



# Do students with immigrant and native parents perceive themselves as equally engaged in school during adolescence?

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## Abstract

Student engagement in school needs to be considered when comparing immigrant and native students, particularly at a time of increasing migratory movements throughout the world. Differences in cognitive, affective, behavioral, and agentic student engagement dimensions were examined for students with immigrant and native parents, and for early and middle adolescence. A four-dimensional measure of student engagement was completed by 643 students (52.7% women). Results indicated that: students with native parents present higher cognitive and agentic engagement than students with immigrant parents; early adolescents are more cognitively engaged than middle adolescents; early adolescents with native parents present higher cognitive engagement than early adolescents with immigrant parents and middle adolescents. These results contribute to knowledge advancement, enhancing the understanding of student engagement with immigrant and native parents during early and middle adolescence, which might stimulate additional research moving towards a more inclusive school. Based on the findings and conclusions from this study, possibilities for future research and political-educational recommendations are presented.

**Keywords** Student engagement · Age differences in adolescence · Immigration · Inclusion

## Introduction

Student engagement has been highlighted as a determinant of academic success and commitment with school, as well as a protective factor against disruptive behaviors and dropout. Defined as a process related to learning (APA / ERIC Thesaurus) or as a centripetal force attracting students to

school (Veiga, 2016), engagement has been increasingly researched, especially after the first international congress on student engagement in schools (Veiga, 2014). There is evidence suggesting that student engagement is positively associated with academic achievement, motivation for learning, self-regulated learning, and school performance (Wang & Fredricks, 2014). Despite its relevance

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for academic adjustment and success, research regarding differences in student engagement according to parents' nationality (immigrants or natives) is still needed. Previous studies have examined differences in student engagement for early and middle adolescents (Veiga et al., 2014), but have not tested possible variations among immigrant and native adolescents across adolescence. Thus, what might help advance the field regarding personal and contextual factors of students' relationship with learning? One of the possible answers is to deepen our knowledge about the family. The family is among the contextual factors that most influence students' relation with learning (Abreu & Veiga, 2014; Eric & Yu-Lung, 2016; Martínez et al., 2021; Schnepf, 2007; Zimmerman, 2015). Particularly taking current migratory movements into account, parents' nationality (immigrants or natives) needs to be considered. Research suggests that students from immigrant families face more obstacles in their relationship with school and, therefore, present lower academic success than students from native families (Chiu & McBride-Chang, 2010; Li et al., 2011). However, research on this topic is still needed to better understand the reasons why a nationality gap seems to exist in students' relationship with school and academic achievement. In addition, personal factors also impact students' relationship with school. Namely, age differences and developmental changes from early to middle adolescence are important to consider (Arnett, 1999; Laursen et al., 1998; Steinberg, 1990; Veiga, 2019). Inconsistent findings have been found so far, with some studies reporting a decline in academic motivation and achievement (Laursen et al., 1998; Steinberg, 1990), and other studies suggesting a relative stability from early to middle adolescence (Arnett, 1999; Larson & Ham, 1993). These inconsistent results claim further research (Arnett, 1999; Larson & Ham, 1993; Veiga, 2019).

Besides a need to advance empirical studies regarding the separate and combined/interaction effects of variables such as adolescence (early versus middle) and parents' nationality (immigrant versus native) on student engagement, a more comprehensive view of the latter is required. Student engagement can be conceptualized as a construct that adds the agentic dimension to three more traditional dimensions (cognitive, affective, behavioral). Agentic engagement is defined as the student's intentional, proactive, and constructive participation in the instructional process (Reeve, 2013; Reeve & Tseng, 2011; Veiga, 2013, 2016). Agency frames an active role of the student, who thinks and is inquisitive about school contents – the student offers suggestions, expresses preferences, and asks questions. The present study aims to fill these research gaps by examining variations in engagement for early or middle adolescence and for parents' immigrant or native nationality. Before presenting the study, a literature review on the following topics is offered: student engagement; age differences in adolescence; immigrant and

native students in school; student engagement of immigrant and native students.

## Student Engagement

Many studies have confirmed that favorable family environments foster engaged students (Abreu & Veiga, 2014; Li et al., 2011), and that engaged adolescents have a healthier development and are more likely to perform well in school and the society (Chase et al., 2014; Madill et al., 2014). Researchers agree that student engagement is a meta-construct including multiple dimensions (Jimerson et al., 2003; Lam et al., 2012; Sinclair et al., 2003), but the number of its dimensions remains unclear. Some researchers theorize engagement as comprising cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions (Glanville & Wildhagen, 2007; Lam et al., 2016). More recently, other researchers considered a four-dimensional nature of the construct by adding an agentic dimension (Reeve, 2013; Reeve & Tseng, 2011; Veiga, 2013, 2016). The agentic dimension encompasses the student's constructive contribution to the instruction and characterizes him/her as a proactive agent of action, with initiative to make suggestions or ask questions and to express interests to the teacher (Reeve, 2013; Veiga, 2016, 2019; Wentzel, 2012). The cognitive dimension refers to self-regulatory strategies, learning approaches and students' investment (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001; Fredricks et al., 2004). It includes motivation, self-efficacy strategies and academic aspirations (Jimerson et al., 2003). The affective dimension is related to the sense of belonging to school and of feeling identified with school, as well as to positive emotions felt towards colleagues and teachers (Appleton et al., 2008; Christenson et al., 2012; Glanville & Wildhagen, 2007; Johnson et al., 2001). The behavioral dimension refers to expected positive behaviors directed toward school, such as paying attention during classes, participating in school tasks, getting good grades (Fredricks et al., 2004; Jordan & Nettles, 1999), and transgressing no rules at school (Fredricks et al., 2004; Veiga, 2019).

Many studies have showed that engagement contributes to academic achievement and protects students from personal and school problems, namely school dropout and failure, disruptive and risk behavior (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001; Chiu & McBride-Chang, 2010). At the same time, we know that engagement is strongly linked with different contextual factors, such as family, school, or social backgrounds (Veiga, 2019).

## Variations During Adolescence

Several authors (Elkind, 1998; Steinberg, 1990; Veiga, 2019) suggest that adolescence can be conceived according to three developmental stages - early (11–14 years),

middle (15–17 years) and late adolescence (18–21). This study offers a cross-sectional research limited to early and middle adolescence. Some authors conceive adolescence as a time of difficulties in which adolescents are more vulnerable (Fuentes et al., 2020; Larson et al., 2002; McGue et al., 2005), showing increased negative affect during interactions with parents (Garcia et al., 2020; Laursen et al., 1998; Steinberg, 1990; Tsai et al., 2013). Teachers usually report a significant increase of disruptive classroom behaviors in middle adolescents (Eccles et al., 1993; Garcia & Serra, 2019; Veiga, 2019; Wang & Holcombe, 2010). However, other studies indicate that adolescence is not a time of disturbance, unlike other developmental ages (Arnett, 1999; Larson & Ham, 1993). Several authors (Elkind, 1998; Steinberg, 1990; Veiga, 2019) claim that while early adolescents (11–14 years) present a concrete and self-centered thinking (“egocentrism”), middle adolescents (15–17) think abstractly and fight to become more independent from their parents. The transition from early to middle adolescence is also highlighted as a time of personality building, where changes in the valorization of significant others (parents, colleagues) take place, with possible negative repercussions on school adjustment, especially in students living in vulnerable conditions (Abreu & Veiga, 2014; Chiu & McBride-Chang, 2010; Li et al., 2011). What happens in adolescence can be critical for students’ engagement in school (Marks, 2000; Steinberg, 1990; Wang & Holcombe, 2010). During adolescence, several changes can occur. The relationships with parents may reduce importance, while the adolescent’s relations with peers may increase frequency and importance (Chen et al., 2020; Elkind, 1998; Garcia et al., 2019; Queiroz et al., 2020; Riquelme et al., 2018; Steinberg, 1990; Veiga, 2019). Authority becomes relativized and the adolescent starts seeing him/herself as equal to the adult, which can affect school adjustment and dimensions of engagement (Marks, 2000; Steinberg, 1990; Wang & Holcombe, 2010). An anti-intellectual attitude is frequently developed during adolescence and might limit cognitive engagement in school (Vannatta et al., 2009). During adolescence, achievement and school engagement seem to be negatively associated with students’ social standing (Preckel et al., 2013) and to be devalued by peers. On the other hand, a decrease in engagement seems to be related to peer influence, which increases during adolescence, contrary to a decrease of family influence (Abreu & Veiga, 2014; Chiu & McBride-Chang, 2010; Li et al., 2011; Steinberg, 1990).

A study with 1543 students across early (12–14) and middle (15–17) adolescence found a decline in three dimensions of engagement - cognitive, affective, and behavioral (Fernández-Zabala et al., 2016). Although these results are aligned with previous studies (Green et al., 2012; Wang & Eccles, 2012), such a decrease is not a universal pattern (Li & Lerner, 2011), which claims future research.

Conceptually, developmental changes from early to middle adolescence may contribute to adolescent’s self-assessments featured by a less positive view of him/herself, as can be illustrated by adolescents’ self-reports on self-esteem (Harter, 2012). Longitudinal (Baldwin & Hoffmann, 2002) and cross-sectional studies (Kalakoski & Nurmi, 1998; Robins et al., 2002) have confirmed such a less positive trend in adolescents’ self-reports. However, other studies found that only some dimensions of self-assessments decrease and suffer from a less positive self-view during adolescence (Kuzucu et al., 2014).

In addition, there are inconsistent results on whether the oscillation of school engagement is more due to personal or contextual variables (Glanville & Wildhagen, 2007; Lam et al., 2012). Literature is also scarce about whether these variations in engagement occur in the four dimensions, including the agentic one, during adolescence.

### Immigrant and Native Students in Schools

Immigration has been an important and up-to-date issue in many countries of the world. Scientific research has contributed to increasing knowledge about some immigration problems. However, in-depth studies on what is happening in specific groups of immigrants are lacking. One of the groups that needs to be more deeply investigated is the one of students with immigrant parents (Eric & Yu-Lung, 2016; Miklikowska et al., 2019; OECD, 2015; Rodríguez et al., 2020; Santos et al., 2016; Walsh et al., 2016). Thus, the present cross-sectional research considered students with immigrant and native parents.

In Portugal, since the 1970’s, there was a lot of immigration from the historic Portuguese colonies (Angola, Mozambique, Cabo Verde, Guinea Bissau, and São Tomé e Príncipe). The nation-states holding Portuguese as an official language in Africa are referred to by the acronym PALOP (Países Africanos de Língua Oficial Portuguesa – Portuguese-speaking African Countries). Therefore, Portuguese schools have received a great number of immigrant children and young people from these countries in the last few decades (Guerra et al., 2019; Oliveira & Gomes, 2014). Elementary, middle-school, and high school in 2013–2014, was attended by 40,737 foreign students (from 5 to 18 years of age), corresponding to 4% of the school population.

Several researchers describe the immigrant situation as a predictor of lower school performance (Miklikowska et al., 2019; OECD, 2015; Walsh et al., 2016). Thus, researchers frequently show a significant and persistent relationship between the immigrant situation and school success, with immigrant students presenting a lower achievement than native students (Abreu & Veiga, 2014; Chiu & McBride-Chang, 2010; Li et al., 2011). In effect, several studies indicate that immigrants tend to present greater difficulties

attaining good school results, when compared to national peers from the host countries (Entorf & Minoiu, 2005; Eric & Yu-Lung, 2016; OECD, 2012; Peguero & Bondy, 2011; Veiga, 2019). Results from the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) (OECD, 2012) showed that students with an immigrant family background tend to demonstrate worse academic achievement in school.

Research has also shown that immigrant students at school are more likely to engage in fighting behaviors and to perpetrate or suffer bullying than native peers (Russo-Netzer et al., 2019; Walsh et al., 2016). Harmful attitudes against immigrants have changed in recent years, with an apparent decline. Still, according to some authors, negative feelings towards immigrants are not expressed through open behavior, but through more subtle expressions (insecurity, feeling threatened) (Rueda & Navas, 1996). This seems to illustrate the implicit prejudice concept, which consists of a negative predisposition toward a social group that can unintentionally bias one's expectations and behaviors (Wittenbrink et al., 2019). At the same time, the literature states that teachers' negative expectations about their students may have an adverse impact on academic performance and inclusion, with greater effects on groups presenting academic difficulties, such as children with immigrant parents (Heckmann, 2008; Moyano et al., 2020; Veiga et al., 2009). Research on the Pygmalion effect alerts that teachers' positive or negative expectations concerning their students can respectively impact their positive or negative academic achievement (Friedrich et al., 2015). Hence, it is understandable that in Portugal, although school tends to be inclusive, the process of integrating students from cultural minorities still represents an educational challenge. For example, we know that immigrant students often attend lower ranked schools, with less qualified teachers (Chiu & McBride-Chang, 2010; Veiga, 2019). In sum, the relevance of immigrants' situation as a factor of academic adjustment and achievement has been documented in several studies.

### Student Engagement of Immigrant and Native Students

The family context has been considered an important factor of school engagement, which can precede positive behavior and school achievement (Reeve & Tseng, 2011; Reeve & Shin, 2020; Wentzel, 2012). Immigrant and native students differ in their family structure and dynamics, and such differences may be associated with school engagement (Chiu et al., 2012). Family characteristics can influence students' perceived school rights, which are positively and significantly related with the dimensions of their engagement at school (Malveiro & Veiga, 2016; Veiga et al., 2014). Given the differences between immigrant and native families, it is likely that immigrant students perceive themselves as

holding fewer rights than native students. Likewise, immigrant families generally have fewer years of study and lower socioeconomic status, when compared to native families (Abreu & Veiga, 2014; Eric & Yu-Lung, 2016; Schnepf, 2007). This can also contribute for immigrant students being less engaged in school and presenting less academic success than native students (Chiu & McBride-Chang, 2010). The literature suggests that variables such as cultural capital and educational resources can generate greater engagement in school for native students (Abreu & Veiga, 2014; Li et al., 2011).

A vital family antecedent includes the student's parents (Abreu & Veiga, 2014; Chiu & McBride-Chang, 2010; Li et al., 2011). Immigrant parents report more barriers to the engagement of their children in school than native parents (Eric & Yu-Lung, 2016; Mantovani & Gasperoni, 2018). Hence, adverse family contexts can contribute to a lack of engagement, which in turn prefigures disruptive behavior and school dropout (Eric & Yu-Lung, 2016; Reeve & Tseng, 2011; Veiga, 2019). Students with immigrant parents may thus perceive themselves as less engaged in school than students with native parents.

School variables are also related to student engagement. Literature shows that school variables are especially relevant during the adaptation process of immigrant adolescents to the host country (Malveiro & Veiga, 2016; Peguero & Bondy, 2011; Schleicher, 2012). Several studies (Chiu & McBride-Chang, 2010; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001) suggests that native students perceive their school engagement as greater than immigrant students do. Despite these results, Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (2001) found that most immigrant students were confident about school and that 70% of their immigrant student sample rated their schools positively. These authors also showed that immigrant students more often than natives ones perceive their teachers as ideal figures or even as substitute parents (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). Chiu et al. (2012) also found that native students, although holding a greater sense of belonging to school (emotional engagement), seem to show weaker cognitive engagement compared to immigrant students. However, immigrant students seem to establish weaker relationships with their teachers.

However, it should be noted that most of these previous studies have been conducted in the United States (Bersani et al., 2014; Caballero et al., 2017; Steinberg et al., 1992), with participants who lived non-normative experiences (Caballero et al., 2017) or who represented specific groups of the population as young offenders (Bersani et al., 2014). Moreover, educational studies with immigrant and native families have been focused on problems, like school dropout (Driscoll, 1999), or have usually examined academic performance indicators (e.g., GPA) (Padilla & Gonzalez, 2001), with less being known about specific components of

school adjustment, such as student engagement. Evidence has also been limited to isolated analyses of engagement dimensions (e.g., Chiu et al., 2012). This has led to a prevalent incomplete profile of engagement, lacking evidence on its four main dimensions, including the most recent one, agentic engagement (Reeve & Tseng, 2011; Reeve & Shin, 2020; Veiga, 2016).

## The Present Study

The present study is framed within the main purpose of investigating both personal and contextual factors of student engagement during adolescence. Although engagement seems to be positively related to school adjustment, student engagement in school can vary for the status of their parents (Chiu & McBride-Chang, 2010; Martínez et al., 2019) and can decrease during adolescence (Ryan, 2001; Wang & Fredricks, 2014). In this manner, it can be stated that students of immigrant origin simultaneously face the changes demanded by the transition to a different culture and the challenges of the age as teenagers (Casas et al., 2018; Council of Europe, 2016; Covell et al., 2017; García & Marks, 2009; OECD, 2015). Despite what is already known about student engagement in school, there is still a lack of knowledge about what underpins the differences between immigrant and native students during adolescence (Eric & Yu-Lung, 2016; Luengen et al., 2021; Menken & García, 2010; Özdemir et al., 2021). It is important to investigate if students with immigrant and native parents perceive themselves as being equally engaged in school during early and middle adolescence.

In a context that emphasizes the inclusion of all students in school, the main goal of this study was to investigate differences in student engagement (considering its affective, cognitive, behavioral, and agentic dimensions) according to the nationality of the students' parents, during early and middle adolescence. This major goal leads us to three specific goals, each with a respective research hypothesis. The first goal is to examine whether students with immigrant versus native parents differ in their engagement. *Hypothesis 1* states that students with native parents will present higher engagement than students with immigrant parents. The second goal was to test whether early and middle adolescents vary in their engagement in school. *Hypothesis 2* states that early adolescents will present higher engagement than middle adolescents. The third goal was to investigate whether parents' nationality and students age, simultaneously considered, play an effect on student engagement. *Hypothesis 3* states that while early adolescents with native parents will be more engaged than peers with immigrant parents, engagement levels will be equivalent for both groups in middle adolescence. Thus, a decrease of engagement among native students is expected to occur from early to middle adolescence,

whereas engagement is expected to remain stable among students with immigrant parents.

Given that most immigrant students in Portugal are from Portuguese-speaking countries, the study described here focused only on students from Portuguese-speaking African countries (PSAC). According to Seabra and Mateus (2003), and to Seabra et al. (2016), 60% of immigrant students and descendants of immigrants are concentrated in the metropolitan regions of Lisbon and Porto, the two largest cities in the country. As in Portuguese mandatory education, there is an obligation for students to enroll in schools belonging to the area where they live, there is a concentration of immigrant students in certain schools (Casa-Nova, 2005). For this reason, the sample of the present study consisted of students with native and immigrant parents from Portuguese-speaking African countries living in the metropolitan regions of Lisbon and Porto.

## Method

### Participants

This study was carried out in Portuguese public middle-schools of the metropolitan areas of Lisbon (fourteen) and Porto (eight), selected among those reported by the General Direction of Education and Science Statistics as having more students with immigrant parents. The classrooms — reported by the management of those schools as having more students with immigrant parents — were also chosen. Hence, from the list of schools in the metropolitan areas of Lisbon and Porto, those with the highest number of immigrants were selected; in each of those schools, the classrooms with the highest proportion of immigrants were selected. Participants were 643 adolescent students. There were 261 (40.6%) students with immigrant parents and 382 (59.4%) with native (Portuguese) parents. Age ranged from 11 to 17 years old ( $M = 13.83$ ,  $SD = 2.33$ ). Students in early adolescence were aged 11–14 ( $n = 361$ , 56.1%) and students in middle adolescence were aged 15–17 ( $n = 282$ , 43.9%). There were 339 women (52.7%) and 304 men (47.3%).

### Procedure

Ethical clearance for conducting this study was granted by the Ethics Committee of the Institute of Education, University of Lisbon, Portugal. All participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw the study at any point. To preserve confidentiality, no names of the participants are mentioned in the research.

An a priori power analysis was calculated to estimate the sample dimension required to detect a medium-small effect size with a high power ( $\alpha = .05$ ,  $1 - \beta = .95$ ;  $f = .17$ ),

in a univariate F-test with four groups of interaction effects (García et al., 2008; Pérez et al., 1999; Veiga et al., 2015). In the present study, with two adolescence stages (early and middle) and students with immigrant and native parents, a minimum sample of 600 students was needed. The sample size of the present study was 643, slightly larger than the minimum size required. Before conducting the study, the consents from the Portuguese Ministry of Education, from the schools' Directors, from the students' parents, and from the students themselves were obtained. School psychologists and trained teachers administered the questionnaires in the schools' classrooms. Data was collected using an online survey, which was applied during class. Several participants were excluded — with inconsistent responses (13.4%) and over 17 years old (2.6%).

## Measures

### Student Engagement

Most of the measures assessing student engagement are two- or three-dimensional, as they do not include a dimension that has been recently acknowledged as a very important one in school settings, the agentic dimension (Reeve & Tseng, 2011; Veiga, 2013). It seemed, therefore, relevant to go beyond three-dimensionality and to use a psychometric-sound measure that would also enable the assessment of the agentic dimension. Data on engagement was collected with the *Student Engagement in School: A Four-Dimensional Scale* (SES-4DS) (Veiga, 2016, 2019).

The SES-4DS includes 20 items, interleaved by four dimensions, and with seven reversed items. Each dimension contains five items, answered in a Likert-type scale from 1 (totally disagree) to 6 (totally agree). Students reported their engagement in school on four dimensions. The cognitive dimension (items 1, 5, 9, 13, 17) includes students' investment in learning approaches and in self-regulatory strategies (e. g., "When I am reading, I try to understand the author's intention", "When I write my academic work, first I make a plan of the text"). The affective dimension (items 2, 6, 10, 14, 18) evaluates emotions generated by school and the sense of belonging to school (e. g., reverse item, "My school is a place where I feel excluded", "My school is a place where I make friends easily"). The behavioral dimension (items 3, 7, 11, 15, 19) assesses students' actions directed toward school (e. g., reverse items, "I intentionally disturb the class", "I am absent from school without a valid reason"). The agentic dimension (items 4, 8, 12, 16, 20) evaluates students' constructive contribution to the progression of instruction and to advance their learning (e. g., "During classes, I ask questions to my teachers", "I give suggestions to teachers to enhance classes"). The exploratory and confirmatory factorial analysis carried out in the initial and previous studies

of the SES-4DS (Veiga, 2013, 2016, 2019; Veiga & Viorel, 2014) found a multidimensional structure and showed that the four dimensions of school engagement are relatively independent from each other. In the present study, total engagement scores ranged from 49 to 117, and internal consistency, measured by Cronbach's alpha, was .84. Cognitive dimension scores ranged from 8 to 29, and internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) was .74. Affective dimension scores ranged from 8 to 30, and internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) was .79. Behavioral dimension scores ranged from 10 to 30, and internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) was .90. Agentic scores ranged from 6 to 30, and internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) was .89. Further elements about the psychometric properties of the instrument used are as follows: cognitive, CR = .75, AVE = .53, McDonald's (omega) = .71; affective, CR = .82, AVE = .59, McDonald's = .79; behavioral, CR = .91, AVE = .49, McDonald's = .90; and agentic, CR = .88, AVE = .53 and McDonald's = .87. These values are similar to those found in precedent studies with the SES-4DS (Prata, Festas, Oliveira, & Veiga, 2019; Veiga, 2016, 2019). Gender invariance in the SES-4DS was tested and the values obtained (such as  $\Delta$  CFI .01) were lower than the threshold indicated by Cheung and Rensvold (2002). In addition to these psychometric properties, the four-dimensionality of the SES-4DS supports the need to overcome the two- or three-dimensional structure of extant engagement scales. It should also be noted that the SES-4DS captures the four underlying dimensions of engagement across cultures, as it was previously found in a study with students from Portugal and Romania (Veiga & Viorel, 2014).

### Demographic Variables

Students were asked the nationality of their father and mother, which enabled the identification of students with immigrant or native parents. If at least one parent was born in a PALOP country, the student was included in the group with immigrant parents. Age was obtained by the student's answer to the question how old he/she was.

## Results

### Preliminary Analyses

Since students were sampled from schools within the cities (i.e., Lisbon and Porto), preliminary nested multifactorial MANOVAs (Maxwell & Delaney, 2004) was applied, with the twenty-two schools – fourteen (64%) from Lisbon, and eight (36%) from Porto — and the two cities as random factors for student engagement dimensions as dependent variables (i. e. cognitive, affective, behavioral, and agentic dimensions). The MANOVA did not yield statistically

significant effects of cities —  $\Lambda = .797$ ,  $F(4, 32) = 2.03$ ,  $p > .05$  — neither of schools within cities —  $\Lambda = .784$ ,  $F(140, 2404) = 1.08$ ,  $p > .05$ . These results suggest that there are no significant differences between the two largest Portuguese cities — despite their cultural idiosyncrasies — on any of the dimensions of student engagement. The same reasoning can be applied to schools. This finding may bring support to a possible generalization of the results for the rest of the national territory with similar schools.

**Multivariate Analyses**

Each dimension of engagement was subjected to a MANOVA using a 2 by 2 factor design – parents’ nationality (immigrant vs. native) by adolescence (early vs. middle) with interaction effect. The two-way MANOVA showed statistically significant multivariate effects of adolescence,  $\Lambda = .96$ ,  $F(4, 636) = 6.78$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .04$ , parents’ nationality,  $\Lambda = .95$ ,  $F(4, 636) = 7.65$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .05$ , and the interaction effect for adolescence by parents’ nationality,  $\Lambda = .98$ ,  $F(4, 636) = 4.00$ ,  $p = .003$ ,  $\eta^2 = .03$  (Table 1).

Therefore, differences related to adolescence, parents’ nationality, and the interaction between the two independent variables were significant for the overall engagement.

**Univariate Analyses of Main Effects**

Regarding the main effect of parents’ nationality (Table 2), univariate test results showed a statistically significant effect on the cognitive engagement dimension,  $F(1, 639) = 7.93$ ,  $p = .005$ ,  $\eta^2 = .01$ , and on the agentic dimension,  $F(1, 639) = 30.13$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .05$ . Students with native parents presented higher cognitive ( $M = 18.77$ ,  $SD = 5.22$ ) and agentic engagement ( $M = 19.15$ ,  $SD = 4.89$ ) than students with immigrant parents (for cognitive dimension,  $M = 17.17$ ,  $SD = 4.39$ ; for agentic dimension,  $M = 16.64$ ,  $SD = 5.49$ ). In what concerns to the remaining two dimensions, affective and behavioral engagement, the effect of parents’ nationality was not statistically significant. Thus, Hypothesis 1 was partially supported.

Univariate test results showed a statistically significant main effect of adolescence (Table 3) on the cognitive

**Table 1** Two-Way factorial MANOVA for dimensions of engagement: cognitive, affective, behavioral, and agentic

Source of variation	$\Lambda$	$F$	$df_{\text{hypothesis}}$	$df_{\text{error}}$	$p$	$\eta^2$
(A) Adolescence	.96	6.78	4	636	< .001***	.04
(B) Parents’ nationality	.95	7.65	4	636	< .001***	.05
A × B	.98	4.00	4	636	.003**	.03

\*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$

**Table 2** Means and standard deviations of the four dimensions of engagement by parents’ nationality

Dimensions	Parents’ nationality				ANOVA		
	Native		Immigrant		$F(1, 639)$	$p$	$\eta^2$
	$M$	$SD$	$M$	$SD$			
Cognitive	18.77	5.22	17.17	4.39	7.93	.005**	.01
Affective	24.01	5.15	23.26	4.86	2.22	.136	.00
Behavioral	25.28	4.02	25.63	3.61	.41	.523	.00
Agentic	19.15	4.89	16.64	5.49	30.13	< .001***	.05

\*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$

**Table 3** Means and standard deviations of the four dimensions of engagement by stage of adolescence

Dimensions	Adolescence				ANOVA		
	Early		Middle		$F(1, 639)$	$p$	$\eta^2$
	$M$	$SD$	$M$	$SD$			
Cognitive	19.01	5.10	16.99	4.53	14.99	< .001***	.02
Affective	24.02	4.84	23.30	5.27	2.24	.135	.00
Behavioral	25.18	4.33	25.74	3.15	1.84	.175	.00
Agentic	18.64	5.50	17.48	4.92	1.21	.272	.00

\*\*\*  $p < .001$

engagement dimension,  $F(1, 639) = 14.99, p < .001, \eta^2 = .02$ . Thus, early adolescents presented a greater cognitive engagement ( $M = 19.01, SD = 5.10$ ) than middle adolescents ( $M = 16.99, SD = 4.53$ ). For the remaining dimensions (affective, behavioral, and agentic), this effect was not statistically significant. These results partially sustained Hypothesis 2.

### Univariate Analyses of Interaction Effects

There was a statistically significant adolescence by parents' nationality interaction effect on the cognitive dimension,  $F(1, 639) = 8.90, p = .003, \eta^2 = .01$  (Fig. 1). Comparison of the four groups on cognitive engagement (Bonferroni post-hoc tests) showed that early adolescents with native parents presented significantly higher engagement ( $M = 19.69, SD = 5.31$ ) than any of the other groups ( $p < .001$ ). Between each of the remaining groups, there were no statistically significant differences; similar averages were found between the remaining groups: middle adolescents with immigrant parents ( $M = 17.03, SD = 4.55$ ), middle adolescents with native parents ( $M = 16.95, SD = 4.53$ ), and early adolescents with immigrant parents ( $M = 17.37, SD = 4.17$ ). These results offered partial support to the Hypothesis 3.

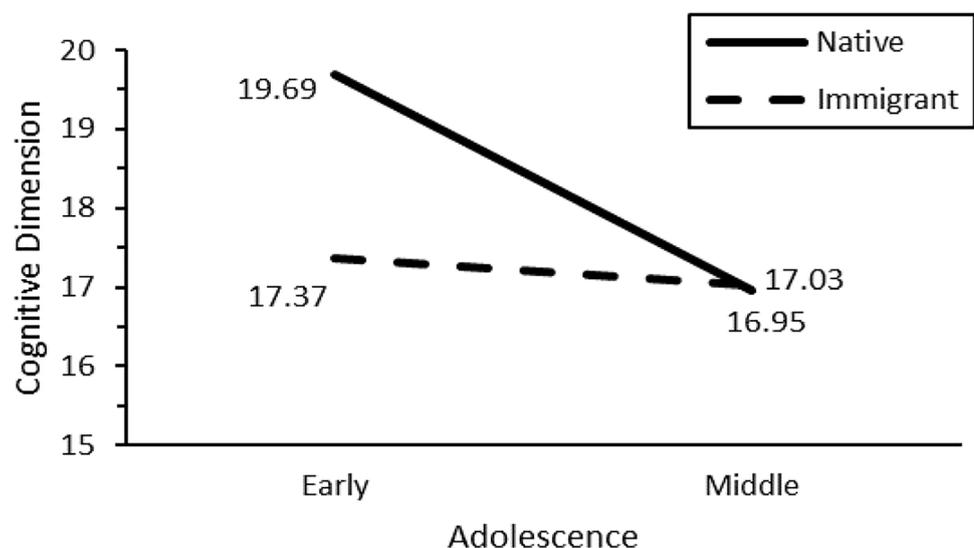
### Discussion

This study analyzed student engagement in school according to adolescence (early vs. middle) and the nationality of students' parents (immigrant vs native). Overall, the results from the present study, conducted in a European country, Portugal, offered partial support to the research hypotheses and revealed a consistent pattern: adolescent students with native parents generally score higher in engagement than their peers from immigrant families. However, both

similarities and differences between students with native and immigrant parents in the multidimensional profile of the student engagement construct (cognitive, affective, behavioral, and agentic) were found.

A main effect of parents' nationality on the cognitive and agentic dimensions was found, with higher results for students with native parents, thus partially supporting Hypothesis 1. These results are within the range of studies suggesting lower academic achievement for students with immigrant parents (Miklikowska et al., 2019; OECD, 2015; Rodríguez et al., 2020; Schnepf, 2007). The literature review pointed to similar results (Chiu et al., 2012; Miklikowska et al., 2019; OECD, 2015; Schnepf, 2007; Walsh et al., 2016). Immigrant families generally have a lower socioeconomic status and fewer school years (Abreu & Veiga, 2014; OECD, 2012; Reeve & Tseng, 2011; Schnepf, 2007). Schools attended by immigrant students are generally of lower quality, their teachers are less qualified and sometimes hold negative expectations about their students (Heckmann, 2008; Veiga et al., 2009). Each of the previously given reasons may have their weight explaining the lower cognitive and agentic engagement in school herein found for students with immigrant parents (Chiu & McBride-Chang, 2010; Peguero & Bondy, 2011). The interpretation of these results does not rely on individual, but on external factors. Given the nature of the dimensions in which differences were discerned (cognitive and agentic), the teaching and learning contexts seem to stand out. One explanation for the higher results from students with native parents in the cognitive dimension may be that the school curricula and their teaching contexts are aligned with the values of the dominant culture in which the native students are embedded. The higher results of these same students in the agentic dimension may be linked to the teachers' greater proximity to the dominant culture and, therefore, their greater receptiveness to the native students'

**Fig. 1** Means in cognitive engagement of early and middle adolescent students with immigrant and native parents



questions and initiatives (Chiu & McBride-Chang, 2010; Heckmann, 2008; Veiga, 2019).

By contrast, although immigrant adolescent students are less cognitively and agenticly engaged in school than those with native parents, in the remaining dimensions of engagement (affective and behavioral), there were no differentiation between students with immigrant and native parents – reinforcing the partial support of Hypothesis 1. This might be justified since behavioral and affective dimensions are less school-related dimensions and might be indicative of an inclusive school environment. Similar results have been found in literature (Menken & García, 2010; Moyano et al., 2020; Peguero & Bondy, 2011; Schleicher, 2012). Students with immigrant parents present a similar sense of belonging at school (affective engagement) as those with native parents, which might be indicative of the former favorable adaptation to the host country and ultimately sustain their long-term adaptation to society (Chiu et al., 2012; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). This seems also to be the case for behavioral engagement, as adolescents with immigrant parents are similarly engaged in school activities as their peers from native families. Consequently, adolescents with immigrant parents seem to hold a regular connection to the school and to be as likely as their peers from native families to present problems (e.g., disruptive behaviors) or to succeed in school. It is noteworthy that behavioral and affective engagement have been identified as strong protective factors against juvenile delinquency (Wang & Fredricks, 2014). Hence, based on present findings, students with immigrant parents may not be more involved in deviant activities than students with native parents, as it is often socially shared.

The *main effect of adolescence* was restricted to the cognitive dimension, with early adolescents reporting higher cognitive engagement than middle adolescents, which partially supports Hypothesis 2. This apparent decrease of cognitive engagement is aligned with results from other studies (Marks, 2000; Steinberg, 1990; Wang & Holcombe, 2010). It might be the case that the abstract reasoning (ability to think about abstract concepts) featuring middle adolescence enables a relativization of the value of school curricula and learning contexts, thus resulting in a lower cognitive engagement compared to early adolescence (Steinberg, 1990; Wang & Holcombe, 2010). The apparent decline in the cognitive engagement during adolescence may find explanation in other two possible reasons. First, the lower cognitive engagement registered in middle adolescence might be linked to personal processes, such as those mentioned in the literature about peers (Elkind, 1998; Steinberg, 1990). In the transition from early to middle adolescence, the relations with parents may reduce importance, while peer relations seem to increase frequency and importance (Chen et al., 2020; Elkind, 1998; Queiroz et al., 2021; Steinberg, 1990). School achievement and cognitive engagement may be negatively

associated with students' social position (Preckel et al., 2013) and thus be devalued by peers. Second, middle adolescents seem to struggle more often than early adolescents in their self-regulation and use of optimal learning strategies, since the transition from middle school to high school is approaching and there are significant dropout rates (Eccles et al., 1993; Garcia & Serra, 2019). This can be linked to some psychosocial vulnerability (Arnett, 1999; Riquelme et al., 2018), especially for cognitive engagement in middle adolescence compared to early adolescence (Veiga et al., 2014). These occurrences could help understand the apparent decrease in the cognitive dimension of engagement only, as this dimension seems to be more related to school learning. On the other hand, the non-differentiation on the remaining dimensions (affective, behavioral, and agentic) may suggest constancy/stability of engagement during adolescence. Such an apparent invariance corroborates other similar studies (Kuzucu et al., 2014; Li & Lerner, 2011; Rodríguez et al., 2020) and supports the conceptualization of adolescence, not as a time of relational imbalances, but as an age of regular functioning and development of personal skills.

An *interaction effect of nationality and adolescence* on the cognitive dimension was also found. Students with native parents showed higher cognitive engagement in early adolescence but did not differ from their peers with immigrant parents in middle adolescence. Thus, Hypothesis 3 was partially supported. Middle adolescents with native parents seem to significantly decrease their cognitive engagement and to approach the levels of cognitive engagement from their peers with immigrant parents. The source of the cognitive engagement of students with native parents seems to lose strength in the transition to middle adolescence. In a search for an explanation, it is likely that the abstract reasoning of middle adolescents allows for their questioning of the value of school curricula, thus resulting in a decrease in cognitive engagement. This occurrence in students with native parents corroborates what was commented regarding the adolescence main effect. However, students with immigrant parents maintained similar cognitive engagement levels in early and middle adolescence. The lack of previous studies does not make it easy to explain the apparent constancy of cognitive engagement in students with immigrant parents. It might be the case that such students perceive and are sensible to their parents' great effort to get them in school and to learn (Chiu et al., 2012; Eric & Yu-Lung, 2016), which might in turn dampen the effect of the relativization of the value of school curricula allowed by the emerging abstract reasoning. However, how to explain that the apparent decrease of engagement in the transition from early to middle adolescence occurs only in the cognitive dimension, but not in the affective, behavioral, and agentic dimensions, in a partial support of Hypothesis 3? These last

three dimensions are more linked to interpersonal relationships and are less school-related variables, while the cognitive dimension is linked to one's internal effort to understand and activate concentration to process information and to learn. It is likely that increased peer group pressure affects more internal processes (devaluation of effort devoted to school and deactivation of concentration in school subjects) than external processes (closeness of peer relationships). The absence of any further differentiation between students with immigrant and native parents may indicate an inclusive school, as well as the apparent constancy of general engagement during adolescence, which seems consistent with the theorization of adolescence as a time of balances and regular exercise of acquired skills, without added disturbances (Li & Lerner, 2011; Kuzucu et al., 2014). The equality in these three dimensions of engagement between students in early and middle adolescence indicates that adolescence is not a time of disruption (Arnett, 1999; Larson & Ham, 1993). This general equality between students with immigrant and native parents could be additionally interpreted as a social advance towards the decline of cultural stereotypes - as admitted by some studies (OECD, 2015; Rueda & Navas, 1996) - or does it just mean that native students decrease their cognitive engagement during adolescence and immigrant students keep a low cognitive engagement? This question should be addressed in future longitudinal research.

Nonetheless, these interaction results suggest that both immigrant and native adolescents might need special support to improve their self-regulatory and learning abilities. Specific interventions should be focused on the promotion of self-regulation and learning strategies (Reeve & Shin, 2020; Zimmerman, 2015) during adolescence. However, although immigrant adolescents seem to favorably adjust in classes (behavioral engagement), they seem to show less initiative (agentic dimension) in comparison to their native peers. Thus, training opportunities and support for teachers to foster students' agentic engagement during classroom instruction, especially directed to immigrant students in early adolescence, would be useful (Reeve & Shin, 2020).

The cross-sectional nature of the presented study does not allow to draw conclusions about cause-effect relationships. Further longitudinal and quasi-experimental studies are, therefore, suggested. Despite the mentioned *limitation*, the results of this study highlight, as a contribution, student engagement as a four-dimensional construct that undergoes substantial oscillations during adolescence linked to personal developmental processes as well as to the social contexts of students' parents. Among the contributions of the present research, the importance of parents' conditions stands out, as well as the potential action of the school.

But how far *can the results be generalized*? The results found in the Preliminary analyses — no differences on student engagement for cities and schools — may support

a possible generalization of the results for other similar schools and cities. Although this study found a consistent homogeneous pattern across the two metropolitan areas, it is possible that differences among schools may appear in other studies with different samples. Moreover, our findings cannot be generalized or extrapolated per se to other settings as non-normative experiences (Caballero et al., 2017) or specific populations such as young offenders (Bersani et al., 2014). One should also bear in mind that these results need to be broadly framed within the European educational policies of inclusion — Portugal ranked 32nd in the last PISA report (OECD, 2018). Future research is needed to investigate if similar findings are found in other European countries like France, Spain, or Italy, which share some common features with Portugal — e.g., a significant part of immigrant students derive from old colonies, whereby there is a common language; there is a greater concentration of immigrants in metropolitan areas (Entorf & Minoiu, 2005). That said, results can only be generalized to subjects with equivalent characteristics to those of this sample. Still, the topic herein investigated and immigration are alive and spread, in greater or lesser extent, by the different societies of our days (Eric & Yu-Lung, 2016; Miklikowska et al., 2019; OECD, 2018; Santos et al., 2016; Walsh et al., 2016). People naturally have their cultures and goals, but they will thrive and build more beautiful lives the more they value the right to an education without social exclusion. Results from this study transport us to this thought — high and dreamer —, making us imagine that one day it might be possible to generalize the “good data” (e.g., similar school engagement among students with immigrant and native parents) and that the “bad data” (e.g., discrimination of the weakest) will end one day, whatever the point of the world where we are. That is it. We need a beginning.

So, to advance the field, implications for future research can be retrieved. Future research might investigate whether the results from this study are consistent in different geographical areas of the country, as well as across other countries with different socio-cultural backgrounds. In addition to the family (particularly parents' nationality, as considered in the present study), the economy and culture in which an individual is inserted are macrosystems with great influence on personal development (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Multiple factors are always intricated in human behavior — so complex is human's mind and action. In the case of students, their interplay with variables at the family (e. g., socio-economic status, time in the country or parental educational styles), school (school climate, peer relations or pedagogical support), and society (values or culture) need to be considered. Our study did not collect information about these variables, but it would be important for future studies to add such data. In addition, different contexts and cultures may have diverse understandings of student engagement, success,

and inclusion in school. To take a cross-cultural perspective would be an indication for future research to investigate how cultural factors (e.g., emphasis on academic excellence) can affect student engagement in various countries. It would be interesting to study how internationally discussed socio-political measures to support immigrants are being implemented and what impact they are playing on the engagement of youths in school. Future mixed-method research would also be useful to explore the meanings that native and immigrant students assign to school and to deepen scientific knowledge on engagement based on both qualitative and quantitative evidence. That said, we will certainly seek to consider them in future studies. We highlight that our study was focused on very important and current variables on engagement and that the hypotheses formulated and the obtained results brought added central knowledge and might inspire continuous research on the topic.

## Conclusions

The current research indicates the following elements as contributors to knowledge advancement: students with immigrant parents show lower school engagement than students with native parents, but only in the cognitive and agentic dimensions, which are more linked to the school learning processes; students with immigrant and native parents do not differ in the remaining dimensions of engagement (affective and behavioral), which could be a result of an inclusive school environment and of inclusive practices; most of the engagement dimensions remain without oscillations during adolescence; early and middle adolescents only differ in the cognitive dimension of engagement, which seems to decrease through middle adolescence. Another contribution of the current research was to expand evidence on the external validity of the SES-4DS, regarding the measure's potential to discern engagement levels according to the groups herein considered. These findings support previous studies (Eric & Yu-Lung, 2016) and suggest that an educational policy that considers the nationality of students' parents is needed, enhancing specific teaching and learning elements for students with immigrant parents. A policy where parents from abroad are accompanied in their linguistic disadvantage in connecting with their children's school and teachers is required. Immigrant parents state specific barriers to their children's engagement in school and to their parental relations with the school (Eric & Yu-Lung, 2016; Mantovani & Gasperoni, 2018) that will need to be considered in future research and practice. The point is that the cause of the lower engagement or learning from some students with immigrant parents is not due to the students themselves but must be assigned to the environment.

Based on the findings and conclusion, this research allows for the following specific political-educational *recommendations*: (1) support for immigrant parents — just when they have arrived —, to meet your primary needs; (2) educational measures aimed to compensate immigrant linguistic deficits; (3) reformulation of school curricula and teaching contexts so that these include multicultural elements representative of the values shared by immigrant children at school; (4) teacher's training to be receptive to the questions raised by students with immigrant parents, as well as training about the academic motivation of middle adolescents; and (5) school professionals' support offered to immigrant parents to keep their children in school and to strengthen family-school partnerships.

Therefore, forces for change and inclusion are lacking in a collaborative work between teachers and parents. One important implication from this study is that immigrant adolescents need specific support, especially in early adolescence, to improve cognitive engagement (self-regulatory and learning abilities), and agentic engagement (to show initiative and to make proposals). School psychologists can consider these processes and contexts in a joint work with teachers and parents throughout adolescence (Eric & Yu-Lung, 2016; Luengen et al., 2021; Özdemir et al., 2021; Prata et al., 2019; Reeve & Shin, 2020; Veiga et al., 2009). Supports that encourage a shift from stagnant to increased engagement for students over the course of adolescence are proposed (Council of Europe, 2016; Covell et al., 2017; OECD, 2015). Studies covering the impact of pedagogical and psychological interventions on students' cognitive and agentic engagement might advance the scientific knowledge and contribute to the inclusion of all students without discrimination. Although the partial support of our initial research hypotheses might lead us to think that the negative attitudes against immigrants seem to have decreased, it is not certain whether deeper pejorative feelings remain latent and assume more subtle expressions of discrimination (Council of Europe, 2016; Rueda & Navas, 1996). Research has shown that schools can promote interethnic friendship and openness to diversity (Luengen et al., 2021; Özdemir et al., 2021). Particularly, teachers can prevent anti-immigrant attitudes by supporting their students and fostering inclusive-friendly school environments (Eric & Yu-Lung, 2016; Miklikowska et al., 2019; Walsh et al., 2016). Research has shown that adolescents who perceive their teachers as supportive figures show lower levels of anti-immigrant prejudice than children and adolescents who perceive their teachers as being less protective (Miklikowska et al., 2019). In this manner, teachers need training and innovative educational models that promote the diversity and inclusion of students in a school for all (Menken & García, 2010; Peguero & Bondy, 2011; Schleicher, 2012). Even considering its

above-mentioned limitations, this study contributes, from a European (Portuguese) perspective, for the identification of important differences and similarities between students with native and immigrant parents. Based on the wider profile of student engagement (cognitive, affective, behavioral, and agentic), this study highlights the potential of this line of research to add knowledge on immigrant students and to help make inclusion in school possible. Training teachers and psychologists with innovative models that embrace multiculturalism and consolidate a school for all is justified and expected (Menken & García, 2010; Özdemir et al., 2021; Peguero & Bondy, 2011). As long as a school for all is not achieved, research on this topic will continue to be justified.

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**Availability of Data and Material** The data used in this study is not publicly available due to institutional and national ethical specifications. For this reason data will be available from the corresponding author, on reasonable request.

**Author Contributions** FHV conceived and coordinated the study, designed, and performed the statistical analyses, and participated in the interpretation and writing of the text. IF, OFG, IMO, CMV, CM, FC and NAC participated in the analyses, description, and interpretation, and helped in the revisions of the paper. All authors read and approved the final paper.

## Declarations

**Conflicts of Interest/Competing Interests** The authors state that they have no conflict of interest.

**Ethics Approval** This study has ethic approval from the Ethical Board of the Instituto de Educação da Universidade de Lisboa.

**Consent to Participate** Active parental consent and student assent was acquired from all participants.

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