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### Emotions and their Effect on Learning

*Emociones y su efecto en el aprendizaje*

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#### RESUMEN

El artículo tiene como objetivo dar una visión general sobre el vínculo entre las emociones y su impacto en el proceso de aprendizaje. Los adultos creen no estar influenciados por sus emociones cuando niños, ni en la capacidad que ellas tienen de dirigir el proceso de aprendizaje. Las emociones pueden ayudar a una persona a recordar detalles y al mismo tiempo distraerlos del tema de aprendizaje. Este artículo presenta diferentes perspectivas de las emociones negativas y positivas en el aprendizaje. Algunas investigaciones revelan el doble carácter que estas tienen, en cuanto que al ser positivas pueden tener un impacto negativo y cuando son negativas pueden influir positivamente en el aprendizaje.

**Palabras clave:** Aprendizaje, bienestar, emoción, inteligencia emocional.

#### ABSTRACT

The article aims to give a general overview of the link between emotions and learning, their impact on the learning process. Adults are believed not to be influenced by emotions as children, neither in their ability to direct their learning process. Emotions can help a person to remember details and at the same time distract them from the learning topic. This article presents different perspectives of negative and positive emotions in learning. Some research reveals the double character that these have, in that when they are positive they can have a negative impact and when they are negative they can positively influence learning.

**Keywords:** Emotion, emotional intelligence, learning, well-being.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Many scholars agree that emotions play a crucial role in the learning process, and therefore, they can be even the basis for learning (Pekrun and Linnenbrick-Garcia: 2014). Some scholars especially underline the meaning of emotions in adult learning (Zeivots: 2016; Dirx and Espinoza: 2017). Also, they argue that this field is still in need of further and deeper research. Especially much attention to emotions in education was paid by Pekrun et al. (2010), who developed a good theoretical approach and collected empirical data demonstrating the importance of emotions in learning. Pekrun and his colleagues (2010) have researched various types of emotions, influencing students and teachers. Their works give insights into this field, suggesting further research. Emotions in adult learning became the focus of Dirx (2008), who is interested in the ways emotions influence adults in different academic situations. In his research, Dirx (2008) shows that adults are influenced by emotions strongly and offers different teaching methods to reduce negative impact.

According to Goetz et al. (2003), there are three reasons for exploring emotions in education: their impact on learning quality, students' well-being (physical and mental state) and their role in socialization (peers and teachers). It is believed that emotions affect the internal motivation of students to learn based on interest and curiosity in learning as well as their external motivation associated with the achievement of positive results or to prevent negative consequences. Also, emotions are expected to facilitate the use of different learning strategies (Goetz et al.: 2003). In addition, emotions can contribute to styles of self-regulation. Positive emotions such as enjoyment, hope and pride are believed to contribute to both internal and external motivation, promote the use of flexible learning strategies and support self-regulation (Tyng et al.: 2017; Dewaele & Alfawzan: 2018). Thus, they have a positive impact on academic performance conditions. Conversely, negative emotions such as hopelessness and boredom are set to reduce motivation and easy processing of information, implying a negative impact on performance. Emotional influence on students' mental and physical states is also underlined by some scholars as an important factor in learning (Goetz et al.: 2003; Rudd: 2012). As a result, emotions affecting mental state can cause some behavioural changes often expressed in communication. That shows a strong connection between emotional state and learning abilities.

## **METHODS**

The material for this paper was educational and psychological literature. The method was the theoretical implying analysis of scientific papers on the topic.

Dirx, Espinoza and Schlegel (2018) state that adult learning recently draws more and more attention. According to Merriam, Caffarella and Baumgartner (2007), the main characteristic of adult learning is experience. That is the ability of adults to use their own experiences in learning, to be the source of learning, to make meaning of learning. At the same time, Rogers and Horrocks (2010) argue that children also use their experience and clarify that adult experience is of a higher level that differentiates adult learning from children. Or as Jarvis (2012a, p.142) calls them children's primary and adults' secondary experience. Primary experience is people's senses while secondary is acquired in people's relations. That is children learning from what they see, hear or touch by making a copy and experiencing to remember. Adults having all that in mind make meaning and transform their knowledge in a new form. This allows adult learners to reflect on their experience and use it in their learning.

Hence, they have the ability to regulate their learning process. Illeris (2003) also underlines that adult learning differs by responsibility and full awareness of one's own actions. He argues that a person can be called an adult only when he or she becomes responsible. Other important factors that should be mentioned here are certain expectations about the course and voluntarily nature of adult learning (Rogers and Horrocks:

2010, p.17). In other words, adults choosing courses are driven by their needs and learning they have their views on future outcomes. Such learning can be mostly learner-centred as adults might guide their learning process by arising topics important for them. In such a way, learners can participate in building teaching content showing their interests in the classroom.

Such division in learning types between children and adult education leads to division in teaching types requiring different methods. That is so-called andragogy or adult pedagogy specialising in teaching adult students. That implies more student-centred approach as adults are able to answer such questions as "What have I learnt from that experience what I did not realise?" or "What and how can I learn better?". Therefore, adult learning is also characterised by self-direction and self-regulation. The concept of self-directed learning as a crucial part of adult learning was also developed. It contains a need for learning, set of aim, using resources, finding ways, their application and learning outcomes. In that sense, self-regulation may be called a part of self-directed learning as it means controlling learning process by a learner himself or herself (Postareff et al.: 2017; Muis et al.: 2018; Ouherrou et al.: 2019). As aims of self-directed learning Merriam, Caffarella and Baumgartner (2007) discuss three of them: to enhance adult's self-directness, to create conditions for transformative learning and provide more freedom in learning. In other words, self-directness implies being prepared to develop one's own way of learning, being involved in learning content and being independent.

According to Goetz et al. (2003), emotions occurring in the educational context are called academic emotions. He states that such emotions can happen in five different academic situations: during lessons, taking assessments, preparing or doing home tasks independently, learning in a group and other situations. In the last group, there can be academic situations as one-to-one tutorials with the teacher to discuss task or receive oral feedback. Other emotions are either linked with social interaction or personal feelings (Goetz et al.: 2003). In addition, Zeivots (2016) also has conducted research on emotional highs in adult learning. According to his findings, there are six points in learning awakening emotions: unfamiliar themes, first experience, discovery, learning adventure, changes, meaning (link to real life). Some of them can awake positive emotions, others may be painful, but students cannot be indifferent. It is possible to combine these two areas as Zeivots (2016) six points can occur in Goetz et al. (2003) five academic situations.

Moreover, Dirx (2008) lists different types of negative and positive emotions influencing adult learning: emotions in the learning context, personal life and past experience. Emotions in learning context can occur during the learning process. Doing some task students can find the task difficult and feel embarrassed. Different emotions can arise not only before or during the assessment but also after receiving feedback. So, purely negative feedback can lead to frustration and hopelessness, even breaking self-esteem. Positive feedback may relax student and making him or her reluctant to any changes because he or she is already good. That's why it is important to make correct feedback to motivate students. Such constructive feedback even if the outcome is not good enough, gives ways for improvement. Fong et al. (2017) list five characteristics of good feedback: it should have advice for improvement, some appraisal of student's ability, try to meet student's expectations, be respectful, and contain the outcome of improvement. For making such feedback, a teacher might need experience, as it is complex and may have significant consequences

## **RESULTS**

The emotional context may enhance the ability to remember details and store them in long-term memory. That happens because people focus on an object, drawing emotions. For example, feeling interested in something means trying to get to know about it investigating for its own sake. Interest may be the main reason for choosing a certain course and keeping learning. There are two main types of interest: individual and situational. Individual interest may be defined as a personal emotion depending mostly on a person itself, individual characteristics, preferences and values. Therefore, it can be the main regulator of action in achieving goals. Situational interest occurs in appropriate circumstances depending on the environment. It can be

“caught” (short time) and “held” (turning to the individual). Even if students have no individual interest learning some material, they might find something “catchy” for themselves that draw their attention and evoke situational interest that can last longer depending on the personal link. That means that it is possible to develop interest.

Additionally, Ainley and Hidi (2014) connect interest with enjoyment which can be an outcome of some academic achievement. Then, enjoyment is linked with joy, excitement, delight leading to concentration. Such positive emotions are called achievement emotions as they may lead to success or be a result of effective learning (Ainley and Hidi: 2014). Therefore, both interest and enjoyment can be called a good basis for engagement and involvement in learning, stimulating cognitive processes (Ainley and Hidi: 2014).

Then, any personal problems may be the main students' concern distracting them from learning. So, Kasworm (2008) raises the question of personal background emotions influencing adult learning. That is emotions that adults experience apart from their studies, such as personal life or workplace. For such adults combining study with work or family duties can be challenging as it can take much energy. Menzies and Baron (2014) and Solano (2016) raise the question of international postgraduate students adjusting in an English academic environment. They state that such students may face different cultural and language difficulties in their transition period. Therefore, Menzies and Baron (2014) suggest in their research that friends and peer support provide social and emotional support helping to enhance their English and be more confident in an academic environment. Solano (2016), in his research, orients more on teachers' role in helping students by providing feedback. Hence, students can use their friends, peers, groupmates, as well as teachers or tutors to feel more comfortable. Such support influences positively on general students' well-being and therefore, their learning abilities.

Finally, past experience can be the main factor in having a certain attitude towards learning and teaching. The negative or positive experience might determine a person's behaviour and build a certain attitude towards learning. For instance, during learning, adults can face emotional obstacles like fear of failing to prevent them from expressing their arguments (Rogers and Horrocks: 2010). That can happen when a student has similar negative practice or compares himself or herself with other students thinking that he or she can say silly things. Students also can avoid some tasks as they think they are not able to manage. They see academic tasks too difficult for them (Rogers and Horrocks: 2010). Similarly, Walker (2017) describes shame as a block in learning when, for example, a student can feel shame in front of his groupmates because he or she could not answer the teacher's question. In that case, fear and shame are closely connected; they both aim to protect from painful emotions in future. On the other hand, shame can motivate learning ability (Walker: 2017), making students improve their behaviour and work to avoid this feeling in future. Rowe and Fitness (2018) also underline the twofold impact of negative emotions in adult learning. They can hinder learning by reducing motivation, and they can help energies students in achievement like anger can motivate to remove obstacles. Pekrun et al. (2010) call them deactivating and activating emotions. This twofold character of negative emotions can show how much sense a person implies in different events. Either negative or positive impact might depend on students' individuality (character or view) or specific nature of the situation.

Ability to recognize one' own emotions as well as people's emotions is called emotional intelligence (EI). Some authors state that level of emotional intelligence can predict learning outcome (MacCann et al.: 2011). Some empirical data proves that the higher level of emotional intelligence, the more successful students are (MacCann et al.: 2011). MacCann et al. (2011) name three reasons for this: the ability to rule negative emotions, better communication skills and meeting academic requirements. For this reason, there are special pieces of training for developing emotional intelligence in students and teachers to improve the learning environment. That is how to regulate emotional state (e.g. to cope with overwhelming emotions, stress) to be able to learn effectively, how to understand students' emotions to engage them in the learning process. However, there is some research showing a weak connection between emotional intelligence and learning in comparison with cognitive abilities or personal characteristics (Ranjbar et al.: 2017). That means emotional

intelligence cannot be the only one-factor influencing learning abilities. The possible way is a combination of different skills and characteristics to build a basis for effective learning.

## **DISCUSSION**

During the learning process, teachers can influence emotionally on their students greatly. In other words, teachers' feelings can be reflected in the students' mood. For this reason, teachers should be emotionally intelligent not to let their negative personal emotions affect their job (Rudd: 2012). That can be significant also for students themselves when a student needs to study some necessary literature preparing for exam or test, but he or she finds it uninteresting. In that case, he or she should find ways to keep learning, even if there is no desire. One way for this may be a "reappraisal" method implying a try to raise one's mood and evoke positive emotions by doing something pleasant. Such ability also can be called significant adaptive function to learn to understand people around and be socially engaged. That is a psychological influence. There is also physical influence researched by Rudd (2012). She points out that physical state is the basis for learning, and that can be reached by physical exercises evoking good feelings. Or on the contrary, remembering something pleasant can evoke positive emotions affecting health positively (Rudd: 2012). Such regulation might be a very useful and effective tool for enhancing learning abilities when it is necessary. Good teacher-student relations that are based on trust and support. In other words, it is teachers' being engaged with their work "wholeheartedly", to wholly devote themselves to the teaching. Dirx and Espinoza (2017) call such practice manipulating students' emotions in order to engage them with the content. Such relationships often create a supportive atmosphere where learners can be open and be selves. Here the primary teacher's role is to be open himself or herself and let students feel the same, provide help and encourage students to find a common language with peers.

Also, the ability to control emotions is culturally bound and develops with socialisation (Jarvis: 2009). Mostly that comes from school education, where students learn to communicate and understand other people. That is understanding that you are not alone and should consider other's feelings (Jarvis: 2012b). That implies appropriate behaviour sometimes contradicting one's emotional state; for instance, staying calm when one feels frustration.

## **CONCLUSION**

As shown above, there are various perspectives on learning, emotions and their connection. To sum up, adult learning is characterized by independence and responsibility. Emotional influence on learning can be both negative and positive. Moreover, there is a two-fold character of emotions when positive emotions may affect not only positively but also negatively. The same is concerning negative emotions. Literature review underlines the existing gap in the field of emotions in learning and education in general. The emotional influence on the adult learning process is researched even less. One of the reasons for that maybe that adults are believed to be able to control their emotions and therefore, not to let them influence the learning process.

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