LECTURERS' PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENT
ENGAGEMENT AND THEIR ROLE IN SUPPORTING IT

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Abstract:

A positive relationship between emotional engagement and teaching support was reported in a previous quantitative study on students' perceptions of student engagement in four introductory lecture-based courses at four different German universities. The present qualitative research was designed to collect data from the four German male lecturers who participated in the previous study to explore their perceptions of student engagement and their role in supporting it. The lecturers of varying degrees of experience were observed while lecturing and subsequently interviewed to analyze their motivating teaching behavior. The analysis highlighted that lecturers (1) positioned themselves as committed professionals with a sense of ownership, (2) attributed positioning to students as social scientists, and (3) communicated messages characterized by supporting autonomous motivation. The lecturers implemented motivation strategies to engage their students who exhibited a preference for intentional silence. Certain characteristics of the students attending introductory level courses in Germany, such as having gained self-regulation skills at upper secondary school, highlight the importance of establishing specific goals before attending higher education courses.

Keywords: perceptions, autonomy, positioning, school culture, intentional silence

1. Introduction

Traditional introductory university courses are often characterized by large group lectures and limited interpersonal interactions (Black & Deci, 2000). As the size of the class increases, the amount of student engagement decreases (Quinlan, 2019; Meyer, 2009). The adverse effects of large class sizes in lectures are well evidenced, including low levels of students' depth of thinking, low student satisfaction (Cuseo, 2007), and decreased learning outcomes (Grund & Tulis, 2020). Additionally, numerous studies have claimed that students' attention in these lectures declines after 10 to 15 minutes (Bradbury, 2016; Wilson & Korn, 2007). Negative aspects surrounding such introductory

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courses also include the stressors of the transition from upper secondary school to university (Bebermeier et al., 2019).

Consider a large group of first-year university students attending a 90-minute on-site lecture-based course, one which they attend every week during an academic semester in Germany. Student behavior in this scenario demands the students' disposition to learn in expository lectures in which students ask only occasional questions. High levels of behavioral and cognitive engagement, as well as few opportunities to display agentic engagement, are expected due to the lecture-teaching format. However, the degree of emotional engagement is more uncertain.

As a precursor to the present study, a quantitative analysis of a cross-sectional study (manuscript in preparation) of four groups of university students (n = 334) in four German universities revealed a positive relationship between emotional engagement and teaching support. The multiple correlation analyses among the four dimensions of engagement and several motivational constructs also showed that students were satisfied with the lecture format (79% agreement). This suggests students have positive feelings toward lecturing, which defends the 'inner dialogue or interaction' between lecturer and students as an important educational experience. Additionally, given the positive correlation between emotional engagement and teaching support, it was expected that particular teaching strategies would be a significant indicator of student engagement in lecture-based courses. Based on the quantitative findings, the qualitative data from interviews and observations were analyzed by contrasting the lecturers' responses.

The research questions used to orient this analysis are:

1) How do the participating lecturers perceive student engagement in large lecture-based courses?
2) What pedagogical strategies do they implement in their courses?

Identifying positionings in relation to student engagement informs and extends recent research on motivational contributors and possible associations with student engagement.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Student Engagement and Motivating Teaching Behavior

Engagement as a multidimensional construct (Reeve, 2012) was initially investigated through students' feelings, behaviors, and cognition (Wigfield et al., 2015). Thus, the concepts of behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement have been used to capture the extent to which students become active in learning (Fredricks et al., 2011; Reeve, 2013). All forms of engagement are influenced by the personality and self-image of the students, their classmates, and their instructor (Meyer, 2009).

Behavioral engagement is described as a student's conduct in accordance with classroom norms, attendance, and effort towards task completion (Fredricks et al., 2011). Students may work hard, pay attention in class, and complete their assignments as forms of behavioral commitment. A set of behaviors can be more or less appropriate depending

on cultural contexts. In some countries, for example, arriving late is a relatively common practice that is considered acceptable; in others, it is a sign of disrespect (OECD, 2013).

Emotional engagement refers to the expression of interest, belonging, and affective reactions such as anger, happiness, anxiety, and boredom (Fredricks et al., 2011). Emotions are tied to behavior and influence thinking (Meyer, 2009). Self-reports allow researchers to identify and analyze students' feelings, which are not always observable. Studies have shown that students come to large courses such as lectures to socialize, and that this is important for creating student identity and emotional engagement (Petrović & Pale, 2015).

Cognitive engagement denotes the ability to self-regulate by understanding and mastering skills (Fredricks et al., 2011). Cognitive engagement is connected to the idea of discovery learning in which "*students are more likely to remember facts that they deduce themselves*" (Crompton, 2014, p. 9). Recent studies on cognitive engagement in the German context have linked cognitive skills acquired in previous courses with academic success. For example, Bebermeier et al. (2019) found that the academic success of psychology students largely depends on skills students already have when beginning their studies, their individual development, and on learning processes taking place during the first year of study. In this respect, as the authors conclude, students become more confident in their competencies because of their initially high competencies. In addition, these students usually attend their lecture-based courses with accompanying courses such as tutorials and practice classes (Bebermeier et al., 2019).

The most recently identified form of engagement is agentic engagement (Reeve & Tseng, 2011; Montenegro, 2017). This form of engagement is a proactive dimension since it involves the learner having a sense of agency by contributing to the learning process and instruction (Reeve, 2012). In other words, agentically-engaged students have a sense of ownership (Fletcher, 2016; Matusov et al., 2016). Particularly regarding higher education, an initial level of agentic engagement at the beginning of an academic year may predict a high level of autonomy support perceived by students later in the course (Matos et al., 2018).

A classic example of agency in a lecture format relates to hand raising to initiate a contribution (Montenegro, 2019; Reeve, 2013; Sahlström, 2002). When instructors prompt their students with questions and the freedom to speak, students tend to display agentic behavior through their initiatives. Proactive actions are associated with specific teaching approaches, formats, and school cultures. For example, Balas (2010) states that American students are encouraged to ask questions during lectures, whereas students from other cultures may consider asking questions impolite, or even insulting, given that it is perceived as interrupting the lecturer.

Student engagement is influenced by a variety of factors and includes both oral participation and silence. Exploratory studies report students actively participating through means of oral engagement, and other students remaining silent also reporting engaging through other means (Frymier & Houser, 2015; Meyer, 2009). This reinforces the idea that teachers and students use both speaking and silence to form relationships in the classroom.

Not all university students enter lecture-based courses with a history of engagement or a willingness to engage. As a result, instructors need to make accommodations and modifications based on the learning and cultural characteristics of their students (Meyer, 2009). Recently, researchers have drawn attention to teachers' messages to encourage engagement among their students (Santana-Monagas et al., 2022; León et al., 2017). Messages from educators are characterized by their aim to support a certain type of motivation (autonomous or controlled) (Santana et al., 2019). For instance, when educators appeal to controlled motivations, student behavior is driven by external sources such as rewards or punishments (Santana-Monagas et al., 2022).

Motivating teaching behavior (i.e., autonomy support and support for structure) is characterized by verbal explanations of the relevance and importance of a task for students' current and future lives (Su & Reeve, 2011). It also includes the defining of goals and nurturing of students' intrinsic motivation (i.e., through student interest) (Jang et al., 2009) as well as the presentation of interesting material and activities related to student expectations (Cheon & Reeve, 2013).

Previous studies have shown that in response to autonomy support, students experience more engagement (Shernoff et al., 2016; Kaplan et al. 2014; Cheon & Reeve, 2013; Reeve et al., 2004) and positive emotions (Black & Deci, 2000). Motivating teaching behaviors (e.g., autonomy support) are encouraged when teachers provide meaningful choices, encourage independent thinking, and ask autonomy-supportive questions (Cents-Boonstra et al., 2021). Considering these qualities and behaviors, autonomy-supportive teaching represents highly skilled teaching (Reeve & Shin, 2020).

Student engagement should not be separated from the motivation that produces it, which includes autonomy support (Reeve et al., 2021). Teaching autonomy support, understood as the delivery of instruction through an interpersonal tone of understanding and support, is a key variable when analyzing student engagement (Reeve & Shin, 2020; Reeve, 2009, 2016). Autonomy support refers to behaviors that "*collectively create that interpersonal tone of support and understanding*" (Reeve, 2015, p. 407), which promotes a positive learning context that enhances student engagement (Olivier et al., 2020). It is also a means to help students generate and seek self-relevant and course-related objectives (Assor et al., 2002). In other words, students learn to take responsibility for working out what they need to know and where to find that knowledge.

Support for structure in an autonomy supportive teaching style is related to the creation of orderly and organized environments (Moreno-Murcia et al., 2021). *Structure* demonstrated by instructors also allows students "*to know how they can regulate their learning*" (Sierens et al., 2009). Positive associations between student perceptions of autonomy support and support for structure suggest that teachers tend to combine them (Hospel & Galand, 2016; Vansteenkiste et al., 2012). For example, telling students that a certain activity is helpful for developing understanding and regulating their learning would lead to different cognitive processing than telling them that the activity evaluates a certain ability (Belenky & Nokes-Malach, 2013). Thus, university teachers set the intellectual standards and the quality of performance they expect from students as well as exemplify their values by the quality of the instruction they provide.

In Germany, the transition from a supported guidance system at school to a self-regulated learning approach at university requires students to develop a high level of intellectual skills (Booth, 2001). Certain student characteristics such as having gained knowledge and competencies at upper secondary school also highlight the importance of establishing particular skills and goals before attending higher education. For example, primary and secondary school students are invited to observe and attend lectures in university buildings (*die Kinderuni-Vorlesungen* [lecture series for kids]). Such activities may help explain the extent to which German school culture can elicit behaviors and dispositions toward autonomous behavior and learning.

German universities have a selective admission policy based on students' past academic records and grades. Students who attend a *Gymnasium* (the advanced secondary school) are encouraged to establish achievement goals, determine autonomous actions, and evaluate those actions for academic performance and success. It is expected that students who pass their *Abitur* examination to enter university have reached high levels of autonomy. This examination is commonly obtained at an age between 18 and 20 (Schwerdt & Woessmann, 2017) after the successful completion of 12 or 13 consecutive school years (Eurydice Unit, 2017).

3. Material and Methods

An elicitation process was implemented to identify lecturers' perceptions of student engagement during in-person lecture-based courses in four sociology courses in Germany. Face-to-face interviews were designed taking into account previous studies on elicitation interviews in educational contexts (Oplatka, 2018; Lesh & Kelly, 1997) and were conducted on campus by the author. A data-collection strategy consists of four mechanisms – construction, differentiation, reorganization, and refinement (Lesh & Kelly, 1997). The word 'mechanism' describes a process that has been set up to accomplish a particular goal: to explore lecturers' perceptions of student engagement, their role in supporting it, and the positionings they attribute to their students in their courses.

The participants are four German male lecturers who deliver introductory-level sociology courses at their respective state universities, all located in the German federal state of North Rhine-Westphalia. The four lecturers were observed lecturing and were subsequently interviewed to collect data about student engagement in their courses. Both interviews and observations occurred late in the semester (Winter semester 2017/18). This meant that the lecturers had built some rapport with their students, who had already engaged with complex knowledge.

Lecturers 1, 2, and 3 were faculty members with circa four years of teaching experience and lecturer 4 was a highly experienced professor with about 30 years of both teaching and research experience. Lecturer 4 holds the title of 'professor', which refers to a professional who obtains the *Habilitation* degree (a second doctorate in Germany) and who can negotiate working conditions such as research budgets (Franck & Opitz, 2006). Lecturers 2 and 3 reported having attended pedagogical courses to teach at the university

level whereas lecturers 1 and 4 reported that they have mainly learned how to teach university students through practice. Their courses rely on PowerPoint presentations and were categorized as expository lectures. The interviews were one-on-one, lasted approximately 40 minutes, and were audio recorded by the author.

3.1 Lecturer Interviews

The interview process consisted of exploring the mechanisms of construction, differentiation, reorganization, and refinement (Lesh & Kelly, 1997), which allowed the lecturers to self-express, confront, and confirm previous thoughts (Table 1). Throughout the interviews, the lecturers were encouraged to comment on their profession, teaching behavior, pedagogical strategies, and teaching experiences.

Table 1: Matrix of mechanisms to explore lecturer beliefs
during interviews (adapted from Lesh & Kelly, 1997)

Mechanisms	Aims
Construction	To capture preliminary ideas
Differentiation	To express (dis)agreement
Reorganization	To revise/extend beliefs
Refinement	To consolidate/share beliefs

Lecturers were given quotes, questions, and scenarios describing teaching behavior and student engagement in lecture-based courses. After reading them aloud or to themselves, they were given time to consider their response. This process follows the premise that reading and discussing a situation helps the interviewees immerse themselves in the topic (Oplatka, 2018).

The interview started with three quotes to be discussed by indicating (dis)agreement and reporting initial thoughts by the participants. Then, three scenarios were presented to the interviewee for discussion. This step included the presentation of a response given by a fictitious lecturer to explore how the participating lecturer would react in the same situation. The final step included five questions on teaching behavior and student engagement.

Lecturers' responses were recorded and later manually transcribed, summarized, and reviewed by a researcher/colleague to contrast and discuss interpretations. Data were recorded using emergent codes based on the theory from student engagement literature. Analytical elements from Positioning Theory (Montenegro, 2012; Harré et al., 2009; Davies & Harré, 1990) were implemented to understand how the lecturers perceive their responsibility in student engagement and how they position their students in their courses.

The themes that emerged from coded data were used to capture the perspectives of the lecturers on student engagement in lecture-based courses as well as the positioning they attribute to their students. Such characteristics as codes were initially grouped and then regrouped in a second step considering three subthemes: self-positioning, attribution of positioning, and lecturer-student relationship.

3.1.1 First Stage: Mechanism of Construction

For the mechanism of construction, the lecturers read three quotes, designed to introduce the lecturer to the topic of the interview, and commented on them. The first quote demanded lecturers to respond to *"Lectures without student engagement turn students into passive observers."* The second quote was *"Ideal students focus on learning, not grades; improvement, not appearances; competency, not competition"*, while the third quote was *"The most important point of lectures is the transmission of information"*.

3.1.2 Second Stage: Mechanisms of Differentiation and Reorganization

For the mechanisms of differentiation and reorganization, the lecturers were confronted with scenario-based questions (i.e., fictitious situations). Each scenario was followed by a comment and a follow-up question that was discussed by each lecturer. For example, the following text was shown to the lecturer:

Scenario 1:

Professor #1: "I would like to see "ideal students" focus on learning. Unfortunately, the majority of my students in this course are not this type of student. How can I help my students to set appropriate goals for lecture-based courses?"

[Time for answering]

Now you will read an answer from another professor regarding the previous statement. Professor A: "In general, instructors can help students to set learning goals by (1) focusing attention on students' effort, (2) modeling how students should plan, monitor, and evaluate their learning, and (3) fostering the establishment of realistic, but challenging goals. But these strategies are impossible to implement in lecture-based courses." Do you agree or disagree? Why?

For the analysis of lecturers' answers and confrontations of ideas, both mechanisms were integrated and summarized into single statements.

3.1.3 Third Stage: Mechanism of Refinement

The last part of the interviews was designed to consolidate and refine thoughts about lecturing and student engagement. The following questions were asked:

1) How would you describe your own way of lecturing?
2) How would you describe the way your students behave in your lectures?
3) Are male students more likely to participate during lectures than female students? Why?
4) Have you ever tried to prevent students from surfing the Internet during lectures? Why?
5) What can professors do to keep students awake and engaged in lecture-based courses?

All responses were integrated and summarized into single statements to identify positionings and attributions of positionings in lecture-based courses.

4. Results

Student engagement in the German lecture-based courses included behavioral engagement (i.e., attention, punctuality, distraction avoidance), cognitive engagement (i.e., an effort to comprehend and make connections and reflections among topics), emotional engagement (i.e., a desire to learn, feeling a positive attribution of positioning as social researchers), and agentic engagement (i.e., asking questions that allow a topic to expand and the consideration of alternatives). The four dimensions emerged with different frequencies, with agentic engagement as the least observed form due to the characteristics of the teaching format.

Through multiple readings of the interview transcripts to identify descriptions of student engagement in lecture-based courses, the following three subtopics emerged: (1) lecturers as committed professionals with a sense of ownership, (2) students as social scientists, and (3) messages supporting autonomous motivation.

4.1 Lecturers as committed professionals with a sense of ownership

All lecturers considered their courses an invitation to awaken students' interest in social science research, guiding their attention and knowledge toward a critical and multidisciplinary perspective. This guidance, according to the lecturers, needs structure, a variety of activities, and flexibility when appropriate.

Observation data highlighted the lecturers' classroom structure (i.e., agenda, schedule, dates for submissions) and the variety of examples used to explain a topic (Table 2). The lecturers positioned themselves with a sense of ownership. According to Pierce et al. (2001), ownership allows individuals to alter their environment, thus satisfying their need to be efficacious. Efficacy is reflected in control over scheduling, curriculum development, selection of material, and planning.

Table 2: Summarized responses from each of the four lecturers (L) to the first quote

Quote: *"Lectures without student engagement turn students into passive observers. Do you agree or disagree?"*	
L1	Lecturers need provocative theses, texts, and questions in order to turn students into active students.
L2	Lecturers need interactive tools and response triggers in order to activate students' concentration and find out what students are thinking about.
L3	Lecturers can activate student engagement by using questions, discussions, and small group work.
L4	Student engagement is dependent on cultural and personal dispositions toward lectures.

As found in the mechanisms of differentiation and reorganization, all lecturers shared the view that lecturing as a teaching format is improved over time by the practice itself. This statement is connected to the lecturers' claim that they need to observe and analyze the tendencies of younger generations in order to select appropriate teaching material and strategies.

The results showed that all four lecturers viewed themselves as possessing the skills to promote student engagement when emphasizing the value of sociological

knowledge for both personal and professional life. The analysis also revealed no controlling discourse in these courses. A university teacher is *"a very elite status in German culture and is considered one of the top five most important professions in the country"* (Hairston, 2015, p. 882). Findings suggest that this status informs how they perceive and define their positioning as university lecturers (Table 3).

Table 3: Summarized responses from each of the four lecturers (L) to the second scenario

Scenario: *"… I start my lectures often with enthusiasm but after some weeks I have to accept that I lose my energy because I don't perceive any improvement or support from my students during my lectures. What should I do?"*	
L1	A lecturer in Germany gets his/her job for being a brilliant scientist but not for being a good lecturer necessarily. We may think that the more students have learning problems, the more lecturers lack pedagogical knowledge.
L2	Due to the ongoing hard work during each semester, most lecturers can mainly improve their teaching through experience and take advantage of what students like such as the use of technology.
L3	Even though lecturers in Germany are not required to take didactic courses, these courses are of great support in order to increase lecturers' enthusiasm and student engagement.
L4	The success of lecture-based courses is possible by using texts, graphics, examples, and principles in combination with additional learning environments such as tutorials and seminars.

In response to the third quote in mechanism 1, "The most important point of lectures is the transmission of information" (Table 4), lecturers 1 and 4 emphasized critical thinking and reflection (cognition), whereas lecturers 2 and 3 emphasized both thinking and social interaction (cognition and emotion). This exemplifies the importance given to the development of cognitive skills in lecture-based courses.

Table 4: Summarized responses from each of the four lecturers (L) to the third quote

Quote: *"The most important point of lectures is the transmission of information."*	
L1	Reflection and discussion are very important points of lectures.
L2	Positive emotions and cognitive connections are very important points of lectures.
L3	Information and social interaction are very important points of lectures.
L4	The development of critical thinking and scientific reflection are very important points of lectures.

These results showed that teaching behaviors supporting students' autonomy were related to encouraging students' independent thinking. However, teaching behaviors such as allowing students to make their own choices were not mentioned by lecturers. This finding is in line with prior research (Cents-Boonstra et al., 2021). Increasing the use of this strategy could prove to be particularly beneficial in increasing agentic engagement (Jang et al., 2009). Motivating teaching behaviors that are related to the active contributions of students (e.g., such as providing meaningful choices) seemed to be the least applied.

4.2 Positioning Students as Social Scientists
All four lecturers corroborated students' willingness to learn and make an effort to understand the content in their introductory level courses. These lecturers believed that

their students' goals for self-improvement (mastery goals) were higher than those for competency (performance goals). When students start out with setting mastery goals, it can better prepare their studying strategies and habits for university.

All lecturers included examples from personal experience as social science researchers and gave specific recommendations, for example, to avoid informal language and ambiguity in research. The lecturers drew attention to the label of 'students as social scientists', examples from personal experiences, and their own interest in students' questions and understanding.

In the mechanisms of differentiation and reorganization, the lecturers' responses included words and phrases reflecting silence as a component of student engagement in lecture-based courses (Table 5). For example, silence was positively perceived when students "think together" (lecturer 1), "think how" (lecturer 2), "come up with a bigger picture" (lecturer 3), and "read and write (their) thoughts" (lecturer 4).

Table 5: Summarized responses from each of the four lecturers (L) to the third scenario

Question after reading the scenario: *"How can I teach my students to be focused on learning by analyzing and not only on memorizing?"*	
L1	By thinking together and discussing few but relevant topics during each session, while individual thoughts are for seminars and tutorials.
L2	By criticizing the so-called truths and then thinking how this might be socially constructed.
L3	By bringing together different perspectives and coming up with a bigger picture of what students should know for both the examination and a later job.
L4	By developing the ability to reflect critically about the social world and prepare themselves autonomously for the course by reading and writing thoughts that can be discussed later in tutorials and seminars.

All lecturers related silence as a form of intentional involvement (behavioral engagement) as well as thinking about the lecture content (cognitive engagement). In this sense, they considered silence to be participatory involvement through actions such as paying attention and taking notes (behavioral engagement) as well as thinking about the lecture content (cognitive engagement). In other words, silence, engagement, and participation are not mutually exclusive. These findings show that participatory students were willing to be engaged in intentional silence during the non-mandatory attendance courses.

The lecturers highlight student commitment to pay attention during lectures. For example, "students come voluntarily, so they avoid getting distracted during the lecture" (lecturer 1), "breaks/pauses and technology during the lecture are needed in order to keep students' concentration" (lecturer 2), "students come voluntarily and a lecture hall is a professional environment in which careful listening is expected" (lecturer 3), and "students rarely use their mobiles during the lectures" (lecturer 4). These observations refer mainly to behavioral engagement (e.g., paying attention, attending, and listening). The lecturers also labeled their students in relation to silence with words such as "engaged", "concentrated", "motivated", and "interested".

Regarding modelling achievement goals in lecture-based courses, all four lecturers agreed that it is possible to implement strategies for helping students to set goals (Table

6). These strategies include helping students to set learning goals by (1) focusing attention on students' efforts, (2) modeling how students should plan, monitor, and evaluate their learning, and (3) fostering the establishment of realistic, but challenging goals (support for structure).

Table 6: Summarized responses from each of the four lecturers (L) to the first scenario

	Question after reading the scenario: "… *How can I help my students to set appropriate goals for lecture-based courses?*"
L1	A good student does not necessarily participate, but rather understands the topic. Students that understand tend to be more present in the lectures. We can help students to set their goals by saying explicitly that attending, reading, self-questioning, and self-explaining are relevant for learning.
L2	Even though explicit goals might be set in the lectures, a lecturer would expect students to achieve some implicit goals. However, there is no expectation of typical student engagement because of the lecture format.
L3	A lecturer sets explicit goals and ideal examples for learning. Typical engagement behavior is realistic as well as the implementation of strategies for engagement during lectures.
L4	A lecturer expects more emotional and cognitive engagements than the ability to learn and reproduce content directly. Engagement strategies cannot be implemented in the lecture itself, but in accompanying courses [tutorials and seminars].

Explicit or implicit modelling requires a classroom discourse based on the need to understand the topics, rather than just memorize them. In this respect, cognitive engagement refers to how the student approaches learning using sophisticated cognitive strategies, such as elaboration rather than memorization (Walker et al., 2006).

4.3 Messages Supporting Autonomous Motivation

Results from mechanism 1 show that lecturers perceived the role of the lecturer as crucial for the activation of student engagement in their courses. These lecturers proposed using tools, provocative theses, and even changing the lecture format to include work in small groups. In response to scenario 2, in the mechanisms of differentiation and reorganization, all lecturers agreed that pedagogical knowledge and didactic strategies are needed to improve both teaching practices and learning experiences. It is worth noting that in Germany pedagogical courses for lecturers are taken voluntarily.

Lecturers argued in their responses about engagement that lecturing "requires both planning and improvisation in order to find new examples and material of interest to the students" (lecturer 1), is about "talking to the students and noticing when a change or question is needed" (lecturer 2), is "explaining the field of sociology from different perspectives, sources, and theories" (lecturer 3), and is "a well-structured monologue and an invitation to awaken students' interest in the subject, guiding students' attention and knowledge toward a critical and reflexive perspective" (lecturer 4).

The participants concluded that lecturers should "use technology creatively and ask students to participate by finding out answers as sociologists" (lecturer 1), "give students time to digest knowledge, be humble when presenting content, and not make students feel stupid" (lecturer 2), "combine activities, provide challenging questions, and

give reasons about the importance of a topic for students' professional life" (lecturer 3), and "refer to the students' experiences and emphasize the content and sociological knowledge as valuable aspects for both personal and professional lives, as well as challenging students' intellectual capability by discussing enigmas of the academic subject" (lecturer 4).

In this study, the participating lecturers frequently employed questions for student participation such as, "Who is the next student who has not participated yet and wants to speak?", "Do you want a two-minute break before starting with the analysis of the survey?", and "Do you have any questions regarding this topic?" They also paused for questions or asked students to solve a problem applying the concept that have been presented. Asking questions allows the lecturers not only to identify students' misunderstandings during the course but also relates to the premise that autonomy support can provide an interpersonal tone of understanding as a signal that the lecturer believes in the students' abilities and shows his/her interest in student comprehension (Vermote et al., 2020).

In summary, all lecturers' perspectives were similar regarding student enjoyment and their expected behavior in non-mandatory attendance courses. The results highlighted the lecturer's perception of students as 'engaged', 'concentrated', 'motivated', and 'interested' (positive attribution of positioning), who are immersed as experienced learners in the German educational system (both positive adaptation and performance). The responsibility for student engagement in lecture-based courses was perceived as a shared endeavor by both students and lecturers. The results also indicate that motivating teaching behavior increases the likelihood of student engagement.

5. Discussion and Recommendations

Considering the importance of student engagement in lecture-based courses, this study contributes to prior research by applying an elicitation technique to explore lecturers' perceptions of their positionings and the positionings they attribute to their students. The results show that lecturers positioned themselves as committed professionals with a sense of ownership and they positioned their students as social scientists. Attribution of a positive positioning may be considered a motivational force for encouraging student engagement.

The findings of this study also revealed that student engagement was enhanced when lecturers referred to the students' experiences and emphasized that sociological knowledge is valuable for both personal and professional life. Previous research on students in German lecture-based social science courses has shown that lecturers bring different experiences related to the students' lives into their lectures to enhance student engagement (Montenegro, 2019).

This study supports the idea that the more an instructor interacts through messages supporting autonomous motivation, the more emotional engagement there will be. However, autonomy-supportive questions are not always followed by expressed student engagement; for instance by asking questions based on personal interest (Cents-

Boonstra et al., 2021). In the current study, lecturers offered their students opportunities to ask questions and promoted the freedom to speak. However, their students displayed little agentic engagement (e.g., asking questions of interest or taking initiative). This result may indicate a need to increase focus on fostering students' proactive behavior in lecture-based courses. However, just because most students remain silent, even when oral participation is encouraged, does not mean that they are not participating.

Students come to the university having experienced silence at school, which can be perceived as positive or negative, depending on the school culture they are immersed in. Silence in lecture-based courses offered in large theatre halls in Germany is intentional and perceived positively by students and lecturers, reflecting the cognitive state of engaged listening (MacKinnon, 1999). This study proposes the conceptualization of intentional silence as a component of student engagement. This follows Remedios et al. (2008), who recommend that instructors recognize silence as a learning tool and an active process where students are contemplative and engaged.

Silence is culturally relative (Gilmore, 1985) and contextual (Hine, 2020). Jaworski (1993) argued that the absence of speech does not mean the absence of communication and that silence and speech are on a communicative continuum. Similarly, Corradi-Fiumara (1990) described silence as "*a very fertile way of relating, aimed at the inner integration and deepening of dialogue*" (p. 102). In this study, intentional silence was identified as a valuable component of reactive dimensions of engagement in lecture-based courses that lays the groundwork for further discussions (e.g., questions and debates) in accompanying courses such as seminars and tutorials. In other words, intentional silence was linked to both behavioral and cognitive engagements. Given pedagogical trends in education, the relationship between speech and silence ought to be more carefully examined (Meyer, 2009).

School culture in Germany is associated with ideas, values, and goals that allow for the development of autonomy and independence (Vandenberghe, 2009). As education moves from kindergarten to upper secondary school, there is progressively less supervision and more individual freedom and responsibility. As Tinto (1993) asserts, students enter university with a variety of patterns of personal, family, and academic characteristics and skills. These include their initial perceptions and intentions regarding attending certain courses and pursuing certain achievement goals in higher education. Thus, learning strategies and achievement goals evolve early at the school level and continue to develop. By the time students enter university, instructors in Germany assume that autonomous students are familiar with strategies to achieve their academic goals. The findings of this study confirm the lecturers' expectation of student autonomous behavior at a university level.

6. Conclusion

This research analyzed lecturers' perceptions of student engagement and their role in supporting it based on their motivating teaching strategies (autonomy support and support for structure). Using lecturer voices to analyze perceptions about their teaching

and the intersection of school culture, this study reported how these may impact on the development and support of student engagement in large university courses. The analysis revealed no controlling discourse in these courses (i.e., no pressure to adopt the lecturer's perspective), lecturers positioned themselves as committed professionals with a sense of ownership, and they positioned their students as social scientists. Attribution of a positive positioning may be considered a motivational force for encouraging student engagement in the field of study.

Teaching in large courses requires that instructors use a range of strategies to connect with students and maintain student engagement. In this qualitative study, motivating teaching behaviors such as 'autonomy support' and 'support for structure' were related to student engagement. Additionally, this study proposes the conceptualization of *intentional silence* as a component of student engagement. When silence is a choice, it is intentional. Intentional silence was specifically identified as a valuable component of reactive dimensions of engagement (behavioral and cognitive engagement) that lays the groundwork for further discussions (e.g., questions and debates) in accompanying courses (tutorials and seminars).

Certain characteristics of students attending bachelor level courses in Germany, such as having gained self-regulation skills at upper secondary school, highlight the importance of establishing specific goals before attending higher education courses. The broader definition of engagement, where some of the responsibility for engagement resides with the school culture of the students, has also been considered here. Although many aspects of the German educational system are supportive, there is scope for further development in this area.

Conflict of Interest Statement
The author declares no conflicts of interest.

About the Author
Aida Montenegro is a PhD candidate at the University of Bonn, Germany. Her research has focused on alternative pedagogies, student motivation, foreign language learning/teaching, and how student engagement is conceptualized and measured in one-to-one tutoring and large classes.

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