

PSYCHOLOGICAL DETERMINANTS OF DEVELOPING PARTICIPATORY DECISION-MAKING COMPETENCE AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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Annotation.

Participatory management is increasingly regarded as a core competence of modern higher education, yet the psychological foundations that allow students to participate meaningfully in collective decision-making remain underexamined. This paper presents a theoretical and analytical review of recent scholarship on the psychological determinants of participatory decision-making competence among university students. Drawing on a narrative synthesis of peer-reviewed studies published mainly between 2020 and 2026, it identifies self-efficacy, intrinsic motivation, psychological safety, emotional intelligence, critical and reflective thinking, trust and collaboration, and personal responsibility as interrelated determinants shaping students' willingness and capacity to engage in shared decision-making. The discussion links these determinants to academic governance, classroom decision-making, teamwork, and student self-government. The paper concludes that participatory competence cannot be cultivated through administrative directives alone; it requires educational environments that actively support autonomy, dialogue, trust, and reflection, and it offers practical recommendations for universities seeking to strengthen students' participatory capacities.

Keywords:

participatory decision-making; psychological determinants; university students; self-efficacy; psychological safety; emotional intelligence; student competence

Introduction:

Contemporary higher education is increasingly organized around principles of shared governance, collaborative learning, and student partnership, reflecting a broader shift from hierarchical, instruction-centered models toward participatory forms of academic management. Universities are expected to involve students not only as recipients of education but as active contributors to institutional, academic, and social decision-making, whether through student councils, curriculum committees, project teams, or classroom-level deliberation. This shift places new demands on students, who must be psychologically and practically prepared to voice opinions, negotiate perspectives, and share responsibility for collective outcomes.

Preparing students for participatory roles is not merely an organizational or procedural task; it is fundamentally a psychological one. A student may be granted formal opportunities to participate in decision-making yet remain silent or disengaged if they lack confidence in their own competence, fear negative judgment from peers or instructors, or have not developed the emotional and reflective skills needed for constructive dialogue. Conversely, students who possess strong self-efficacy, intrinsic motivation, and a sense of psychological safety are more likely to engage actively, take responsibility, and contribute meaningfully to group decisions. Understanding participatory management competence therefore requires attention to the psychological readiness that underlies observable participatory behavior, alongside knowledge, communication skills, and collaborative habits.

Despite the growing body of research on student engagement, leadership, and shared governance, comparatively little work has systematically synthesized the psychological

determinants that jointly enable participatory decision-making competence among university students. This paper addresses that gap through an analytical review of recent literature. The purpose of this paper is to identify and analytically examine the main psychological determinants that contribute to the development of participatory decision-making competence among university students.

Research Methodology

This paper is based on a qualitative, analytical, and narrative review of recent academic literature rather than a formal systematic review or meta-analysis, since no predefined protocol, dual-reviewer screening, or quantitative synthesis was applied. Sources were identified through academic databases and publisher platforms, including Scopus, Web of Science, PubMed, ERIC, Frontiers, MDPI, SAGE, Taylor & Francis, Elsevier ScienceDirect, and Google Scholar. The main search terms combined "participatory decision-making," "student engagement," "self-efficacy," "psychological safety," "emotional intelligence," "critical thinking," "shared governance," "student leadership," and "collaborative learning" with terms specific to higher education. The review prioritized peer-reviewed, English-language studies published mainly between 2020 and 2026, while a small number of foundational theoretical sources published slightly earlier were retained where they remain the primary reference point for a construct. Non-peer-reviewed websites, blogs, and unverifiable sources were excluded. The resulting literature was thematically organized around the psychological constructs most consistently associated with participatory competence in the reviewed studies.

Results and Discussion

Self-Efficacy and Confidence in Expressing Personal Opinions

Self-efficacy, defined as an individual's belief in their capacity to organize and execute the actions required to achieve a given outcome, is widely recognized as a precondition for active participation in academic and social life. Recent research on academic self-efficacy shows that it is shaped by a wide range of experiential factors, including community and extracurricular participation, and that students with stronger self-belief are more inclined toward problem-solving, independent decision-making, and engagement with challenging tasks (Hinduja et al., 2024). In the context of participatory management, self-efficacy operates as the psychological gatekeeper of voice: students who doubt their competence to contribute meaningfully tend to withdraw from committees, classroom debates, or project negotiations, even when formal opportunities to participate exist. Strengthening self-efficacy through incremental participatory experiences, constructive feedback, and visible peer models is therefore a foundational step toward broader participatory engagement.

Intrinsic Motivation and Active Student Engagement

Self-determination theory frames intrinsic motivation as arising from the satisfaction of three basic psychological needs — autonomy, competence, and relatedness — and identifies autonomy-supportive environments as central to sustaining self-directed engagement (Ryan & Deci, 2020). When applied to educational governance, this theory suggests that students participate in decision-making not simply because they are instructed to, but because doing so satisfies their need to feel effective, connected to others, and in control of meaningful choices. Guay (2022) further argues that autonomy-supportive teaching practices, structure, and opportunities for genuine involvement shift students along the motivational continuum from externally regulated compliance toward autonomous, internalized engagement. Participatory decision-making structures that offer students real influence over outcomes — rather than symbolic consultation — are therefore more likely to be intrinsically motivating and sustainably effective.

Psychological Safety and Freedom from Fear of Criticism

Psychological safety, understood as a shared belief that a group is safe for interpersonal risk-taking, has emerged as one of the most consistently cited determinants of student voice. Tu (2021) demonstrates that a democratic classroom culture combined with high psychological safety substantially increases students' willingness to engage actively in instructional activities,

while its absence produces avoidance and silence even among academically capable students. In team-based settings, Gonda et al. (2024) found that students' involvement in active, cooperative learning is strongly supported by internal motivation together with trust in the class collective, and that teachers play a decisive role in building this trust. Robinson and Held (2025) similarly show that psychologically safe interdisciplinary student teams are more able to voice dissent, share unique knowledge, and engage in genuine problem-solving, whereas unsafe climates encourage premature consensus and groupthink. For participatory decision-making, psychological safety is thus not a peripheral comfort but a functional precondition for honest deliberation.

Emotional Intelligence and Interpersonal Communication

Participatory decision-making inherently involves negotiating differing viewpoints, managing disagreement, and coordinating with peers under time and social pressure — processes that draw heavily on emotional intelligence. Empirical data collected among university students indicate a meaningful association between the dimensions of emotional intelligence — emotional awareness, understanding, usage, and regulation — and the quality of teamwork outcomes (Nguyen, 2022). Students who can accurately read social and emotional cues, regulate their own reactions, and communicate assertively yet respectfully are better positioned to advocate for their views without generating unnecessary conflict, and to receive critical feedback without disengaging. Emotional intelligence therefore complements cognitive competence by supplying the relational skill required to translate individual opinions into constructive collective dialogue.

Critical and Reflective Thinking in Collective Decision-Making

Participatory competence also depends on the capacity to analyze arguments, evaluate evidence, and reflect on one's own assumptions before contributing to a group decision. Yeh et al. (2022) demonstrate that structured reflective writing over an extended period can measurably strengthen college students' critical thinking, prompting shifts in self-perception, values, and behavioral dispositions relevant to responsible participation. At a broader level, Thornhill-Miller et al. (2023) situate critical thinking alongside creativity, communication, and collaboration as one of the interdependent "4Cs" essential to navigating complex, ill-structured problems of the kind that participatory governance frequently presents. Reflective and critical thinking allow students to move beyond simply expressing preferences toward reasoned advocacy, evaluation of alternatives, and constructive compromise, all of which are essential to functional collective decision-making.

Trust, Collaboration, and Group Belonging

A sense of belonging and mutual trust within a student group shapes both the willingness to participate and the quality of that participation. Gonda et al. (2024) found that trust in the class collective, alongside psychological safety, was a decisive factor in students' active cooperation, while Robinson and Held (2025) emphasize that collaborative problem-solving in interdisciplinary teams depends on established norms of knowledge-sharing and mutual accountability rather than on formal authority alone. Systematic analysis of shared governance in post-secondary institutions similarly highlights that meaningful student participation is enabled less by the formal existence of governance structures than by the relational trust between students, faculty, and administration that determines whether those structures function inclusively in practice (Raza et al., 2025). Belonging and trust thus function as the relational substrate on which formal participatory mechanisms depend.

Personal Responsibility and Readiness to Accept the Consequences of Collective Decisions

Participatory competence is ultimately measured not only by willingness to speak but by readiness to own the outcomes of decisions made collectively. The systematic review of shared governance by Raza et al. (2025) notes that authentic student participation entails shared accountability for institutional decisions, moving students from a consultative to a co-owning role. This shift requires a degree of social responsibility and maturity that is closely tied to the other determinants discussed above: students who feel efficacious, safe, intrinsically motivated,

and emotionally attuned are more likely to accept responsibility for group outcomes, including those that diverge from their personal preferences, rather than disengaging when decisions do not go their way. Responsibility, in this sense, is both an outcome of psychological readiness and a further determinant that reinforces sustained participatory engagement over time.

Practical Implications

The determinants identified above point toward concrete institutional and pedagogical measures. Universities should prioritize the creation of psychologically safe classroom and organizational environments in which mistakes and dissenting opinions are treated as part of the learning process rather than as grounds for negative judgment (Tu, 2021; Gonda et al., 2024). Collaborative and project-based learning formats, structured around genuine rather than symbolic student input, can strengthen intrinsic motivation by satisfying students' needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2020; Guay, 2022). Student councils and self-government bodies should be resourced and integrated into real decision-making processes, since participatory structures function effectively only when accompanied by relational trust between students and institutional stakeholders (Raza et al., 2025). Faculty development should include training in facilitating dialogue, managing disagreement, and providing feedback that builds rather than undermines self-efficacy (Hinduja et al., 2024). Reflective exercises, case studies, debates, and simulations can be used deliberately to cultivate critical thinking and reflective capacity (Yeh et al., 2022; Thornhill-Miller et al., 2023), while structured teamwork activities with clear roles and accountability can help students practice emotional regulation and constructive communication (Nguyen, 2022; Robinson & Held, 2025). Finally, institutions should explicitly frame participation as entailing shared responsibility for outcomes, helping students understand that collective decision-making is a process of joint ownership rather than one-directional consultation.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the psychological determinants that underlie the development of participatory decision-making competence among university students. The reviewed literature indicates that this competence rests on an interconnected set of psychological factors — most centrally self-efficacy, intrinsic motivation, psychological safety, emotional intelligence, critical and reflective thinking, trust and collaboration, and personal responsibility — none of which functions independently of the others. Self-efficacy and psychological safety determine whether students are willing to voice an opinion at all; intrinsic motivation and trust sustain that willingness over time; emotional intelligence and critical thinking shape the quality of the resulting dialogue; and responsibility converts participation into genuine co-ownership of collective outcomes. These findings suggest that participatory competence cannot be developed through administrative instruction or the mere provision of formal participatory structures. It requires an educational environment that deliberately supports autonomy, dialogue, trust, reflection, and psychological safety. Universities that wish to prepare students for meaningful participation in academic, organizational, and social decision-making should therefore attend as much to the psychological climate of learning as to the formal architecture of governance.

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