



INTRODUCTION

Student drop-out has serious financial implications for universities through lost funding for non completers. (Jessop, Herberts & Solomon, 2004).

■ Drawing on social Identity Theory (SIT), (Tajfel and Turner, 1979), when students feel comfortable in their environment it should help them to achieve and maintain a positive social identity and to boost self-esteem.

■ Thomas (2002) indicates the university environment or habitus is important for student success

■ Students who engage with the faculty have higher academic confidence at the end of college, even controlling for background (Astin, 1977, cited in Laird, 2005).

Objective

The objective of this study was to measure the extent to which 1st year students engage with University of West London (UWL) and whether or not they feel at ease in the environment.

H₁ = High engagers and low engagers will differ over time for measures of (a) academic confidence, (b) wellbeing, (c) connection to UWL, (d) feeling at ease and (e) peer support

METHOD

Design

■ A quantitative 2 x 2 mixed design.

Between Subjects IV: Engagers and Non-Engagers.

Within Subjects IV: October and February measures

Dependent Variable: Academic Confidence, wellbeing, connection, peer support and comfort zone

Participants

■ **Phase 1:** N= 55 convenient sample of 1st year students from University of West London (UWL).

Low Engagers: 28, Male=10, Female =18

Age range = 18 – 45 (mean = 24.64; std dev = 7.95)

High Engagers: 26, Male=9, Female =17

Age range = 18 – 44 (mean = 27.35; std dev = 9.20)

■ **Phase 2:** N=13, Low Engagers: 6; High Engagers:7

Materials and Procedure

■ A paper self-report questionnaire was hand distributed with a follow-up electronic questionnaire distributed in February. Measures were similar to those used by Stuart et al., (2009) and all had reliability scores of $\alpha \geq .80$

Measures included:

Academic confidence; peer relations; comfort zone; wellbeing; feelings of connection as well as detailed demographics

RESULTS

2x2 mixed model ANOVAs were carried out with Engagement (high and low) and repeated measures (Oct and Feb) on the IVs of academic confidence, wellbeing, connection to UWL, Peer support and feeling at ease. There were no significant findings for wellbeing, ease or peer support therefore these will not be discussed below.

Academic Confidence

■ There is a significant main effect of academic confidence whereby it decreases over the term. $F(1,11) = 6.61, p < .05$

■ There is no significant main effect of engagement neither is there a significant interaction, $p > .05$

Feelings of connection

■ Shows significant lowering in feelings of connection to UWL over the first term $F(1,11)=4.85, p=.05$. There is no significant interaction $F(1,11) = 3.21, p=.10$

■ But high engagers stay stable whilst low engagers feeling of connection lowers. There is no significant main effect of engagement $F(1,11) = .45, p > .05$

■ A comparison of means identified a significant difference with regard to feelings of connection to university where ethnic groups were more likely to feel a connection to university than their white counterparts, $F(1,51) 4.90, p < .05$.

Engagement

■ Student status, whether domestic or international, is shown to be a significant predictor of engagement, $Beta = .35, p < .05$, whereby international students engage more.

Figure 1 Change in academic confidence amongst high and low engagers over the first term

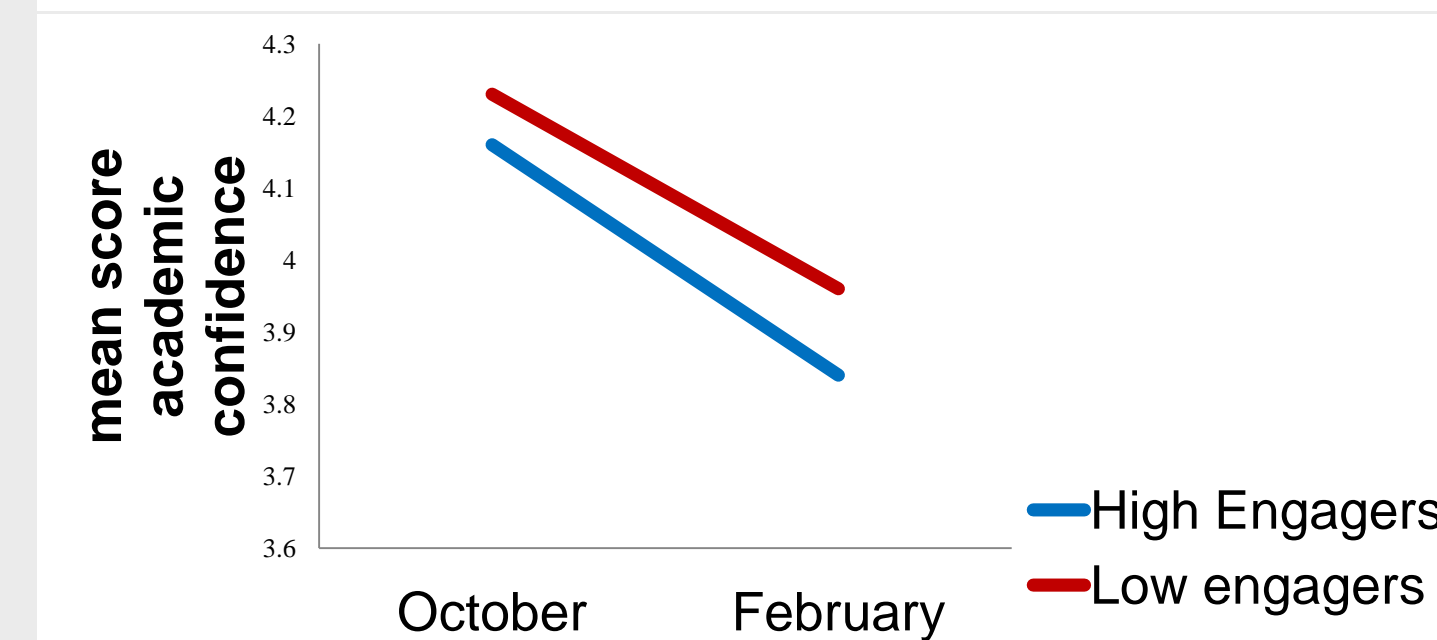


Figure 2 Change in Connection to UWL amongst high and low engagers over time

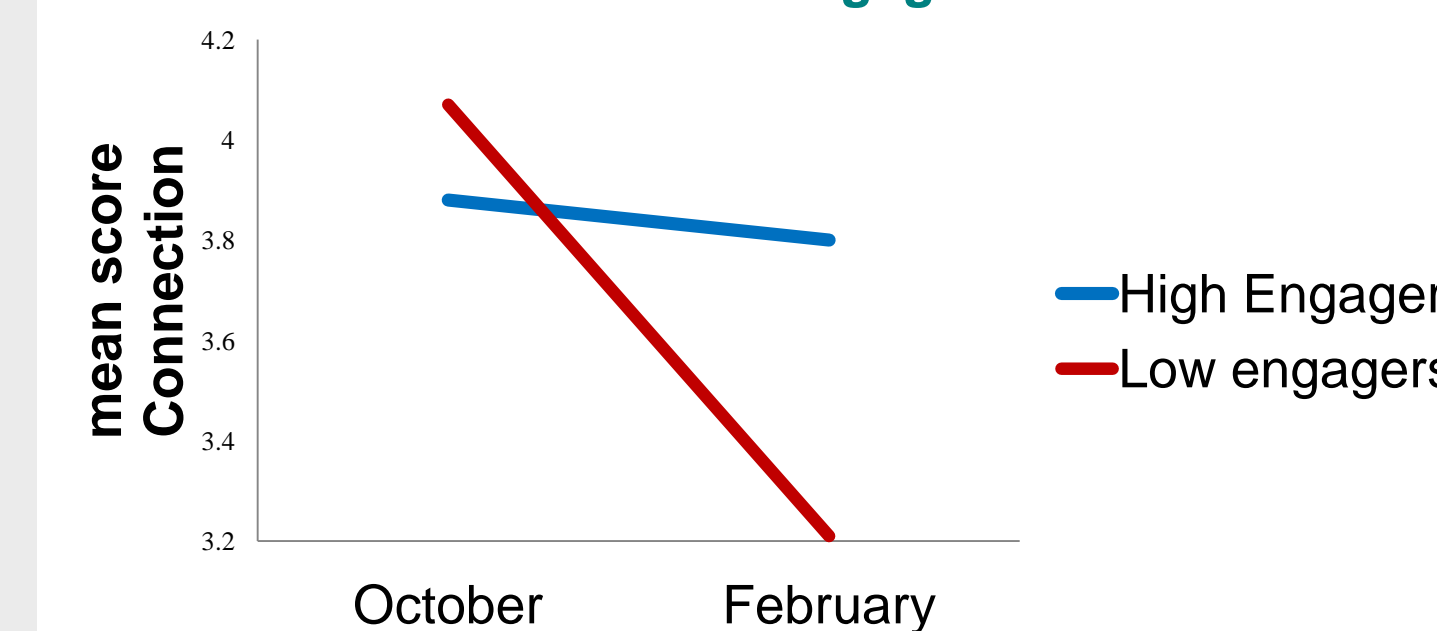
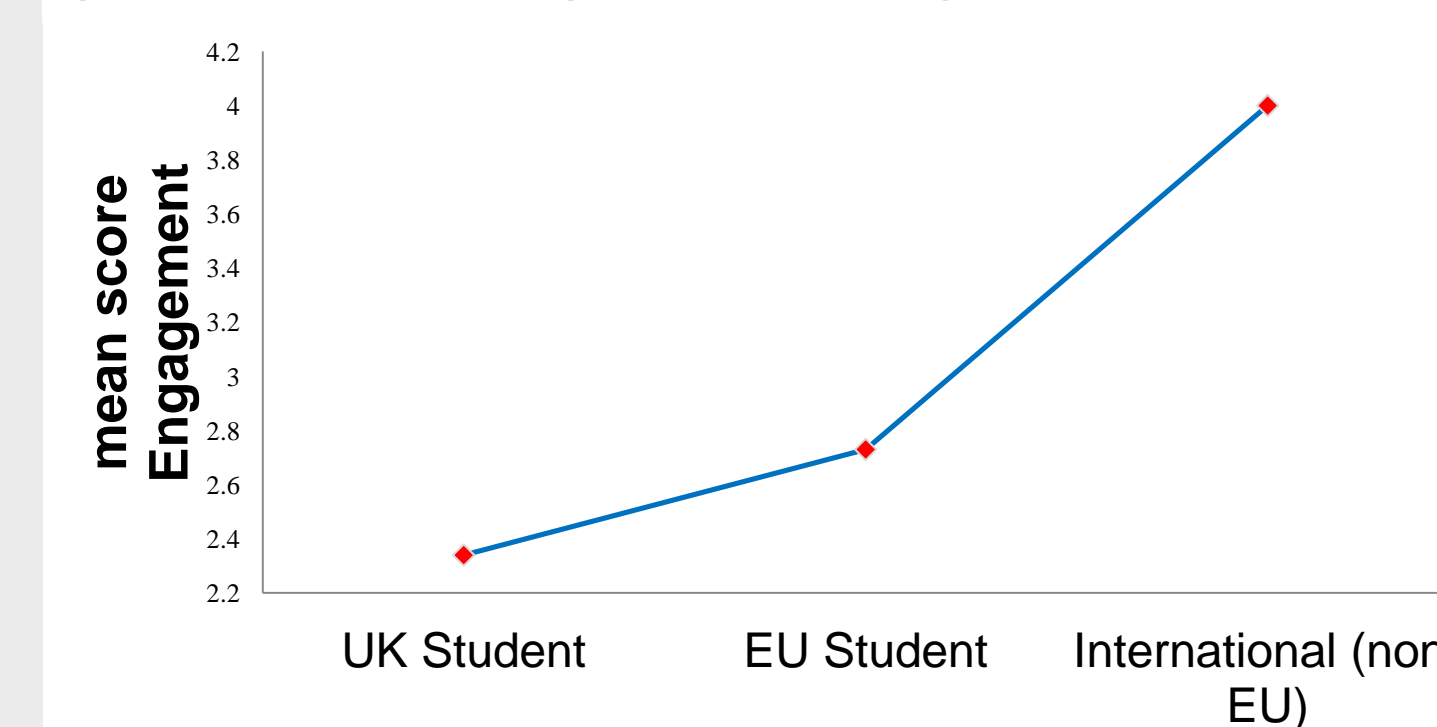


Figure 3 Levels of Engagement amongst UK, EU and Other International Students at TVU



DISCUSSION

Contrary to predictions

■ Academic confidence dropped over the first term for both high and low engagers. This may turn around over a longer period, in line with the findings of (Astin, 1977, cited in Laird, 2005), and warrants further research.

In line with predictions

■ In line with SIT whilst high engagers maintain a fairly stable level of connection to UWL for low engagers the connection weakens over term.

Implications

■ Engaging students at the outset is important to carry students through inevitable setbacks in the first term of study which leads to lower confidence

■ Universities need to understand the cultural capital (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977) of students and create an environment to suit this, which will facilitate their engagement, retention and success.

Study Limitations

■ Small sample sizes in phase 2 of the study reduces the power of the analysis and limits the possibility of further data exploration

FURTHER RESEARCH

■ To examine the effects of engagement on academic confidence over the duration of the course

■ To explore links between engagement, ethnicity and measures such as academic confidence, wellbeing, peer support, ease and connection to UWL in particular

References

See references on reverse of handout.

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