



## **The Influence of Motivation and Academic Emotions on Academic Performance in High School Learning**

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Received: 9 May 2024/ Accepted: 18 June 2024/ Published: 06 September 2024

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### **Abstract**

*Emotions felt during learning influence students' behavior, thinking, and attention in the classroom. On the other hand, motivation is a crucial factor that impacts high school students' performance in learning, as it helps students feel the urge to pay attention and desire to learn, whether for a good grade or other reasons. Through this research, we aimed to discover the relationship between motivation and academic emotions as predictors of academic performance, when it comes to the learning process during lessons. We intended to determine whether performance is directionally influenced by motivation and academic emotions, and if so, to what extent. Additionally, we seek to identify which types of emotions —positive or negative, activating or deactivating — have a greater impact on learning. 110 high school students from the 9<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades participated in this study. The main finding indicated that positive emotions, and also activating emotions contribute to the explained variation of performances of students in high school classes more than motivation. Conclusions and recommendations are also made.*

**Key words:** Emotional Intelligence; marital infidelity; narcissistic; personality traits; stress

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**How to cite:** Acatrinei, A.M. (2024). The Influence of Motivation and Academic Emotions on Academic Performance in High School Learning. *Journal of Innovation in Psychology, Education and Didactics*, 28(1), 37-46. doi:10.29081/JIPED.2024.28.1.04

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## **1. Introduction**

Whether we are talking about parents, adolescents, teachers, or the school itself, each of them desires to achieve the highest possible results. Therefore, we need to discover what actions we need to take in this regard and how we can reach those goals. Adolescents are becoming increasingly different and harder to understand, making their school performance more difficult to control. Therefore, we need to understand both what motivates them to learn and how to make them feel comfortable and at ease.

Researching the specialized literature, it appears that there are not many studies discussing the connection between motivation, academic emotions, and academic performance. One of the first studies found is the one conducted by Kiuru, Spinath, Clem, Kenneth Eklund, Timo Ahonen, and Riikka Hirvonen (2020), in which the authors discovered a close relationship between the three variables. Specifically, they found that high positive emotions play an important role in the effort exerted to complete a task. Essentially, they lead the student to a high level of motivation, which ultimately results in high performance. Another study that addresses the relationship between motivation, emotions, and performance was conducted by Moè, Pazzaglia, Tressoldi, and Toso (2009). They also discussed the term well-being in school and argued that emotions have a major impact on performance. Therefore, they suggest that teachers should place more emphasis on how students feel during classes. Additionally, they believe that motivation is something that develops over time and requires a lot of effort to change. Méndez-Aguado, Aguilar-Parra, Álvarez, Trigueros, and Fernández-Archilla (2020) state that in recent years, the focus has shifted away from how students feel and more towards what they learn. Emphasis has been placed on knowledge at the expense of students' emotional well-being, even though the latter appears to be crucial for achieving high performance in school.

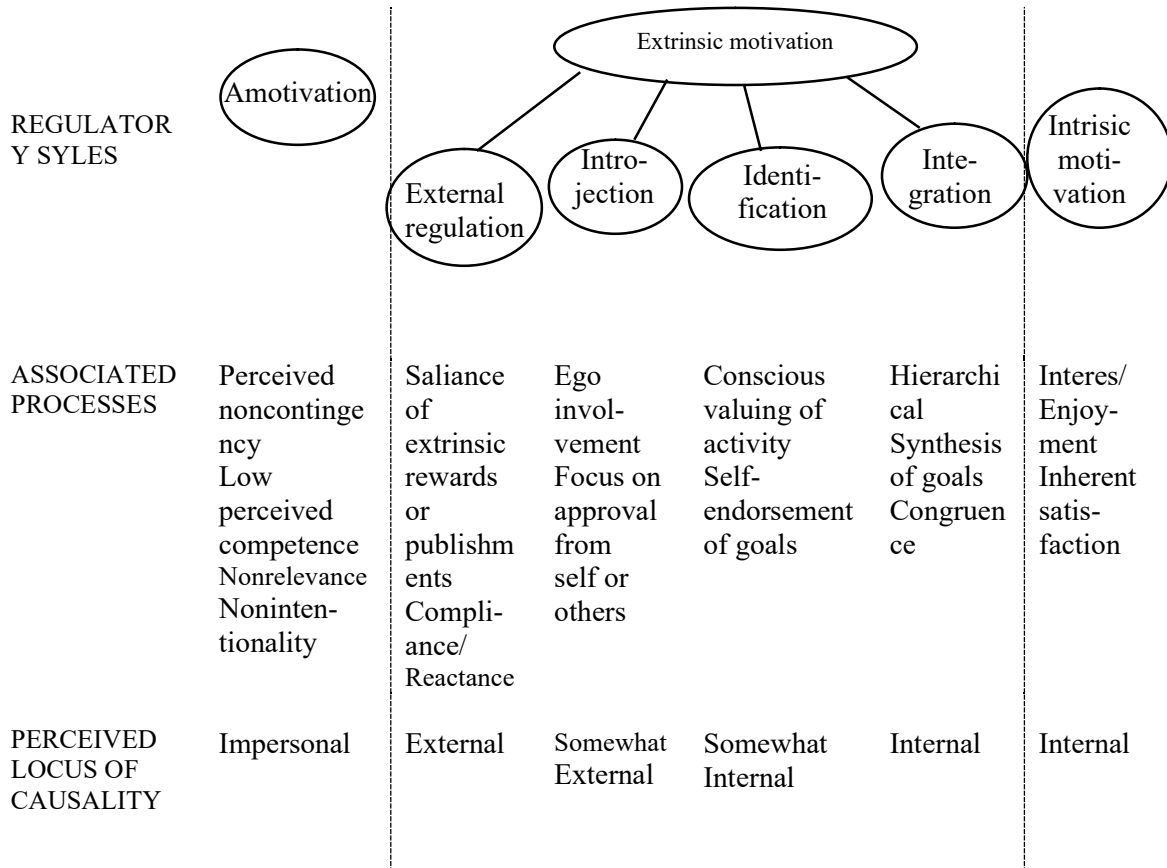
## **2. Performance, Motivation and Academic Emotions**

### ***2.1. Performance***

In a broad sense, performance refers to the observable results of learning. For the sociocognitive approaches to learning, performance denotes those components that reflect students' use of declarative or procedural knowledge in different learning situations (Sălăvăstru, 2004). According to Gherasim and Butnaru (2013), performance is a concept that encompasses an individual's achievements, particularly notable or exceptional ones, and tasks that are completed correctly and thoroughly. The general sense of academic performance becomes specific only when associated with a particular field (artistic, literary, economic, etc.); thus, academic performance becomes a "branch" of general performance, emerging as the sum of school experience and learning, with these results not always being extraordinary. This performance is influenced by an individual's past experiences and self-perception, whereas good results cannot be associated with a person who has a poor self-image. There must always be a balance, a harmonious relationship between the two. Performance alone cannot define their capability, as it depends on many factors (Bora, 2003). Performance is seen as everything that a student effectively accomplishes, depending on the situation they are placed in. High performance means that the student is fulfilling the school's purpose, which is to learn and gain knowledge. Essentially, performance is like a well-defined goal set at the beginning of the school cycle that is achieved when the results meet our expectations. Conversely, low performance is the opposite of high performance, characterized by poor results and minimal effort from students (Curelaru, 2014). "Numerous studies highlighted the variables that influence performance, emphasizing motivation as a strong predictor of academic performance (Moreira-Morales & García-Loor, 2024).

**2.2. The Relationship Between Motivation and Performance**

Ryan and Deci (2000) discuss the two types of motivation, namely intrinsic and extrinsic, as well as the absence of it, known as amotivation. On the one hand, intrinsic motivation represents the satisfaction of an internal need rather than an external reward. This determination is inherent and rooted in the pleasure people derive from completing the task as well as from the task itself. On the other hand, extrinsic motivation is the opposite of intrinsic motivation. While intrinsic motivation involves the joy of completing a task, extrinsic motivation refers to the rewards themselves, as well as the external impulses and pressures. As for amotivation, this is the opposite of motivation, as it represents the lack of any intention and desire to act in any way. Essentially, the person is not inclined to do anything and lacks any sense of personal causality. This can stem from a lack of self-confidence, from the belief that the person is not capable of completing any task (Deci, 1991). Figure 1 is an illustration of the motivation levels established by Deci and his collaborators, Vallerand, Pelletier, and Ryan (1991), that a student may achieve during the learning process.



**Figure 1.** A taxonomy of human motivation (Ryan & Deci, 1991)

According to Nuță and Cămărașu (2013), students are motivated to learn for various reasons: grades, scholarships, fear, the desire to be at the top of the class, apply the knowledge acquired, achieve success in a profession, and so on. Moreira-Morales and García-Loor (2024) found in their research on motivation and academic performance that when students' needs are met, they are much more motivated to learn and develop a genuine interest in learning. The main force driving this change is intrinsic motivation. Daniela (2015) addresses the issue of the relationship between motivation, performance, and self-regulation in her article, where she tries to

establish what this relationship might be. Following her research, Popa discovered a positive correlation between the two variables, motivation and performance, with self-regulation acting as a mediator between them. Another study on the relationship between motivation and performance was conducted by Fortier, Vallerand, and Guay (1995), who concluded that academic motivation is significant in predicting school performance among students.

### **2.3. The Relationship Between Academic Emotions and Performance**

The emotional dimension within the school setting has become a fundamental aspect of the learning process for students, drawing increasing attention in recent times. Given its significance, it is crucial to conduct more studies to elucidate the emotions students experience throughout their academic years. The range of emotions students encounter during the learning process varies widely from one individual to another. This leads to the concept of ensuring emotional well-being in schools. Whether discussing primary school, middle school, or high school students, schools must provide a supportive learning environment for all these groups. The way children feel during classes greatly affects their learning. Teachers need to ensure that all students feel comfortable and motivated to pay attention, eager to learn more because they are in a good mood and find the lessons interesting. When students are happy and interested in the material presented by the teacher, they are more likely to participate and succeed academically.

According to Pekrun et al. (2023), emotions can be pleasant (or positive), such as the pleasure of doing homework, learning a piece of literature, feeling proud of a good grade, or the gratitude a student feels towards a teacher who helped them understand a concept or lesson. All of these can be countered by unpleasant (negative) emotions, such as anxiety before a test or oral exam, frustration when receiving a low grade, or nervousness caused by not understanding a task. In both situations, there are two types of emotions: activating and deactivating, these range from highly activating to highly deactivating. This arousal represents the activation of the human physiological system and manifests through changes in heart rate, breathing, and how our body cools or heats (hot flashes). Stress and panic felt by a student before delivering a project, or the anxiety before a test, are some examples of activating emotions. On the other hand, lack of motivation, boredom, relaxation, relief, despair, and disappointment are examples of deactivating emotions that allow the student to unwind from a situation.

Practically, activating emotions represent the reaction of the human psyche and body when emotions are aroused. Emotions are responses within the psychophysical system, resulting in multicomponent changes encompassing affective, cognitive, physiological, motivational, and expressive-behavioral components. Positive activating emotions in this taxonomy, such as joy, lead to feelings of hope, pride, and gratitude. As long as students are happy, these positive emotions prevail in their minds. The positive deactivating emotion is relaxation, which brings about feelings of satisfaction and relief (Pekrun et al., 2023).

**Table 1.** The Three-Dimensional Taxonomy of Human Emotions of Pekrun et al. (2023)

	Positive <sup>a</sup>		Negative <sup>b</sup>	
	Activating	Deactivating	Activating	Deactivating
Activity	<b>Enjoyment</b> Excitement	<b>Relaxation</b>	<b>Anger</b> Frustration	<b>Boredom</b>
Outcome-prospective	<b>Hope</b> Anticipatory joy	<b>Assurance</b>	<b>Anxiety</b>	<b>Hopelessness</b>
Outcome-retrospective	<b>Pride</b> Retrospective joy Gratitude	<b>Relief</b> Contentment	<b>Shame/Guilt</b> Anger	<b>Disappointment</b> Sadness

<sup>a</sup>Positive = pleasant emotions

<sup>b</sup>Negative = unpleasant emotions

Conversely, negative activating emotions, like anger and frustration towards obstacles, result in anxiety, anger, and shame. The corresponding negative deactivating emotion is boredom, which leads to despair and disappointment. In summary, positive emotions guide students toward potential success, while negative emotions steer them toward possible failure. Ensuring emotional well-being in schools is thus crucial for fostering an environment where students can thrive both emotionally and academically. Ion Lupuleț (2021) supports the existence of a close connection between academic performance and the emotions students experience, specifically the state of well-being. As long as students and teachers feel well when they are at school or during classes, they perform at a high level.

#### ***2.4. The Relationship Between Motivation and Academic Emotions***

Arias, Soto-Carballo and Pino-Juste (2022) argue that there is a high correlation between emotional intelligence and motivation. They suggest that students with high emotional intelligence are much more likely to exhibit higher motivation in school. Additionally, it appears that there are no differences between girls and boys; in other words, regardless of gender, emotions have a significant impact on motivation. Domínguez-Alonso, Domínguez-Rodríguez, López-Pérez, and Rodríguez-González (2016) discuss the existence of a significant relationship between academic emotions and motivation. They support the idea that students do not encounter issues with school-related emotions and feel motivated because they want to protect their image in front of their peers due to insecurities.

### **3. Methods**

Our study relies on the hypothesis that there must be a significant relationship between the three variables (motivation, performance, and academic emotions). Specifically, we hypothesized the presence of a positive correlation between academic performance (the dependent variable) and high school students' motivation (the independent variable), as well as between performance (the dependent variable) and academic emotions (the independent variable).

#### ***3.1. Participants***

Following discussions with the school principal, we obtained authorization to distribute our questionnaire under the supervision of the high school coordinator. The study involved 110 students from "Grigore Antipa" Theoretical High School, in Botoșani County. The questionnaire was administered to four classes: two 9th-grade classes and two 12th-grade classes, each comprising 25 students. All classes were part of a scientific profile, specifically two classes of Mathematics-Computer Science and three classes of Natural Sciences.

Given this profile, these classes have fewer geography lessons compared to other profiles, leading to lower interest from both students and teachers in the teaching-learning process, as Geography is not included in the baccalaureate exams. More than half of the surveyed students are female (54.55%), while 45.45% are male.

#### ***3.2. Instruments***

We used a questionnaire as the primary data collection method. The questionnaire consisted of 85 questions designed to measure the motivation, self-perceived performance, and academic emotions of 9th and 12th-grade students during lessons.

Motivation was assessed using the Geography Learning Motivation Scale (Yıldırım, 2017). This scale includes 22 items across four subfactors: interest, self-confidence, acquired information, and performance. It was evaluated using a five-point Likert scale. However, we computed only the total score of motivation.

Emotions were evaluated using the Achievement Emotions Questionnaire (AEQ), which we adapted for the subject of Geography (Bieleke, Goetz, Yanagida, Botes, & Frenzel, 2022). The adapted scale comprised 59 items divided into seven categories: joy (10 items), pride (6 items), anger (8 items), anxiety (15 items), shame (8 items), despair (6 items), and boredom (6 items). Responses were recorded on a five-point Likert scale (not at all true, slightly true, somewhat true, mostly true, very true). We computed separately aggregated scores for positive activating emotions, negative activating emotions, negative deactivating emotions, and negative emotions.

Self-perceived performance was measured using the EBAE-10 scale, developed by Moral de la Rubia and colleagues (Mateos, Fernández Zabala, & Díaz de Cerio, 2020). I used only three of the ten items: “I get good grades,” “I think I am a good student,” and “I like doing my school work.” These items were evaluated using a six-point Likert scale (strongly disagree, disagree, somewhat disagree, somewhat agree, agree, strongly agree). These questions assess students' perceived effectiveness, work desire, and involvement in school activities, as well as their grades. We calculated only a global score as the sum of these factors.

### 3. Results

In our study, we utilized Pekrun's (Table 1) Three-Dimensional Taxonomy of Achievement Emotions as a reference to analyze emotions and determine which of them have the greatest impact on performance. We categorized emotions into positive and negative, and further subdivided them into activating and deactivating, to delve deeper into the research. To examine how high school students' performance is influenced by motivation and academic emotions, we applied hierarchical multiple-linear regression analysis. We conducted two regressions, each with two models. The first regression included motivation and positive activating emotions, as well as negative activating emotions. The second regression incorporated motivation along with both sets of negative emotions (activating and deactivating).

**Hypothesis 1:** *In a regression model, motivation and positive activating emotions predict performance. Adding negative activating emotions as predictors increases the explanatory power of the regression model.*

#### **Regression 1 (Motivation + Positive Activating Emotions + Negative Activating Emotions)**

To investigate which set of emotions — positive or negative — has a stronger effect on performance, we performed two hierarchical multiple-linear regressions. The first regression included two models: one with motivation and positive activating emotions and the other with these variables plus negative activating emotions. From the correlation table (Table 2), it is evident that positive activating emotions have a stronger correlation with performance compared to motivation. This suggests that among all the variables, positive activating emotions have the most substantial effect on performance as they exhibit the highest correlation with it.

**Table 2.** Correlations between variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Performance	-	0,348**	0,404**	-0,278**	-0,253**	-0,262**
2. Motivation		-	0,738**	-0,361**	-0,281**	-0,435**
3. Positive activating emotions			-	-0,420**	-0,313**	-0,537**
4. Negative emotions				-	0,963**	0,845**
5. Negative activating emotions					-	0,669**
6. Negative deactivating emotions						-

\*\* - Correlation is significant to level 0,01 (2-tailed)

\* - Correlation is significant to level 0,05 (2-tailed)

According to the Model Summary (table 3), Model 1 is the only statistically significant model, explaining 16.9% of the variance in performance ( $R^2 = 0.169$ ). Model 2, which includes motivation along with positive and negative activating emotions, is not statistically significant ( $p = 0.146$ ). The analysis indicates that positive activating emotions have a significant impact on performance, with Model 1 being the only statistically significant model in explaining performance variance ( $p = 0,000$ ). Despite the inclusion of negative activating emotions in Model 2, it did not significantly improve the model's predictive power ( $p = 0,146$ ).

**Coefficients and Effects**

**Model 1:** The positive activating emotions have a higher standardized beta coefficient ( $\beta = 0.324$ ) than motivation ( $\beta = 0.109$ ). This indicates that positive activating emotions have a stronger impact on performance.

**Model 2:** Although negative activating emotions ( $\beta = -0.13$ ) show a negative influence on performance, this model is not statistically significant ( $p = 0.146$ ). Thus, this influence is not considered further.

**Table 3.** Model Summary (Regression 1)

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics		
					R Square Change	F Change	Sig. F Change
1	.411 <sup>a</sup>	.169	.153	2.66860	.169	10.852	.000
2	.430 <sup>b</sup>	.185	.162	2.65448	.016	2.141	.146

a. Predictors: (Constant), Positive\_emotions, Motivation

b. Predictors: (Constant), Positive\_emotions, Motivation, Activating\_negative\_emotions

c. Dependent Variable: Performance

This suggests that positive activating emotions account for a larger proportion of the variance in performance compared to motivation.

**Model 1:** Explains 15.3% of the variance in performance (adjusted  $R^2 = 0.153$ ). The significant contribution of both variables — positive activating emotions and motivation — highlights that individuals with high levels of positive activating emotions and motivation tend to achieve better performance.

**Model 2:** The explanatory power does not increase with the addition of negative activating emotions, indicating that positive activating emotions and motivation are the more impactful predictors.

The effect size indicators for each variable in Model 1 are:

- **Motivation:**  $r_{sp} = 0.08$ , representing a small effect.
- **Positive Activating Emotions:**  $r_{sp} = 0.23$ , indicating a moderate effect.

The results indicate that Model 1, incorporating motivation and positive activating emotions, provides the best explanation for performance. Positive activating emotions show a more substantial impact on performance than motivation. The model highlights that both motivation and positive activating emotions contribute significantly to academic success, with positive activating emotions having the most pronounced effect.

**Hypothesis 2:** *In a regression model, motivation and negative activating emotions predict performance. Adding negative deactivating emotions, as predictors increases the explanatory power of the regression model.*

**Regression 2 (Motivation + Negative Activating Emotions + Negative Deactivating Emotions)**

The second regression model contains motivation, and negative activating emotions, to which we added negative deactivating emotions (Table 4).

**Table 4.** Model summary (Regression 2)

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics		
					R Square Change	F Change	Sig. F Change
1	.384 <sup>a</sup>	.147	.131	2.70290	.147	9.229	.000
2	.384 <sup>b</sup>	.148	.124	2.71452	.001	.086	.770

a. Predictors: (Constant), Activating\_negative\_emotions, Motivation

b. Predictors: (Constant), Activating\_negative\_emotions, Deactivating\_negative\_emotions, Motivatie,

c. Dependent Variable: Performance

**Model 1:** Includes motivation and negative activating emotions, explaining 14.7% of the variance in performance ( $R^2 = 0.147$ ). This model is statistically significant.

**Model 2:** Adds negative deactivating emotions to Model 1 but is not statistically significant ( $p = 0.770$ ). This indicates that negative deactivating emotions do not significantly contribute to explaining performance when included with motivation and negative activating emotions.

Motivation ( $\beta = 0.30$ ) shows a significant positive influence on performance. Negative activating emotions ( $\beta = -0.16$ ) exhibit a significant negative impact on performance. Based on the comparison of beta coefficients, it appears that motivation has a stronger effect on performance than activating negative emotions. However, if we measure the squared Part coefficients ( $r_{sp}^2$ ), we find a similar situation, namely that in model 1, the variable activating negative emotions ( $r_{sp}^2 = 0.596$ ) has a higher influence on performance compared to the variable deactivating negative emotions ( $r_{sp}^2 = 0.324$ ).

No issues of multicollinearity are present among the variables (all Tolerance values are greater than 1). This confirms that the model satisfies the condition of avoiding multicollinearity.

Despite including negative deactivating emotions, this model does not significantly improve the prediction of performance, highlighting that these emotions, when added to the model, do not contribute additional explanatory power.

Therefore, the results show that model 1, which includes the variables motivation and activating negative emotions, best explains performance, with the contribution of both variables being significant. Thus, individuals with high levels of motivation and activating negative emotions tend to have higher performance. In the case of model 1, the  $R_{adjusted}^2$  is 0.131, meaning that model 1 explains 13.1% of the variance in performance. Additionally, the greatest explanatory share among the two variables in model 1 is held by motivation ( $\beta = 0.30$ ), followed by activating negative emotions ( $\beta = -0.16$ ).

#### 4. Discussion and conclusions

This paper aimed to show the relationship between the three variables — motivation, academic emotions, and performance — and how they interrelate. We started with the hypothesis that there is a connection among them and created four models within two regressions. Using Pekrun's taxonomy of emotions (2023), we wanted to compare activating and deactivating emotions to see which, along with motivation, have a greater impact on performance. We conducted two regressions to compare negative and positive emotions. However, due to the absence of positive deactivating emotions (as we did not include such emotions in the questionnaire), we could not make this comparison. Therefore, we chose to perform a first regression using motivation and positive activating emotions, to which we also added negative activating emotions. Thus, it was found that Model 1, which included motivation and positive emotions, had the most significant effect on performance. Specifically, emotions had the strongest impact on students' success in class, followed by motivation. These results are unexpected



because, most of the time, motivation tends to be the primary factor in students' achievements. As long as students are happy and feel good during class, they can achieve excellent academic results. We should also remember that motivation plays an important role in the learning process. Therefore, students need to feel comfortable and be motivated to achieve harmony and greater determination, leading to high performance. It has been found that as students grow older, they tend to develop greater resistance to negative emotions. They realize that it is more exciting to tackle a more challenging task and earn well-deserved success. They also come to see that teachers are not as strict as they may have seemed when they first entered high school. Additionally, they tend to have higher hopes for the future (Cocoroadă, 2016).

The second regression includes motivation along with negative emotions, both activating and deactivating. The results from this regression showed that motivation has a strong positive effect on performance, while both sets of negative emotions have a detrimental impact on performance. This is not surprising, as we did not expect emotions such as anger, despair, anxiety, or any other negative emotions to positively influence performance. The only effect they can have is, as expected, a negative one, which can lead to a decrease in students' performance rather than an increase, and thus these emotions are unlikely to be beneficial or useful in the learning process (Pekrun, 2023). Emotions influence our behavior, dictate our thinking, and affect our attention. When we are happy or feel good, we can be more attentive, focus more on what we are doing, and, in our case, be more eager to learn, discover new things, and follow the teacher's instructions. Conversely, when we are upset or angry and do not feel well, we cannot be fully present; we struggle to focus on tasks, lack the patience to listen, and essentially cannot learn as effectively as we should.

Motivation is also a crucial factor in high school students' performance in learning. It helps students have the drive to pay attention and desire to learn, be it even for extrinsic reasons only, discover new things about Earth and the universe, understand their environment, or aspire to be at the top of the class. Motivation can also stem from pleasure. Some students may be passionate about a particular subject, topic, or lesson, so any effort in learning becomes less noticeable because their interest in the subject helps them learn more easily and logically, rather than mechanically or superficially. We, as teachers, need to ensure a conducive learning environment—one where students are eager to learn and where the atmosphere during the lesson encourages this outcome. We should use various activities, worksheets, or any methods that prompt them to interact and feel happy about participating. As mentioned earlier, when students are cheerful, they are more motivated to learn and, consequently, achieve better results and higher performance.

## **Limitations**

The limitations of the study stem from the daily changes occurring among students regarding motivation, desires, goals, and, of course, the differences between generations in terms of mentalities, desires, and opportunities. Given that the research is relational and responses vary from one student to another, and one study to another, we can say that the results can be interpreted differently depending on who conducts the study and on whom.

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