students were lazy to learn and lazy to do homework, as many as 15 (25%) students had difficulty understanding the lesson, as many as 21 (35%) students were afraid to ask questions and were bored in certain subjects. Besides, some students wrote down that even though they liked going to and being in school, but they did not like it when they were involved in learning activities in class, such as learning mathematics, learning Sundanese, and learning English. Some students did not take the time to study outside school hours with the excuse of being lazy and tired of studying. Based on information from counseling guidance teachers, some students found it difficult to obey school rules and were lazy to do homework, which would have an impact on the effectiveness of teaching and learning activities in schools.

The construct of student engagement develops in varied theoretical tradition. Some experts explain student engagement to see the relationship between contextual factors, patterns of engagement, and student adjustment. Other researchers explain the role of student engagement in the dynamics of students dropping out of school (Fredricks et al., 2016).

Wang dan Peck (2013) view student engagement based on self-determinant theory, expectancy-value, and stage-environment fit. Self-determinant theory and stage-environment fit explain that individuals seek experience to meet their fundamental needs and identities through interactions with the environment. If the environment can meet the psychological needs of students, then students will be more interested in actively participating in school activities. Conversely, if the environment fails to meet the psychological needs of students, it will cause a decrease in academic motivation and student interest, which will contribute to decreased student engagement.

Stokes et al. (2009) propose that to overcome this low motivation to learn and apathy, students need to have a higher capacity in making decisions to go through the learning process. The capacity to make decisions for the learning process can also be referred to as student autonomy. Autonomy is the ability to control one's own actions (Stokes et al., 2009). Nix, and Hamm (2003, in Reeve, 2005) add that this autonomy focuses on the decision in a person to do something.

In this study, a school environment capable of meeting students' psychological needs is a school environment that can encourage students to be autonomous. Autonomous students will have an intrinsic motivation that makes students have positive feelings, perseverance, and confidence to

be involved in learning activities in school (Reeve, 2005).

According to self-determination theory, autonomy is included in the type of intrinsic motivation. Students who are involved in learning activities at school because of their choices will get satisfaction through the learning process (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Autonomy is considered a strong source of increasing student engagement. Autonomy is an awareness that can make personality develop, and other psychological needs can be actualized; in other words, autonomy is a common thread of different needs, such as need competence and need relatedness in order to run optimally (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Students who have autonomy in the learning process will undergo a learning process based on their desires so that the learning process is referred to as autonomous learning (Ciekanski, 2007). Autonomous learning processes make students tend to be more responsible for their learning processes so that they will be more involved in terms of cognitive, affective, and social in learning than if students are forced by external pressure. Autonomy can also increase students' well-being; if a student has high autonomy, then he will wholeheartedly act, be open, interested in developing himself, and be able to utilize awareness of values and feelings (Vansteenkiste & Sheldon, 2006).

Because of the importance of students having autonomy in learning and the problems experienced by students, junior high school students need intervention to increase autonomy through autonomy training to prevent more severe problems at a higher level. According to Fredricks et al. (2004), the issue of students who are not involved in learning activities can be reduced or eliminated, because student engagement is malleable or can be formed within students. Intervention needs to be done because if students have high engagement, they will behave actively in assignments and have good emotional intensity (Connell et al., 1990 in Reeve et al., 2004) and can predict the value of learning outcomes (Lam et al., 2012).

Based on the explanation above, one way that can be done to increase student engagement is to bring up a sense of autonomy in students. Generally, the efforts made to improve the desire for autonomy are the strategies of teacher autonomy support or parent autonomy support. In a study conducted by Devina, Savitri, and Pandin (2017), the results showed that parent autonomy support influenced student school engagement in terms of emotional, cognitive, and behavioral engagement. Research conducted by Reeve et al., (2004) regarding the role of teacher autonomy support towards increasing student engagement showed the results that teachers who were trained to use autonomy support in their teaching activities could make students more involved while learning. The role of the teacher and parent provides motivation and the ability of students to independently make decisions and increase intrinsic motivation in students, which prepares students involved while learning.

Autonomy owned by students has an influence on student engagement in learning activities at school. Students will have an awareness that they have the choice to determine something and decide on something; it will motivate students to carry out their opportunities to engage in learning activities at school or outside school. Conversely, if autonomy is less formed, then awareness about students that determine learning activities to be carried out will not appear, and students do not have the motivation to learn (Halimah, 2017).

Based on the above explanation, providing autonomy training to students who have low student engagement, will be able to bring up intrinsic motivation in these students and increase student engagement. Intrinsic motivation influences students to achieve learning achievement. Some studies show that intrinsic motivation can motivate students to achieve the highest levels of achievement, low anxiety, and perceptions related to competence and engagement (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002, Wingfield and Wagher, 2005 in Saeed & Zyngier, 2012).

The impact of low student engagement is that students become passive, easily bored, anxious, and give up when facing academic problems, and the long-term impact will affect the risk of dropping out of school (Appleton, Christenson, & Furlong, 2008).

## 13 METHOD

This study used a quasi-experimental design with the research design of one group pre-test-post-test design (Campbell, 1969 in Graziano & Raulin, 2000). The condition of the pre-test and post-test in question was to see the role of autonomy training in increasing student engagement in learning activities in schools. The independent variable in this study was autonomy training, and the dependent variable was student engagement in learning activities at school.

The respondents of this study were seventh-grade students at junior high schools in Bandung, obtained by purposive sampling method. This junior high school is one of the private junior high schools in the city of Bandung. The measuring instrument employed was the SEI (Student Engagement Instrument) to measure student engagement in the form of a Likert scale adapted from the theories of (Appleton Christenson, Kim, & Reschly, 2006). This scale is intended explicitly for junior high school students (secondary school). Measuring behavioral engagement of students was carried out after training using the same questionnaire to measure student self-monitoring. The questionnaire method was chosen by the researcher so that the assessment of the behavioral engagement aspect was more objective than observation. The questionnaire was prepared by researchers based on Appleton Christenson, Kim, and Reschly (2006) theories with the aim of answering hypotheses to see differences in behavioral engagement of students whose data were taken on the 15th and 21st days. This measuring device consisted of five statements with a Likert scale.

Furthermore, students would be given a self-monitoring sheet as supporting data that would be filled every day for three weeks by students participating in the training. In the third week, students would also be measured degrees of autonomy and degrees of engagement (post-test). The measurement results before and after participating in the autonomy training would be compared to find out any improvement.

The self-monitoring measurement tool was utilized as supporting data to see student development for 21 days or three weeks filled in by students every day after students left school. The measuring instrument consisted of five questions based on theories from (Appleton Christenson, Kim, & Reschly, 2006). Student responses each week represented one aspect of the three aspects of student engagement in learning activities at school. The first week was to measure aspects of emotional engagement, the second week was to measure cognitive engagement, and the third week was to measure behavioral engagement.

The autonomy training module was based on the theory of Human Autonomy Weinstein, Przybylski and Ryan (2012), which used experiential learning methods. The types of activities carried out during the training were lectures, group discussions, group sharing, writing assignments, videos, and games.

The training objectives were prepared using (Bloom & Krathwohl, 1956). The research objectives are divided into two.

### General Instructional Purposes (TIU)

After participating in autonomy training, junior high school students who were the subject of research had more engagement that was driven by intrinsic motivation. One of which was a sense of

autonomy, so that students' motivation to learn which initially generated from outside themselves, came from within themselves.

### Special Instructional Purposes (TIK).

Session I TIK (Student Engagement): Participants gained general understanding and insight about student engagement and the underlying internal factors, namely three basic needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness so that participants could understand the importance of increasing student engagement and understanding the need for autonomy within (Cognitive, Emotional).

Session II TIK (Autonomy Simulation 1): Specific Instructional Purpose: Participants could understand the autonomy aspect, namely in the aspects of authorship and interest taking in themselves, then participants could be responsive by sharing and discussing with their friends based on the needs (Cognitive, Emotional).

Session III TIK (Autonomy Simulation 2): Specific Instructional Purpose: Participants could believe that the aspect of autonomy in oneself is the aspects of susceptibility to control through the "Nine Dots" activity. Furthermore, participants could organize the desire to succeed, which came from within, without any outside influence. Through games, the ability of participants to successfully face a problem could be improved (Emotional).

Session IV TIK (Autonomy Simulation 3): Specific Instructional Objectives: Participants could prepare themselves to get accustomed to applying autonomy in their daily behavior while learning (Behavioral, Readiness, and Natural Reaction).

The pre-test and post-test scores were then compared with the Wilcoxon different tests to find out if there were differences in student engagement before and after autonomy training. The research hypotheses proposed are as follows: 1) There is a difference in student engagement after participating in autonomy training for junior high school students; 2) There is a difference in cognitive engagement after participating in autonomy training for junior high school students; 3) There is a difference in emotional engagement after participating in autonomy training for junior high school students; 4) There is a difference between behavioral engagement after participating in autonomy training for junior high school students.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The description of students taking part in the training was 20 participants, consisting of 85% of the sample are male and 15% female. Participants were generally in the age range of 13-14 years by 70%, and the rest were in the age range of 15-16 years by 30%. The highest level of education was in class VII as much as 70%, and participants in class VIII only as much as 30%. Based on the results of statistical tests on the four research hypotheses, the following description was obtained:

Table 1.  
The Results of Pre-Post Statistical Test

No.	Z value	Asymp.Sig.	Hypothesis Test Results
1	-3.923	0.00	H1 was accepted
2	-3.928	0.00	H1 was accepted
3	-3.924	0.00	H1 was accepted
4	-3.363	0.00	H1 was accepted

Note. \* < .05 \*\* < .01 Wilcoxon Test

The hypothesis was accepted with a Z value of -3.923 and an Asymp value of sig <0.05, which means there was a significant difference between student engagement after attending autonomy training in junior high school students. Twenty positive data and 0 negative data imply that 20 participants have increased aspects of student engagement after attending the training autonomy with an average increase of 10.50. 1) The hypothesis was accepted in the cognitive aspect. The results obtained from pre-test and post-test with a value of Z-3,928 and Asymp. Sig (2 tailed) on cognitive engagement was 0.00 <0.05. Then, the hypothesis was accepted with 20 positive data and 0 negative data. It means 20 participants experienced an increase in cognitive engagement after participating in autonomy training with an average increase of 10.50; 2) The hypothesis was accepted on the emotional engagement aspect. The results obtained from pre-test and post-test with a value of Z-3,924 and Asymp. Sig (2 tailed) on emotional engagement was 0.00 <0.05. Then, the hypothesis was accepted with 20 positive data and 0 negative data. It indicates that 20 participants experienced an increase in emotional engagement after participating in autonomy training with an average increase of 10.50; 3) The hypothesis was accepted on the aspects of behavioral engagement. The results obtained from pre-test and post-test with a value of Z-3,363 and Asymp. Sig (2 tailed) was 0.01 <0.05. Then, the hypothesis was accepted with 15 positive data. It demonstrates that 15 participants experienced an increase in behavioral engagement aspects after attending autonomy training, with an average increase of 8.83. However, there was one negative data, which means that one training participant has decreased the behavioral engagement aspect after the autonomy training.

Table 2.  
Pretest Student Engagement

Participant	Gender	Score	Category
1	M	14	Low
2	M	20	Low
3	M	37	High
4	M	26	Moderate
5	M	30	Moderate
6	F	26	Moderate
7	F	31	Moderate
8	F	32	Moderate
9	M	38	High
10	M	39	High
11	M	34	Moderate
12	M	26	Moderate
13	M	29	Moderate
14	M	31	Moderate
15	M	34	Moderate
16	M	27	Moderate
17	M	28	Moderate
18	M	28	Moderate
19	M	30	Moderate
20	M	31	Moderate

Measuring behavior change was carried out by using a self-monitoring questionnaire given to 20 students every day after returning from school after attending the autonomy training. Students' appreciation of student engagement before getting training was generally in the medium category by 75%, and the rest was in the high category by 15%, as well as the low categories was by 10%.

Table 3.  
Posttest Student Engagement

Participant	Gender	Score	Category
1	M	70	High
2	M	82	High
3	M	75	High
4	M	83	High
5	M	71	Moderate
6	F	93	High
7	F	85	High
8	F	85	High
9	M	80	High
10	M	88	High
11	M	84	High
12	M	82	High
13	M	79	High
14	M	74	High
15	M	69	Moderate
16	M	72	Moderate
17	M	72	Moderate
18	M	85	High
19	M	87	High
20	M	78	High

The appreciation of students towards student engagement after receiving autonomy training was generally in the high category by 80%, and the rest was in the moderate category by 20%. Students' appreciation of the aspects of cognitive engagement possessed by the participants was in the high category by 75%, and 25% of the participants were in the moderate category. It indicates that there was a change in cognitive engagement after the training. Students' appreciation of the emotional engagement aspects of the participants was in the high category by 85%, and as many as 15% of the participants were in the moderate category. It shows that there was a change in the emotional engagement aspect after the training.

Students' appreciation of the behavioral engagement aspects of the participants was in the high category by 75%, and as many as 25% of the participants were in the moderate category. It indicates that there was a change in behavioral engagement after training.

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Based on the results of statistical tests on the research hypothesis, it showed that there were significant differences after the autonomy training on student engagement in junior high school students in Bandung with a Z value of -3.923 with an Asymp Sig 0.000 with a significance value <0.05 (see Table 1). These results are consistent with the statement made by Deci and Ryan (2000)



Table 4.  
Cognitive Engagement

Participant	Gender	Score	Category
1	M	78	High
2	M	87	High
3	M	71	Moderate
4	M	90	High
5	M	75	Moderate
6	F	85	High
7	F	85	High
8	F	87	High
9	M	85	High
10	M	76	High
11	M	84	High
12	M	71	Moderate
13	M	83	High
14	M	85	High
15	M	82	High
16	M	76	High
17	M	84	Moderate
18	M	82	High
19	M	93	High
20	M	75	Moderate

that increasing student autonomy is considered a strong enough source in increasing student engagement. Students who have autonomy in the learning process will undergo a learning process based on their desires so that the learning process is referred to as autonomous learning (Macaskill and Taylor in Doko, 2012)

Students who have intrinsic motivation will do activities to get the satisfaction inherent in these activities (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Students will be interested in learning, happy in working and enjoying working on assignments, and they feel challenged to do it, so they feel engaged and do not want to break away from these activities (Deci & Ryan, 2000). This type of motivation will later influence student autonomy, which leads to student engagement.

In the aspect of cognitive engagement, it is crucial for students to have it because it serves to help students understand lessons, do assignments, and apply tasks to daily life. For example, by group learning, students become trained to think about learning strategies that affect the level of student understanding. Autonomy training that had been given to students could improve aspects of cognitive engagement with an Asymp Sig (2 tailed) value of 0.00 and a Z value of -3.928 (see Table 1). The results showed that all students who participated in the training experienced an increase in scores after attending the autonomy training.

Besides, an increase in the category of aspects of student cognitive engagement can be seen in table 4, in which self-monitoring was conducted for five days. In the cognitive engagement aspect, 75% of students were in the high category, which means that students in training had a high cognitive engagement after the training. Based on interview data on students, the desire to learn again at home was influenced by the responsibility to do homework and try to learn again. Students

also realized that to be able to master a lesson successfully, they should have their learning strategies and learning styles so that it was easier to understand the lesson.

Table 5.  
Emotional Engagement

Participant	Gender	Score	Category
1	M	78	High
2	M	91	High
3	M	71	Sedang
4	M	89	Moderate
5	M	78	High
6	F	90	High
7	F	91	High
8	F	91	High
9	M	86	High
10	M	91	High
11	M	82	High
12	M	86	High
13	M	92	High
14	M	76	High
15	M	82	High
16	M	83	High
17	M	70	Moderate
18	M	81	High
19	M	91	High
20	M	74	Moderate

Based on the results of the student evaluation, it can be seen that the autonomy simulation gave influence on the meaning of students regarding cognitive engagement. Students began to think that they started to bring up the values of their need to be successful in mastering lessons according to cognitive engagement theory that was influenced by students' perceptions of value (goal setting), self-regulation of the relevance of school to future aspirations (Appleton & Christenson, 2008).

The results above can be concluded that basically, students understood the values that learning is useful for the future, learning is useful for oneself, and each individual must have their learning style. However, when applying, it would be strongly influenced by external influences, such as teachers and internal emotions that affected students' motivation levels in learning.

Students who have emotional engagement will have value for independent learning. The results of the autonomy training on emotional engagement showed that there was a difference in emotional engagement after the training. An Asymp Sig (2 tailed) result was obtained for 0.00 and a Z value of -3,924 (see Table 1). These results indicate that all training students had increased scores, so it can be concluded that autonomy training had an influence on student's emotional engagement.

Based on the results of self-monitoring conducted on the aspects of emotional engagement, the results obtained that 85% of students were in the high category, which means that most participants had a high emotional engagement after the training. The remaining 15% were known

Table 6.  
Behavioral engagement

Participant	Gender	Score	Category
1	M	72	Moderate
2	M	93	High
3	M	73	Moderate
4	M	89	High
5	M	75	Moderate
6	F	88	High
7	F	81	High
8	F	90	High
9	M	86	High
10	M	84	High
11	M	79	High
12	M	76	High
13	M	78	High
14	M	81	High
15	M	78	High
16	M	81	High
17	M	84	Moderate
18	M	84	High
19	M	89	High
20	M	75	Moderate

to be in the medium category (see Table 5). The results of interviews with students with emotional engagement stated that they felt happy to be in school because they met with friends, comfortable being in school because of friends, and the atmosphere that occurred at school, and felt the family was very supportive of their learning activities at school and home.

Based on the results above, it can be seen that students' emotional engagement is determined by external factors such as teachers and friends, which are influenced by how patterns of interaction are formed at school. Meanwhile, internal factors are affected by students' emotional conditions, such as moods and perceptions of the treatment of friends or teachers.

Evaluation results showed that students could interpret that emotions especially liking and interest, greatly affected students' understanding and willingness to learn. As the theory of emotional engagement, it is defined to be closely related to students' perceptions of belonging, identification with school, and school connectedness (Appleton & Christenson, 2008).

. If students experience an unpleasant emotional experience, such as a family problem, or that the school situation does not match expectations, it will greatly affect how students can engage in school. In addition, the age of students who are in adolescence also influences adolescent emotional stability in dealing with problems.

The results of the autonomy training on behavioral engagement aspects obtained a significant difference after training with an Asymp Sig (2 tailed) value of 0.03 and a Z value of -3.363. The results showed that some training students had increased scores by 15 students, while four students had fixed scores, and one student had decreased scores (see Table 1).

Based on the results of self-monitoring on the aspects of behavioral engagement after autonomy

training, it is known that the majority of students were in the high category of 75%, and the remaining 25% were at a moderate level (see Table 6). Based on interviews with students, it is known that some of the students in the seventh-grade said that although they understood that they had to fight their laziness, students still found it difficult if they did not like lessons, students had made an effort to come on time to school and asked questions when they did not understand lessons in class, and students also tried to take notes on the lesson summary.

Based on the results of the evaluation, it can be seen that students had raised a sense of autonomy in themselves; students could control themselves and feel responsible for the behavior they did (susceptibility to control). Behavioral engagement is attendance (absences, skips, tardies), participation (Classroom, extracurricular), preparation for class/school (Appleton & Christenson, 2008).

The strength of this research lies in the autonomy training given to students in the low and moderate student engagement categories, which could be upgraded to a high and medium category in most participants (see Tables 2 and 3). Meanwhile, related to changes in the increase in student engagement scores, it occurred to all students (see the description of Table 1). It makes autonomy training could be used to increase student engagement.

The limitation of this study lies in the selection of participants with the category of student engagement that still varied from low to high (see Table 2) so that it seems that some participants had not changed and were at the same level (see Table 3). However, basically, all participants in the autonomy training experienced a change in scores on student engagement (see the description of Table 1). Thus, it would be nice if all participants who took part in the autonomy training had a low student engagement category in the beginning.

Besides, there was a limited time for student self-monitoring evaluation in measuring aspects of student engagement, which was about five days of schooling (one week) for each aspect, so that there were still 25% of students who have not experienced a change in categories, especially in behavioral engagement aspects (see Table 6 and description of table 1). Therefore, it is necessary to increase the time of self-monitoring evaluation to be able to improve all aspects of student engagement, especially to arrive at behavioral engagement.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the discussion above, the following conclusions are obtained: 1) After being given autonomy training, the results showed an increase in student engagement in junior high school students; 2) There was an increase in scores from aspects of cognitive engagement and emotional engagement in junior high school students after attending autonomy training; 3) In the behavioral engagement aspect, some participants did not change, and some even experienced a decrease in scores after the autonomy training; 4) Based on the results of self-monitoring, it indicated an increase in every aspect of junior high school student engagement. It means that students began to bring up a sense of autonomy; 5) The limited selection of participants in the autonomy training with categories varying from low to high made some participants seemed unchanged after attending the autonomy training; 6) The limited-time for self-monitoring evaluation after participating in the training made the participants seemed to be unchanged, especially to arrive at behavioral engagement; 7) Autonomy training can be used to increase student engagement by adding a more extended evaluation time of about two weeks for each aspect so that all aspects of student engagement can increase; 8) For further research, it is better to choose the autonomy training participants with low student engagement scores to make the changes more visible.

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