

Emotions to help engage school students in learning

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Psychology researchers from HSE University have trialed the reliability of a student engagement scale on 537 Russian primary school students. The findings indicated that the emotional component contributes the most to school engagement. The paper has been published in *PLOS ONE* journal.

Student [engagement](#) impacts children's performance and future success. It is also used as a primary predictor of educational dropout or successful [school](#) completion in Europe and North America. The concept of school engagement is broader than the concept of learning motivation: it includes the assessment of a child's general well-being at school, their interest and preparedness to participate in learning activities.

Engagement can be assessed in three components: behavioural, emotional, and cognitive. The behavioural component relates to the child's activity, participation in school events, and readiness to follow the school rules; the emotional component assesses the feeling of comfort, the sense of belonging and interest in the school; the cognitive component assesses the child's willingness to acquire knowledge and their ability for self-regulation.

A school engagement questionnaire that assess three different factors of engagement was not available in the Russian language . That is why HSE researchers decided to adapt and trial one of the most popular international questionnaires of School Engagement , which was developed in 2005.

The researchers translated the School Engagement scale from English with the assistance of developmental psychologists and made the test understandable for kids aged 6 to 12. 537 children from 1st to 4th grades from different schools in Moscow took part in the assessment.

Children marked on a piece of paper how they related to different phrases. For example, the phrase "I feel bored at school" assesses emotional involvement; "I watch learning-related TV shows" assesses the cognitive component, and "I'm attentive in class"—the behavioural one.

Researchers used [statistical methods](#) to confirm the validity and reliability of the survey, and analyzed the data on Russian school

students' engagement. According to factor analysis, the emotional component is the most important component for assessing the overall engagement of primary school pupils. This is consistent with past findings : a child's interest and comfort at school is particularly important for engaging in learning activities.

"If we look at school as a place where we constantly 'rack our brain,' continually solve problems and think, it may seem that cognitive involvement would be the factor that is most important for a student's performance and readiness to make the effort. But this is not true. The emotional component makes a bigger contribution," said Marie Arsalidou, one of the study authors. "The kids need to feel happy and comfortable at school. And this makes sense: when you are in a place where you are happy, you are ready to work more."

Researchers also did not observe any differences in engagement among between boys and girls and children of different ages. Previously, some international papers found that [school engagement](#) usually drops as the child gets older. Researchers of this most recent study assume that the differences in their results may be related to their younger sample or cultural practices: the unification of the study process across all grades in the Russian school system may result in similar engagement.

The translated questionnaire can now be used at Russian schools to evaluate how involved students are in the study process and how comfortable and interested they feel in class. The engagement measurement can then help prevent performance decrease and dropout. The survey is freely available [here](#).

More information: Morteza Charkhabi et al, School engagement of children in early grades: Psychometric, and gender comparisons, *PLOS ONE* (2019). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0225542](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0225542)

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