

# Evaluation of 8th grade students' engagement in literature lessons in secondary education

Munkhgerel Baatarjav<sup>1</sup> , Bayarmaa Gombo<sup>2\*</sup> , TAONUOEN<sup>3</sup> 

<sup>1,2,3</sup>School of Educational Studies, Mongolian National University of Education, Mongolia

\*Corresponding author: Bayarmaa Gombo, [bayarmaa.g@msue.edu.mn](mailto:bayarmaa.g@msue.edu.mn)

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**Abstract** — This study aims to examine the level of student engagement in literature classes among eighth-grade students in general education schools. A total of 607 students from Mongolia and the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region (IMAR) participated in the study. Data were collected using questionnaires and classroom observation methods. Survey results indicate that 49.8% of students reported a high level of interest in literature classes, while 27.5% reported a moderate level of interest; however, their actual classroom participation was relatively low. Observation findings revealed that among 314 observed students, 45.9% did not participate in classroom activities at all, 29% responded to teachers' questions, 9% engaged in classroom discussions, and only 1% participated in cooperative learning activities. The results demonstrate a clear discrepancy between students' expressed interest in literature as a subject and their actual level of participation in classroom learning activities.

**Keywords-** Student engagement, Classroom participation, Learning activities, Observation, Performance-based assessment

## 1.INTRODUCTION

A review of previous studies on student engagement in literature classes indicates that much of the recent research has been conducted in connection with advances in modern technology, particularly through the integration of flipped and digital learning approaches. For example, Indonesian researchers Viska Violita & Markus Budiraharjo [1], in their article "Enhancing Students' Engagement and Active Learning through the Flipped Classroom in Literature Class," examined the effects of implementing the flipped classroom approach in literature instruction on students' active participation and learning processes. Their findings show that when students independently study lesson content prior to class and devote classroom time to discussion, collaboration, and analysis, both their interest in learning and their level of participation increase. In particular, students demonstrated a greater tendency to ask questions, express opinions, and actively engage in lessons, while also developing a deeper understanding of literary texts and improved abilities in independent interpretation. The authors conclude that the flipped classroom is an effective instructional strategy for promoting active learning in literature classes.

Similarly, a study by Indonesian scholar Aziza et al. [2] found that a literature club-based instructional model significantly enhanced student participation. Through group discussions and role-playing activities, students' frequency of active verbal participation increased fivefold, and the originality of textual interpretation improved by 35%. Wong

& Liem [3] proposed a “two-component engagement model” that distinguishes learning engagement (e.g., cognitive engagement) from school engagement (e.g., social interaction). Their research demonstrated that the effect of cognitive engagement on academic performance in literature classes ( $\beta = 0.52$ ) was substantially stronger than that of school engagement ( $\beta = 0.28$ ). Accordingly, they recommend that teachers strengthen cognitive engagement through close reading practices and interdisciplinary connections. Overall, existing research provides evidence that the effective implementation of contemporary digital and active learning methodologies in literature instruction enhances students' interest in learning and their active participation. Student engagement refers to the extent to which learners actively participate in classroom activities, and it plays a crucial role in improving learning outcomes and facilitating students' acquisition of knowledge and understanding.

However, situational analysis suggests that although students express interest in literature classes, their learning outcomes, as reflected in analyses of student work, remain insufficient. For instance, the Grade 8 literature curriculum includes a learning objective that requires students to “compose a short narrative by altering characters or settings from a text they have read, or by developing the plot through the use of metaphor and satire” [4]. When Grade 8 students were assigned a fairy-tale writing task and assessed according to specific criteria, 54.5% demonstrated insufficient performance in using satirical literary devices or modifying the setting when continuing the narrative, while 36.4% showed insufficient performance in creating logically coherent humorous elements. These results indicate challenges in achieving the learning objectives outlined in the literature curriculum. Therefore, this study seeks to identify how student engagement influences learning outcomes in literature education.

**Research Objective:** The overall objective of this study is to analyze student engagement in literature classes among eighth-grade students in general education schools. To achieve this objective, the following specific aims were established:

- To conduct an analytical review of the Grade 8 literature curriculum and standards
- To examine the current conditions of literature instruction through a questionnaire survey
- To observe literature classes and identify students' learning activities and levels of participation
- To analyze students' task performance
- To conduct a qualitative analysis of students' written work, specifically letters written from the perspective of literary characters

## 2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Learning activity has been defined by Helen Beetham as the aggregate of actions performed by learners in order to achieve predetermined instructional objectives [5]. From this perspective, learning activities focus on examining learners' behaviors and cognitive processes as they participate in specific learning contexts. In contrast, the prominent Russian psychologist A. N. Leontiev conceptualized activity as an integrated structure consisting of motive, goal, action, and operation. He emphasized that the goal of an activity and its social significance play a crucial role in the development of learners' socialization. Furthermore, Leontiev identified motive as the internal driving force behind activity, significantly influencing the fulfillment of learners' needs, interests, and goals [6].

Student engagement in learning activities is a key indicator that reflects how actively and creatively students participate in lessons and educational processes. It plays a significant role in determining learners' knowledge acquisition, academic achievement, and motivation to learn [7].

Engagement represents the manifestation of learning activity. It is a multidimensional construct that encompasses students' active involvement in classroom tasks, their psychological attitudes toward learning, and their observable behaviors. Engagement directly influences learning outcomes and is therefore considered one of the primary indicators of the effectiveness of the educational process.

Student engagement is commonly categorized into three main dimensions:

- 1) Cognitive engagement – This dimension refers to the extent to which students actively participate in cognitive processes such as information processing, comprehension, and problem-solving through logical reasoning. Examples include connecting new knowledge with prior understanding and generating original ideas.
- 2) Emotional engagement – Emotional engagement reflects students' attitudes toward learning, their interest in

the subject matter, and the emotions they experience during learning activities, including enjoyment and satisfaction. Motivated students tend to approach learning with positive emotional dispositions [8].

- 3) Behavioral engagement – Behavioral engagement is manifested through observable actions, such as attentive participation in class, responding to teachers’ questions, engaging in group work, and completing homework assignments [9].

Table 1. Learning Theories and Student Engagement

Theory	Key Proponent(s)	Core Theoretical Concept	Perspective on Student Engagement
<i>Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)</i>	L. S. Vygotsky	Learners develop not only through independent effort but also through guidance and support from more knowledgeable others.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Collaborative learning</li> <li>- Scaffolding</li> </ul>
<i>Cooperative Learning Theory</i>	John Dewey	Learning is a process grounded in interaction among students and opportunities for problem-solving.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Sharing ideas</li> <li>- Joint problem-solving</li> <li>- Encouraging creativity</li> </ul>
<i>Performance (Active) Engagement</i>	K. G. Will, T. K. Newmark	Learning is based on learners’ intrinsic motivation and active cognitive engagement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Active processing of content rather than passive reception</li> <li>- Problem-solving</li> <li>- Expressing one’s own ideas</li> </ul>

Based on the table above, the concept of engagement is not limited to viewing learning as a one-directional process of knowledge transmission. Rather, it emphasizes the development of learners’ thinking skills, creativity, and problem-solving abilities. Students do not merely receive instructional content; instead, they learn by understanding the material, articulating their own ideas, and exchanging perspectives with others. Such engagement serves as a vital mechanism for supporting learners’ personal development, enhancing motivation, and fostering collaborative learning processes.

As a result of active engagement, learners tend to:

1. Develop a deeper understanding of knowledge;
2. Acquire the ability to express their own viewpoints and reflections;
3. Demonstrate improvement in collaborative problem-solving skills.

Researchers have further explained the interdependent relationship between engagement and learning activity through a conceptual model, illustrating that these two phenomena are mutually reinforcing [10].

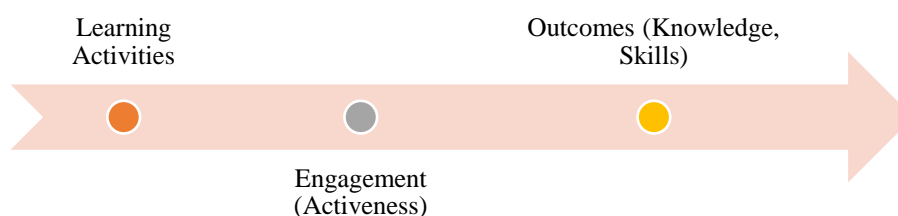


Figure 1. Relationship between Student Engagement and Learning Activity  
Source: Batzorig, J. (2021)

### 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Within the scope of this study, a comparative analysis was conducted of the Grade 8 literature curricula of Mongolia and the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region (IMAR) of the People's Republic of China. In addition, students' interest in literature classes and the underlying reasons for this interest were identified through a questionnaire survey, while their classroom participation during lessons was examined using systematic observation. Furthermore, students' written letters were analyzed based on predefined criteria in order to assess task performance, and the results were synthesized. The purposes, scope, and outcomes of the research methods employed in this study are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Research Methods

Research Method	Purpose	Scope	Outcome
Document analysis	To analyze the Grade 8 literature curriculum of Mongolia and the basic education literature standards of the PRC	Grade 8	A comparative analysis of the curricula of Mongolia and Inner Mongolia (IMAR) based on the main directions of Mongolian language and literature education
Questionnaire survey	To identify students' interest in literature classes	Grade 8 students in Mongolia and IMAR	Identification of students' level of interest in literature classes and the reasons underlying this interest
Classroom observation	To determine students' learning activities and levels of participation in Grade 8 literature classes	Grade 8 literature classes in Mongolia and IMAR	Identification of students' classroom activities and participation in literature lessons
Task performance analysis	To analyze letters written from the perspective of literary characters by Grade 8 students	In-class assignments	Development of assessment criteria and indicators to evaluate students' task performance and synthesis of results

**Research Scope:** A total of 607 students participated in the questionnaire survey, including 294 students from Mongolia (48.4%) and 313 students from the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region of the PRC (51.6%). Classroom observations were conducted across 10 lessons, involving a total of 314 students. In addition, 31 student letters were selected for qualitative analysis.

**General Information on Research Participants:**

The study involved 607 eighth-grade students from general education schools in Mongolia and IMAR. Of the participants, 37.7% were male and 62.3% were female. In terms of age distribution, 3% were 12 years old, 53% were 13 years old, 32.3% were 14 years old, and 11.7% were 15 years old.

**Ethical Considerations:**

The study involved children aged 12–15 years. Therefore, prior to the commencement of the research, the purpose and methodology of the study were explained to students' parents or legal guardians, and written informed consent was obtained. During the research process, no personal identifying information (such as names or identification numbers) was collected. All data were anonymized using unique codes, confidentiality was strictly maintained, and the data were used solely for academic research purposes. Copies of the parental or guardian consent forms for student participation are included in the appendix (Appendix 1).

### 4. RESULTS AND DATA ANALYSIS

Statistical analysis of the research data was conducted using SPSS Statistics 29, employing methods such as descriptive statistics and correlation analysis.

#### 4.1 DOCUMENT ANALYSIS

To examine student engagement, a document analysis was conducted on the Grade 8 literature curricula and standards of Mongolia and the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region (IMAR) of the People’s Republic of China. The Mongolian curriculum primarily emphasizes the development of reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills, whereas the IMAR curriculum focuses on vocabulary acquisition, reading comprehension, creative writing, oral communication, and the development of general learning competencies.

Within these curricular frameworks, five core components were analyzed using content analysis which are instructional objectives and pedagogical orientation, reading skill development, writing skills, listening, speaking, and communication skills, and general knowledge and cultural understanding. The Mongolian curriculum places greater emphasis on deep interpretation of literary texts and the development of aesthetic thinking, while the IMAR standard prioritizes systematic acquisition of linguistic knowledge, theoretical understanding of language, accurate language use, and practical communicative competence.

#### 4.2 ANALYSIS AND RESULTS OF INTEREST IN LITERATURE CLASSES

A questionnaire survey was administered to identify the level of interest in literature classes among Grade 8 students in Mongolia and IMAR, as well as the underlying reasons for their interest.

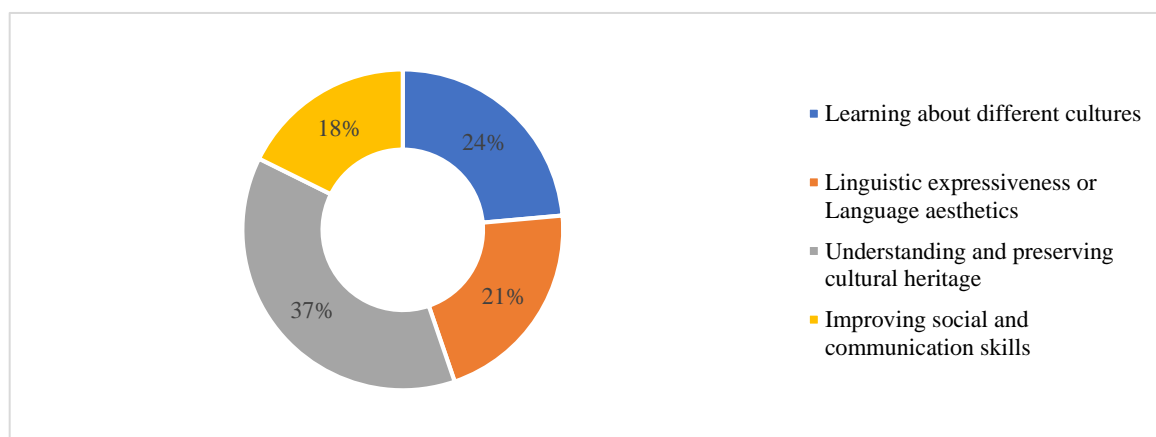


Figure 2. Reasons for Interest in Literature Classes

As shown in Figure 2, students tend to perceive literature classes as a means of preserving cultural heritage and as an opportunity to learn about diverse cultures, which positively influences their interest in the subject.

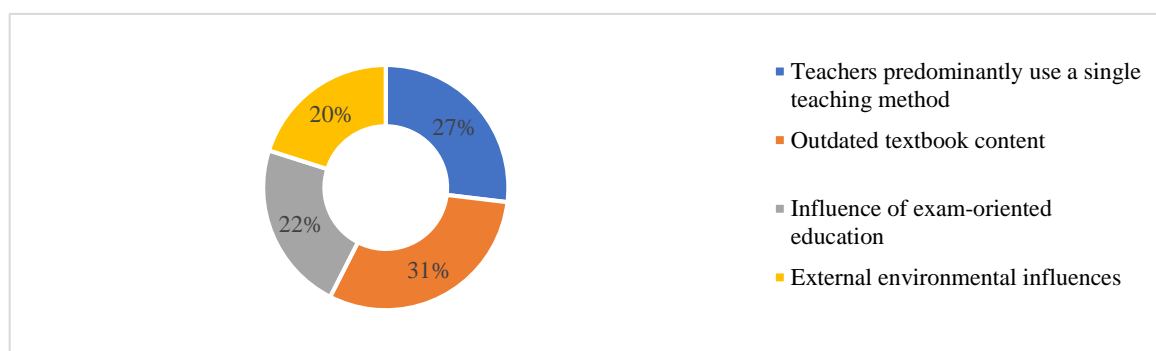


Figure 3. Reasons for Lack of Interest in Literature Classes

Conversely, the findings indicate that students' lack of interest is primarily influenced by factors such as outdated textbook content and the overuse of a single teaching method by teachers. In addition, an exam-oriented education system and external environmental influences were identified as contributing factors to students' disengagement from literature classes.

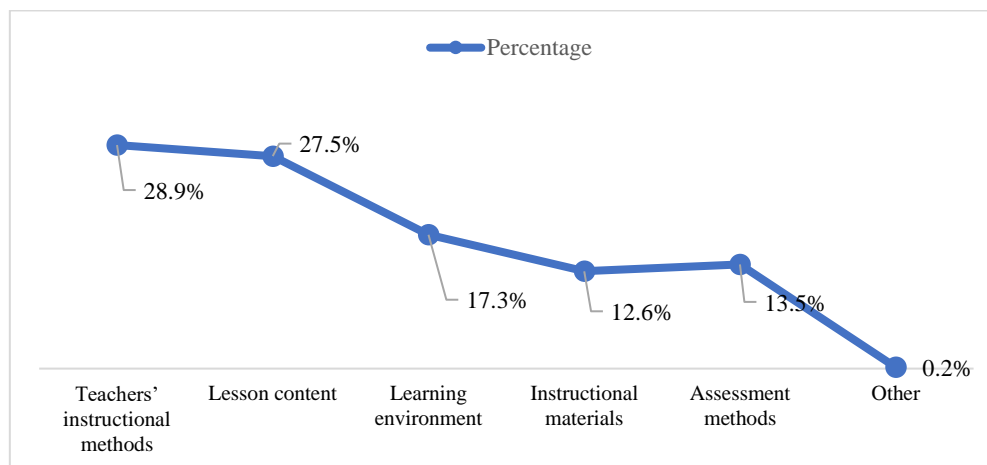


Figure 4. Factors Influencing Student Engagement in Literature Classes

According to the respondents, teachers' instructional methods and lesson content exert the strongest influence on student engagement in literature classes. Compared to these factors, instructional materials were perceived as having a relatively weaker impact. Furthermore, responses categorized under "other factors" frequently referred to teacher–student interaction, suggesting that a comprehensive approach is required to enhance student engagement in literature instruction.

These findings are consistent with responses to the questionnaire item addressing difficulties encountered in learning literature. High-frequency responses indicated the need to improve teachers' instructional approaches, limited opportunities to receive support from teachers during lessons, difficulties in understanding implicit meanings in literary texts, lack of vocabulary explanations in textbooks, outdated content, and assessment practices that are overly focused on examinations.

### 4.3. RESULTS OF CLASSROOM OBSERVATION

A total of 10 Grade 8 literature lessons were observed, during which students' participation in classroom activities was systematically recorded. Selected results are presented in Table 3. Since the students observed in each lesson did not overlap, each student was included in the observation only once.

Table 3. Number of Students and Frequency of Participation

	Number of Students	Percentage
Participation Frequency	.00	45.9
	1.00	36.9
	2.00	7.3
	3.00	4.1
	4.00	4.1
	5.00	.3
	7.00	.3
	8.00	.6
	13.00	.3
	Total	314

As shown in Table 3, 45.9% of students did not participate in any classroom activities, while only a small number of students demonstrated frequent participation. The most active student participated 13 times during a single lesson. Overall, students participated an average of 1–4 times per lesson.

Based on classroom observation records, the types of activities with higher levels of student participation were identified and are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Classroom Activities and Student Participation

Activity	Responding voluntarily to teacher questions	Reading own written story and self-evaluation	Reading a text aloud from the textbook	Asking questions to the teacher	Continuing to read own story/letter (teacher-selected)	Responding to teacher questions (teacher-selected)	Expressing opinions about a reader's letter or own written work	Lesson summary	Student question-and-answer exchanges	Summarizing assigned texts in groups	Discussion	Cooperative learning	Peer assessment
Students	314	314	314	314	314	314	314	314	314	314	314	314	314
Average	.29	.02	.02	.01	.08	.04	.01	.06	.17	.13	.08	.01	.01
Total	91	7	7	4	26	13	3	20	52	40	25	4	2

Analysis of participation among the 314 observed students indicates substantial variation across activity types. Students were most actively engaged when voluntarily responding to teachers' questions, while question-and-answer sessions, text summarization, and class discussions showed moderate levels of engagement. In contrast, participation was notably low in student-centered activities such as asking questions, cooperative learning, and peer assessment. These findings suggest a need to place greater emphasis on student-centered instructional strategies to enhance active participation in literature classes.

#### 4.4. ANALYSIS OF STUDENTS' WRITTEN WORK

To evaluate students' letters written from the perspective of literary characters, an assessment rubric was developed in alignment with the learning objectives specified in the curriculum (Table 5). Students' task performance was assessed using this rubric. An analysis of the rubric's reliability yielded a Cronbach's alpha of 0.962, indicating a high level of internal consistency and strong reliability of the criteria and indicators.

Table 5. Assessment Criteria for Students' Letters

Criterion	Indicator		
	Satisfactory	Average	Unsatisfactory
Clarity of purpose	The purpose of the letter is clearly and explicitly stated (e.g., apologizing, warning, expressing feelings).	The purpose is present but not fully articulated; it may be difficult for the reader to understand.	The purpose is unclear or not stated.
Coherence and logical organization	The letter has a clear introduction, body, and conclusion; ideas are logically sequenced and the character's psychological continuity is clear.	The structure is present, but logical flow is weakened and connections are loose.	The letter is disorganized, ideas are unclear, and content does not align with the narrative context.
Appropriateness of language and style	Literary language appropriate to the character's personality, speech, and emotions is used.	Occasional lapses in literary style, but overall consistent with the character.	Overly general, fails to reflect the character's traits, or resembles formal/administrative language.
Addressing the intended recipient	The character's inner world and emotions are vividly expressed, effectively engaging the reader.	Emotions are present but not expressed in depth.	Lacks emotional expression; reads as informational.
Conformity to form and structure	Closely aligned with the narrative events and the character's situation at the time.	Some alignment is present, but certain parts are inappropriate to the context.	Contradicts the plot or the character's position; inconsistent with the narrative reality.

Students' letters were evaluated using the above criteria, and the results are summarized in Table 6.

Table 6. Analysis of Students' Letters (Percentages)

Criterion	Satisfactory	Average	Unsatisfactory
Clarity of purpose	32.3	38.7	29.0
Coherence and logical organization	22.6	54.8	22.6
Appropriateness of language and style	25.8	54.8	19.4
Addressing the intended recipient	35.5	38.7	25.8
Conformity to form and structure	22.6	48.4	29.0

An evaluation of students' letters addressed to Nyamaa, the main character of the literary work, indicates that many students effectively employed vocabulary and expressions appropriate to the character's personality and emotional state, demonstrating relatively strong performance in language and style. However, the findings also reveal a need for improvement in clearly articulating the purpose of the letter and adhering to standard conventions of form and structure.

## 5 CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, which aimed to analyze eighth-grade students' engagement in literature classes, the following conclusions can be drawn.

### 1) Learning activity as a holistic process.

At the theoretical level, learning activity is confirmed to be a comprehensive, learner-centered, and activity-based process that integrates cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions. Theories of activity, the zone of proximal development, constructive cognition, and cooperative learning advanced by A. N. Leontiev, L. S. Vygotsky, J. Piaget, and John Dewey emphasize that student engagement extends beyond mere task completion and serves as a fundamental factor in supporting learners' intellectual and personal development.

2) Need for improvement in task performance in literature classes.

Greater attention is required to improve students' performance on literature-related tasks. Although students generally complete the tasks assigned by teachers, the overall level of performance remains insufficient. For example, 72% of students who participated in lessons completed the letter-writing task; however, 29% demonstrated an unsatisfactory level in meeting key criteria such as clearly stating the purpose of the letter and adhering to appropriate structure and conventions. From the researcher's perspective, this insufficient task performance appears to be closely related to limited levels of classroom engagement.

3) Patterns of classroom participation and pedagogical implications.

Classroom observations revealed that the highest frequency of student participation occurred in activities involving responding to questions posed by teachers or peers. Therefore, it is recommended that teachers increasingly incorporate instructional approaches that promote active engagement—such as the flipped classroom, problem-based learning, and other student-centered strategies. The use of such methods is expected to enhance students' active participation and learning processes, thereby contributing to the more effective achievement of learning objectives in literature education.

4) Limitations of the Study


This study was conducted exclusively with eighth-grade students in Mongolia and the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region (IMAR) of the People's Republic of China. In addition, classroom observation was limited to a total of ten literature lessons. Future research should more explicitly examine differences in cultural contexts, educational systems, curricula, and classroom cultures between the two regions. Investigating how these factors influence both student engagement and teachers' instructional practices would contribute to improving the validity and reliability of research findings and provide a more comprehensive understanding of student engagement in literature education.

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## AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION


### 1. First Author

	Munkhgerel Baatarjav	<a href="mailto:munkhgerel.b@msue.edu.mn">munkhgerel.b@msue.edu.mn</a>
	Position: Lecturer, Mongolian National University of Education, School of Education Studies Research interests: Educational Studies	

### 2. Corresponding Author\*

	Bayarmaa Gombo	<a href="mailto:bayarmaa.g@msue.edu.mn">bayarmaa.g@msue.edu.mn</a>
	Earned a PhD in Educational Studies in 2007. Position: Lecturer, Mongolian National University of Education, School of Education Studies Research interests: Learning, contemporary teaching methods and strategies, educational assessment, learner assessment	

### 3. Co-Author

	TAONUOEN	<a href="mailto:taonong38@gmail.com">taonong38@gmail.com</a>
	Position: Student of Master degree of Department of Educational Studies, School of Educational Studies, MNUE Research interests: Educational Studies	