

# MOTIVATION TO LEARN

Fact sheet 13/2020

## WHAT IS MOTIVATION?

*Motivation to learn* refers to the willingness or desire to initiate and engage in the process of learning<sup>11</sup>.

Motivation is not something people have or do not have. Instead, motivation is a thought process that everyone can do. It involves identifying one's goals and breaking them down into manageable chunks, allowing people to figure out where and how to direct actions or apply effort. This thought process can be influenced by external factors or extrinsic motives (such as reward and encouragement from others) and internal factors or intrinsic motives (such as personal interest)<sup>5</sup>.

Learning can happen anytime and anywhere. In school, motivation for learning can have a profound influence on students' effort, persistence and choices in the classroom in the short term, and can affect students' academic achievements in the long term. Making an effort and seeing one's positive achievements can in turn influence one's motivation to learn generally<sup>9,10,14</sup>.



## SOURCES OF MOTIVATION

Motivation can differ from subject to subject and from task to task, depending on students' perceptions of the task and of their ability related to the task<sup>6,11,13</sup>. Factors that contribute to individuals' motivation can be represented by the acronym **AEIOU**<sup>3,14</sup>:



### Attribution

Interpretation of causes of one's successes and failures in similar tasks.



### Efficacy

Perception of one's capability in successfully completing a task.



### Intrinsic Motives

Perception of how interesting and enjoyable the task is for oneself.



### Outcome Expectation

Perception of the likely outcomes (positive/negative) as a result of doing the task.



### Utility and value

Perception of how useful one believes a task is or will be for the future (short- or long-term)

Examples of some motivation thought processes linked with the AEIOU model<sup>4,5,6,11,13,14</sup>:

It is <b>HELPFUL</b> for motivation to think:	It is <b>NOT HELPFUL</b> for motivation to think:
<p><b>A:</b> <i>I did well because I used good strategies.</i></p> <p><b>A:</b> <i>I failed because I did not understand the concepts well.</i></p> <p><b>E:</b> <i>I am not good at X, Yet!</i></p> <p><b>E:</b> <i>I can do this! What counts is the process not the outcome.</i></p> <p><b>I:</b> <i>A good grade is nice, but I also want to know more about this.</i></p> <p><b>O:</b> <i>If I spend some time to study per day, I will get better at this.</i></p> <p><b>U:</b> <i>Asking the teacher can help me figure out why I should be learning this.</i></p>	<p><b>A:</b> <i>I did well only because I am smart.</i></p> <p><b>A:</b> <i>I got to university because I was lucky.</i></p> <p><b>A:</b> <i>I failed because my teacher is terrible at teaching.</i></p> <p><b>E:</b> <i>There's no way I am going to do well on this.</i></p> <p><b>I:</b> <i>I am doing this for grades and so people will think highly of me (extrinsic motive).</i></p> <p><b>O:</b> <i>Even if I spend more time studying, I am probably not going to do well.</i></p> <p><b>U:</b> <i>Learning this is useless, I am never going to need this again.</i></p>

## TASMANIAN TEENS' MOTIVATION TO ACHIEVE

Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) collects data from a sample of 15-year-olds in OECD countries every three years. The most recent available data (2015) included assessment of students' motivation to achieve<sup>2</sup>. *Achievement motivation* refers to students' judgment about their desire to perform academically and to master academic tasks and skills. PISA's assessment of motivation tended to focus more on the "performing" rather than the "mastery" of skills. Research delineates between these two goals<sup>1,8</sup>:

Performance-focused goal	Mastery-focused goal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Extrinsically motivated to look smart and outperform peers.</li> <li>Prefer easy tasks; tend to self-denigrate &amp; show helplessness when tasks are challenging.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Intrinsically motivated to learn, understand and improve skills and competency.</li> <li>Prefer tasks that promote learning; tend to persist when tasks are challenging.</li> </ul>

Based on the overall scores, students in Tasmania reported significantly lower achievement motivation than all other states and territories in Australia. However, the same overall scores (based on the full scale) indicate Tasmanian students' level of achievement motivation, on average, is higher than the OECD average.

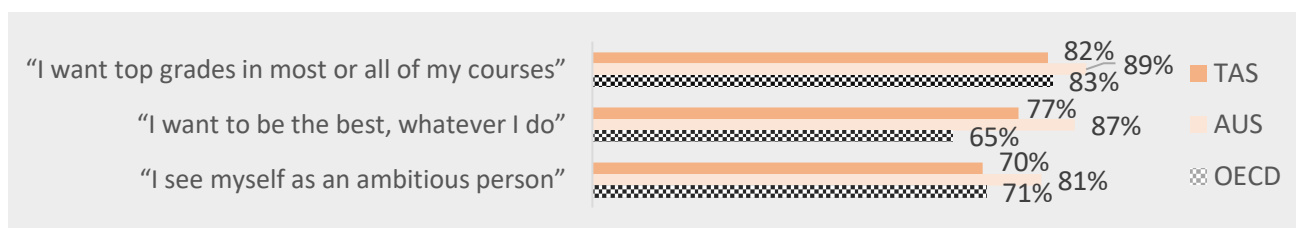


Figure 1. Selected items (3 of 5) on PISA's assessment of achievement motivation and percentage of students agreeing on each statement.

PISA's achievement motivation includes questions that focus on students making comparisons between themselves and their peers. Although a high level of such motivation can move students towards achieving academic goals<sup>8</sup>, research indicates that focusing on external comparison can be detrimental to students' motivation<sup>8</sup>. They may develop a fear of failure or rejection, experience self-doubt, experience a disabling form of perfectionism and/or develop anxious feelings<sup>4,8,12</sup>.

## PRACTICES THAT FOSTER MOTIVATION

Teachers can influence students' motivation to engage in their lessons through thoughtful instructional designs<sup>1,7,11,13</sup>. The TARGET approach<sup>1</sup> highlights key elements for teachers (and parents) to consider when aiming to build a more positive motivational experience during learning:



Overall, students tend to be more motivated (hence flourish) in classrooms and situations that satisfy their needs to feel<sup>5,10,15</sup>:

### Competent

To feel effective in managing learning tasks and to experience 'success'.

### Autonomous

To feel in control over the course of their learning and skills development.

### Related

To have close and caring relationships with others, who value them as individuals.

## REFERENCES & USEFUL LINKS

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