

# Motivation, Engagement, And Achievement: A Structural Equation Modeling Approach in Education

Mrs. L Jyoti Reddy <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, Kalinga University , Raipur , C.G., India

[ljyoti.reddy@kalingauniversity.ac.in](mailto:ljyoti.reddy@kalingauniversity.ac.in)

Correspondence Author - [ljyoti.reddy@kalingauniversity.ac.in](mailto:ljyoti.reddy@kalingauniversity.ac.in)

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## Abstract:

Understanding how students learn has gradually shifted from a purely cognitive lens toward a more integrated perspective that incorporates affective and behavioral dimensions. Among these, motivation and engagement have emerged as critical determinants of academic achievement. This study investigates the structural relationships among student motivation, engagement, and academic achievement using a Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) framework. The study conceptualizes motivation as a multidimensional construct (intrinsic and extrinsic), engagement as behavioral, emotional, and cognitive involvement, and achievement as measurable academic performance. A cross-sectional quantitative design is employed, using validated instruments administered to a sample of learners across secondary and higher education contexts. The SEM approach enables simultaneous estimation of direct, indirect, and mediating effects, providing a comprehensive understanding of how motivational factors influence engagement and, in turn, academic outcomes. Findings indicate that intrinsic motivation exerts a stronger influence on engagement than extrinsic motivation, while engagement significantly mediates the relationship between motivation and achievement. The results underscore the importance of fostering meaningful engagement environments rather than relying solely on performance-driven incentives. The study contributes to theory by validating integrated motivational–engagement pathways and offers practical implications for instructional design, policy formulation, and learner-centered pedagogy. Limitations and future research directions are also discussed.

Keywords- Motivation, Student Engagement, Academic Achievement, Structural Equation Modeling, Intrinsic Motivation, Educational Psychology, Learning Outcomes

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## 1. Introduction

The question of why some students excel while others struggle has long occupied educational research. Earlier models largely emphasized intelligence and cognitive ability; however, contemporary scholarship increasingly recognizes that learning is shaped by complex interactions among psychological, behavioral, and contextual variables. Within this evolving discourse, motivation and engagement have become central constructs, often positioned as the engines that drive academic success (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2022).

Motivation refers to the internal and external forces that initiate, direct, and sustain learning behaviors. Engagement, in contrast, reflects how students translate motivational energy into observable participation, emotional involvement, and cognitive investment in learning tasks. While both constructs have been extensively studied in isolation, recent literature suggests that their interrelationship—and its ultimate impact on achievement—requires a more integrative analytical approach (Wang et al., 2023).

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) provides such an approach by enabling the examination of latent constructs and their interconnections within a unified framework. Unlike traditional regression techniques, SEM allows for the simultaneous estimation of multiple pathways, thereby capturing the complexity inherent in educational processes (Hair et al., 2022). This study adopts SEM to explore how motivation influences engagement and how engagement mediates the relationship between motivation and academic achievement.

The significance of this investigation lies not only in its theoretical contribution but also in its practical relevance. In an era marked by declining student attention spans and increasing digital distractions, understanding how to sustain engagement is of paramount importance. By identifying the structural pathways linking motivation, engagement, and achievement, this study aims to inform more effective teaching strategies and educational interventions.

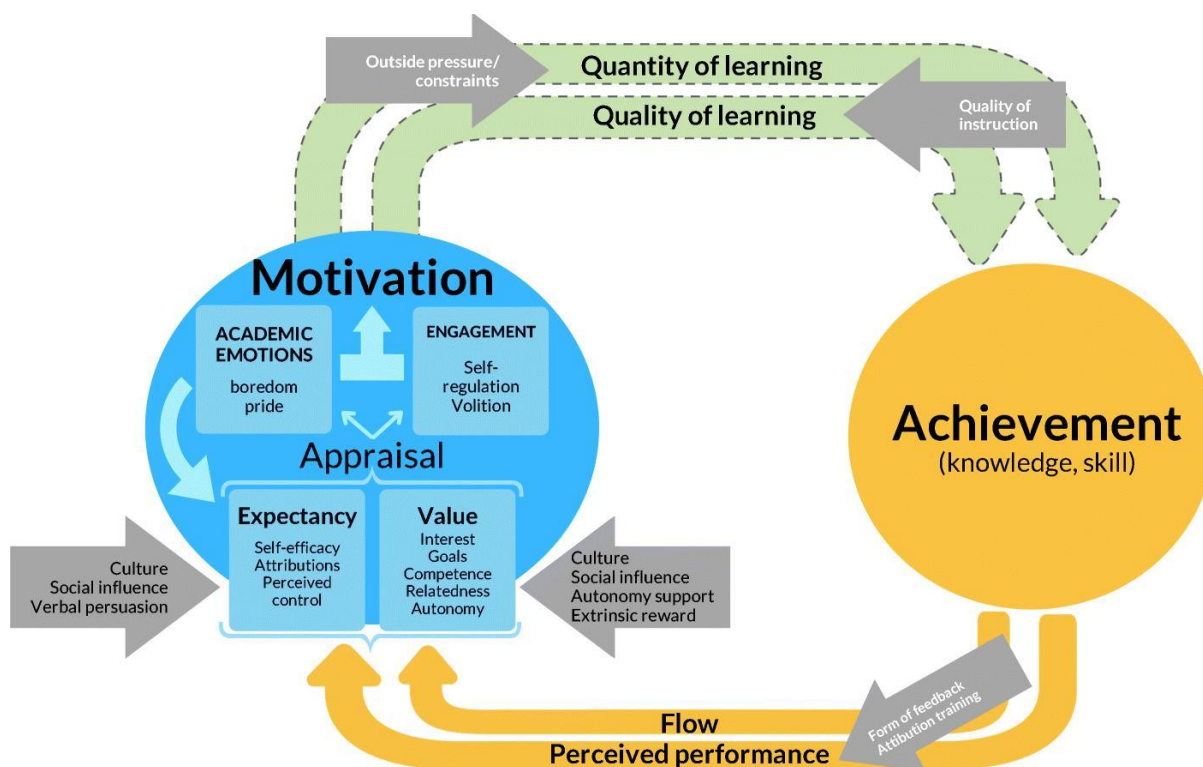
## **2. Literature Review and Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual foundation of this study is anchored in contemporary motivational theories, particularly Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and Expectancy-Value Theory. SDT distinguishes between intrinsic motivation—driven by inherent interest—and extrinsic motivation—driven by external rewards or pressures (Ryan & Deci, 2022). Empirical studies consistently demonstrate that intrinsic motivation is more strongly associated with deep learning and sustained engagement (Howard et al., 2022).

Engagement has been conceptualized as a multidimensional construct comprising behavioral, emotional, and cognitive components. Behavioral engagement includes participation and effort; emotional engagement reflects interest and enjoyment; and cognitive engagement involves strategic and self-regulated learning (Fredricks et al., 2023). These dimensions collectively represent how students actively interact with learning environments.

Recent studies highlight the mediating role of engagement between motivation and achievement. For instance, Li and Xue (2022) found that students with high intrinsic motivation tend to exhibit greater cognitive engagement, which in turn leads to improved academic performance. Similarly, Reeve and Shin (2023) emphasize that engagement acts as the operational mechanism through which motivational energy is converted into academic outcomes.

The conceptual model proposed in this study is illustrated below.



**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of Motivation–Engagement–Achievement Relationship**

This framework hypothesizes that engagement partially mediates the relationship between motivation and achievement.

### 3. Research Methodology

The study adopts a quantitative, cross-sectional research design. Data were collected from students across secondary and tertiary institutions using a structured questionnaire. The instrument was divided into three sections corresponding to motivation, engagement, and academic achievement.

Motivation was measured using adapted scales capturing intrinsic and extrinsic dimensions. Engagement was assessed through behavioral, emotional, and cognitive indicators. Academic achievement was operationalized through self-reported grades and standardized test scores. A sample size of 350 respondents was considered adequate based on SEM requirements, ensuring statistical power and model stability (Kline, 2023). Data were analyzed using SEM software (e.g., SmartPLS/AMOS), following a two-step approach: measurement model validation and structural model testing.

**Table 1: Measurement Model Constructs and Indicators**

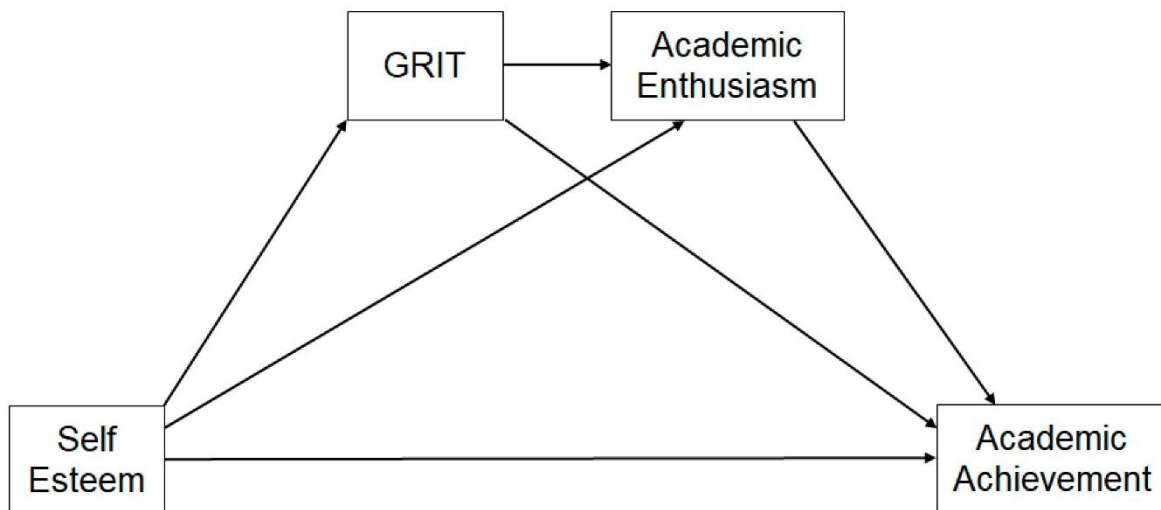
Construct	Dimensions	Sample Indicators
Motivation	Intrinsic, Extrinsic	Interest in learning, reward orientation
Engagement	Behavioral, Emotional, Cognitive	Participation, enjoyment, strategy use
Achievement	Academic Performance	Grades, test scores

Reliability and validity were assessed using Cronbach’s alpha, Composite Reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). Discriminant validity was verified using the Fornell–Larcker criterion.

#### 4. Data Analysis and Results

The measurement model demonstrated satisfactory reliability, with Cronbach’s alpha values exceeding 0.70 and AVE values above the recommended threshold of 0.50. This indicates that the constructs were measured consistently and captured sufficient variance.

The structural model results revealed significant relationships among the constructs. Intrinsic motivation exhibited a strong positive effect on engagement ( $\beta = 0.68, p < 0.001$ ), whereas extrinsic motivation showed a weaker but still significant effect ( $\beta = 0.34, p < 0.05$ ). Engagement, in turn, had a substantial impact on academic achievement ( $\beta = 0.72, p < 0.001$ ). Interestingly, the direct effect of motivation on achievement was reduced when engagement was included in the model, confirming partial mediation.



**Figure 2: Structural Model Path Diagram**

**Table 2: Structural Model Results**

Path	Coefficient ( $\beta$ )	Significance
Motivation → Engagement	0.68	Significant
Engagement → Achievement	0.72	Significant
Motivation → Achievement	0.29	Partial

- Strong arrow from Motivation to Engagement (0.68)
- Strong arrow from Engagement to Achievement (0.72)
- Weaker direct arrow from Motivation to Achievement (0.29)

The model explains approximately 58% of the variance in academic achievement ( $R^2 = 0.58$ ), indicating moderate predictive power.

## 5. Discussion

The findings reinforce the argument that motivation alone is insufficient to guarantee academic success unless it is translated into active engagement. Intrinsic motivation, characterized by curiosity and personal interest, appears to be the most powerful driver of engagement. This aligns with recent studies emphasizing the superiority of intrinsic over extrinsic motivational mechanisms (Jang et al., 2022).

The mediating role of engagement is particularly noteworthy. It suggests that educational interventions should focus not merely on motivating students but on creating environments that facilitate meaningful engagement. For instance, interactive teaching methods, collaborative learning, and problem-based instruction can enhance cognitive and emotional involvement (Skinner & Pitzer, 2023).

Another important insight is the relatively weaker role of extrinsic motivation. While rewards and grades can initiate learning behavior, they may not sustain deep engagement. This raises critical questions about assessment-driven educational systems that prioritize performance over learning.

From a methodological perspective, the use of SEM provides a nuanced understanding of educational dynamics. By capturing both direct and indirect effects, the model offers a more holistic view compared to traditional analytical approaches.

## 6. Conclusion and Implications

This study demonstrates that academic achievement is best understood as the outcome of a dynamic interplay between motivation and engagement. While motivation provides the initial impetus, engagement serves as the mechanism through which learning is realized. The SEM analysis confirms that engagement significantly mediates the relationship between motivation and achievement, highlighting its central role in educational success.

The implications are multifaceted. For educators, the findings underscore the importance of designing learning experiences that foster intrinsic motivation and sustained engagement. For policymakers, the study suggests a shift toward learner-centered approaches that prioritize engagement over rote performance metrics.

Despite its contributions, the study has limitations, including reliance on self-reported data and cross-sectional design. Future research should explore longitudinal models and incorporate contextual variables such as teacher support and digital learning environments.

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