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## TO LEARN OR NOT TO LEARN - HERE ARE THE REASONS

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### **Abstract:**

Abstract

Purpose-the aim of this paper is to find out the reasons to learn and the reasons not to learn for Romanian students.

Design/Methodology/Approach-quantitative methods: open answers; the sample consist of Romanian students from middle school, aged 11 to 15, SPSS was used for statistics.

Findings-The main reasons to learn were identified as personal improvement and for future jobs, while the main reasons not learn were identified as school related ones and other preferences but learning.

Practical implications-The paper highlights the reasons to learn and the reasons not to learn in the students' opinion, expressed in their words. This allows the teachers to strengthen the reasons to learn and to limit the effects of the reasons not to learn.

Originality/Value-This study offers a valuable insight of motivation to learn or not to learn for the Romanian students.

Limitation on the study-The students were from only a town from Romania, therefore further investigations using students from all regions in Romania should follow.

### **Keywords:**

reasons to learn, reasons not to learn, intention to learn, motivation of learning

**JEL Classification:** I21

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## Literature review

In the mainstream body of research, focused on motivation, there are some widely recognized definitions of motivation, from very synthetic to very detailed ones, each of them highlighting some fundamental concepts, as follows in table 1.

**Table 1: Definitions of motivation**

Definition of motivation	Author(s) & year	Main concept
the set of psychological processes that cause the initiation, direction, intensity, and persistence of behavior.	Campbell and Pritchard 1976	behavior
motivation is goal directed	Lawler 1994	goal
motivation is environmentally dependent	Pettinger 1996	environment
motivation is the internal drive necessary to guide people's actions and behaviors towards achievement of some goals	Analoui 2000	goal
the attribute that moves us to do or not to do something	Gredler, Broussard and Garrison 2004	move to do
force comes from the desire to satisfy certain needs and expectations	Mullins 2005	needs
what causes people to behave as they do and outlines the achievement and pursuit of goals	Denhardt, Denhardt and Aristigueta 2008	goals
the reasons underlying behavior	Guay, Chanal, Ratelle, Marsh, Larose and Boivin 2010	behavior
academic motivation is the enjoyment of school learning characterized by a mastery orientation; curiosity; persistence; task-endogen; and the learning of challenging, difficult and novel tasks	Gottfried 1990	academic motivation

Author's table based on literature review study

In this paper, the following definition will be considered: "Motivation means the whole range of reasons of a person's behavior to reach the established goals in order to satisfy certain needs". According to Denhardt, Denhardt and Aristigueta (2008), it's not directly

observable, nor directly controllable, therefore is a complex concept, difficult to assess. The two basic types of motivation are (Deci, 1975):

- Intrinsic motivation- when the only apparent reward of an activity is the activity itself, examples: sense of duty, desire to feel appreciated, altruism
- Extrinsic motivation- when there is an obvious control of the activity, examples of extrinsic motivation: rules, norms, physical environment

In case of academic motivation, Csikszentmihalyi & Larson (1984) found that teachers should strive to increase the intrinsic motivation of their students, while Lepper & Hodell (1989) proved that using extrinsic motivation without addressing the intrinsic motivation could do more harm than good. In 1994, Cameron and Pierce proved that using extrinsic rewards after completing a task will have a positive effect for the moment, yet a negative effect for the next task if the extrinsic reward is missing or it is not present at higher level. On the other hand, a cycle of continual increasing reward would lead to a decreasing and destructive spiral for the intrinsic motivation.

Starting 1943 with the seminal work of Abraham Maslow, “A Theory of Human Motivation”, the theory of motivation faced a continual development and enrichment, table 2 shows a brief review of the needs upon the motivation is based on.

**Table 2: The correspondence between different theories of motivation**

<b>Five level hierarchy</b>		<b>ERG continuum</b>	
Maslow 1943	physiological	Existence	Alderfer 1972
	safety		
	love	Relatedness	
	esteem		
	self-actualization	Growth	
<b>The three Needs Theory</b>		<b>SDT- Self determination theory</b>	
McClelland 1988	achievement	autonomy	Ryan and Deci 2000
	power	competence	
	affiliation	relatedness.	

Author's table

A brief explanation of the main needs is given in table 3.

**Table 3 Examples of the basic needs**

<b>Need</b>	<b>Examples</b>
Physiological	Breathing water food shelter
Safety	personal and financial security health and well-being employment and access to resources
Love	friendship family intimacy
Esteem	our desires for respect self-esteem the need to belong
Self-actualization	the acceptance of ourselves, others and nature spontaneity autonomy independent of culture and environment the mystic experience
Achievement	performing medium difficult tasks based on own effort motivation by accomplishment
Power	enjoy work and competition have an influence on others motivation by status recognition
Affiliation	prefer collaboration better work in groups motivation by role recognition

Author's table

In a study published in 2011, focused on motivation to learn, the following reasons to learn, as well as the following reasons for not to learn were found for the students in the middle school, from Bucharest, Romania's capital city, aged 11 to 15, which is the same target group as in this study (the reasons are in decreasing order).

**Table 4: Reasons to learn and reasons not to learn**

Reasons to learn	Reasons not to learn
To have a good career( or job)	I cannot learn ( different reasons)
What I learn will be useful in the future	Because of the teachers
To have high grades	Not to be considered a geek
What I learn is interesting	I don't want to
To have a high status in the future	I don't understand a thing
To be in the top of the class	I don't care about the school
I like to learn	It doesn't matter for my family
Due to the teachers	I have no proper facilities to learn

Author's table

### Research methodology:

The aim of this paper is to discover the reasons to learn and the reasons not to learn of the students aged from 11 to 15.

The sample consist of 345 students for reasons to learn and 332 students for reasons not to learn from ten middle schools from Bârlad , a town in the East of Romania, situated in Vaslui county, one of the poorest regions in the EU. In the last week of the school year 2016-2017, ten teachers asked the students in their schools to write their reasons to learn or their reasons not to learn.

The students who agreed to complete this task had to write on their paper B for boys, or G for girls, as well as their average annual grade of the previous school year and then they had to write as many reasons as they want. When the data were analyzed, 1185 reasons to learn and 1020 reasons not to learn were found.

I decided to let the students to write the reasons on their will, in their own words, without any restriction, in order to avoid choosing or ranking lists of reasons formulated according to previous studies and based on the theories of motivation. This way, the bias of the responses was minimized and the social desire response was avoided.

The reasons were than classified in clusters, following different patterns, the frequencies of reasons were computed, the correlation with the gender and the level of the grades was investigated. Finally, a comparison with the reasons from a previous study (as seen in table 4) was made, as well as a correspondence between the reasons to learn or the reasons not to learn and the needs of the motivations was made.

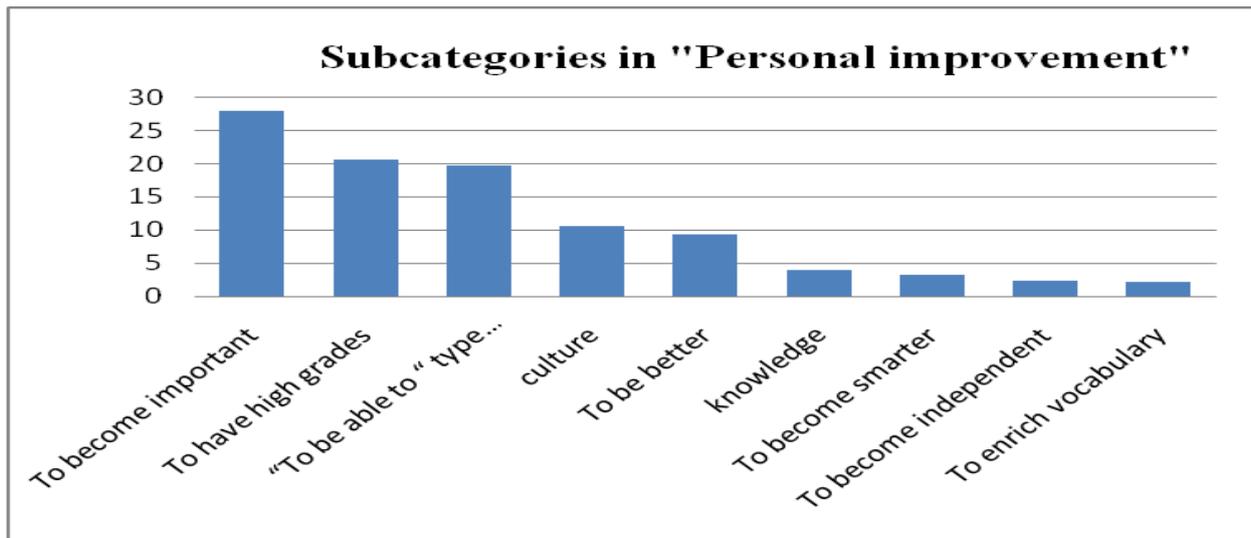
**Findings:****Table 5: The reasons to learn**

Category	Total responses		Of which female		Number of respondents with grades higher than 9 (A grades)	
	No	%	No	%	No	%
Personal improvement	330	27.8	191	57.8	191	57.8
Future studies, jobs and careers	311	26.2	183	58.8	156	50.1
School related reasons	219	18.4	88	40.1	124	56.6
Family related reasons	172	14.5	96	55.8	87	50.5
Other reasons	136	11.4	44	32.3	40	29.4
Total	1185	100	602	100	598	100

Source: Author's table based on respondents' results

The main reason to learn, in the opinion of the respondents, is for personal improvement. The number of female was slightly greater compared to the male ones, the percent is similar with regular percent in Romanian population, as well as in school population. When analyzing the subcategories of the "Personal improvement" category, we can observe that at "To become an independent person" and "culture", the boys lead, while in all the others, the girls lead. Special remarks on the gender polarization on two subcategories: "To enrich vocabulary", where there are girls only and on "To become smarter", where all, but one, are boys. In all subcategories except "knowledge" and "to be better", the majority of the answers were from students with A grades.

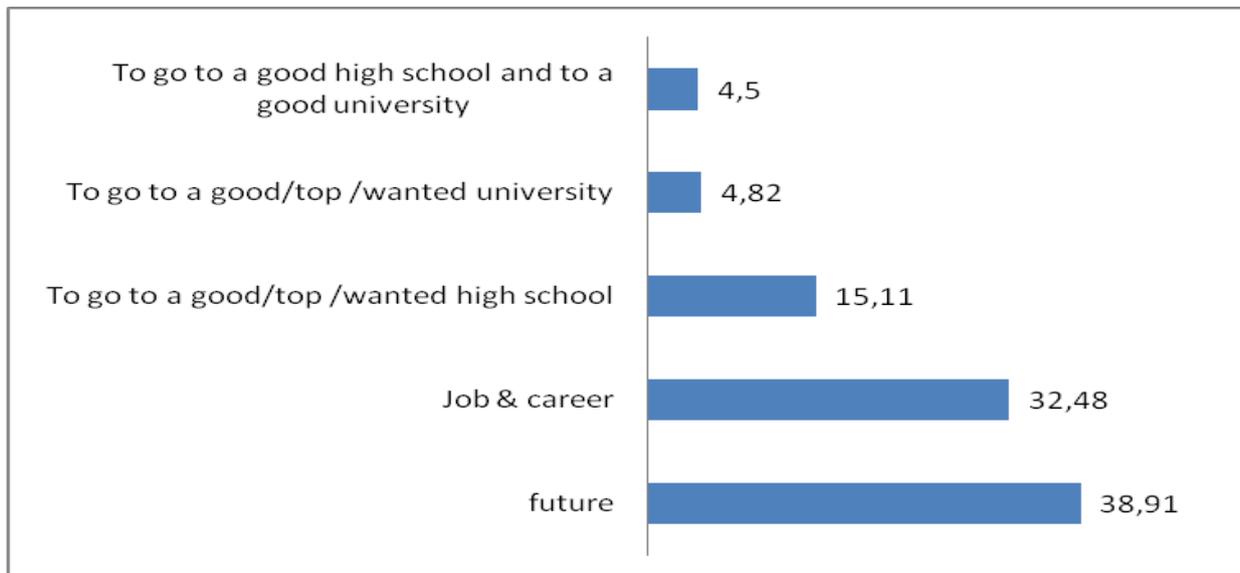
**Figure 1: Subcategories in “Personal improvement” category**



Source: Author’s figure

The second main reason to learn is for “Future studies, jobs and careers”, in the opinion of the respondents irrespective of their grades level, yet mostly by girls. At subcategories related to future studies, the majority is made of A grade students, while in subcategories related to jobs and careers, the majority is made of the other students. This is explained by the fact that the A grades students have more academic oriented goals compared to the others. In subcategories related to university studies there are more answers from girls, the results supports the previous ones, also with girls’ majority for subcategories “To become important”, “To have high grades” or “To be able to”.

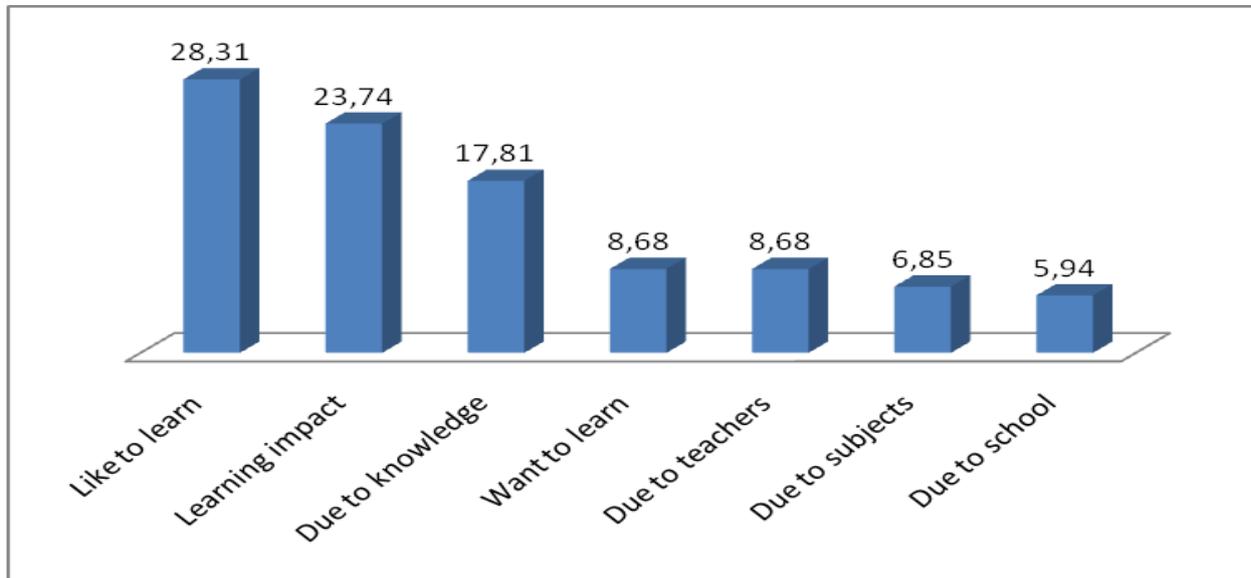
**Figure 2: Subcategories in “Future studies, jobs and careers” category**



Source: Author’s figure

The third important reason to learn is “School related”, in this category the majority is made by boys and by A grades students.

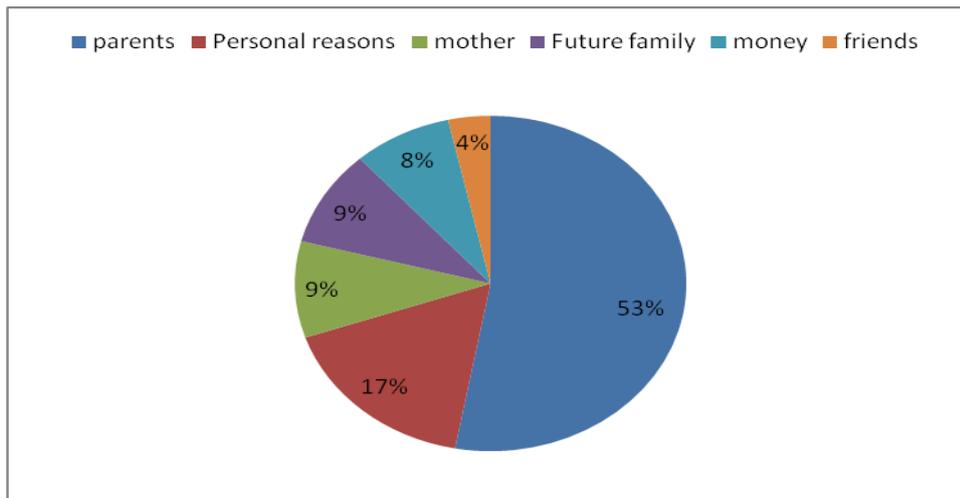
**Figure 3: Subcategories in “School related reasons” category**



Source: Author's figure

We can notice that reasons like teachers, subjects or the whole school environment are not seen as being important. The respondents, mostly boys like to learn, are aware of the learning impact and of the importance of the knowledge they acquire in school. The only subcategory dominated by girls is “Want to learn”, consistent with the fact that girls show more willingness to learn comparing to boys.

The next important reason to learn is “Family related”, almost equal seen as important both from top students and from other students, yet slightly more by girls. Most of the students who learn to make their parents proud or happy of their performance are girls, not necessary A grade students. We might conclude that parents have a great influence on students' reasons to learn. Interesting that girls lead at subcategories “Mother” and “Personal reasons”, while boys lead at subcategories “Future family”, “Money” and “Friends”.

**Figure 4: Subcategories in “Family related reasons” category**

Source: Author's figure

Finally the category “Other reasons” includes the subcategory “To avoid”, for instance:

- Not to be a dustman, or jobless, or homeless, or beggar, or a low worker
- Not to be seen as a stupid, an ignorant, unimportant, a fool person
- Not to be blamed, ashamed, easily manipulated
- Not to depend on the parents anymore, not to be punished by parents
- Not to disappoint the parents or to embarrass the family
- Not to have a bad or poor job, a low paid job
- Not to have low grades, not to repeat a school year
- Not to make a fool of myself in front of the others, not to let other children to make fun of them
- Not to end on the streets, not to feel incomplete
- Not to remain behind, to waist their lives

This subcategory reflects the children's fears, as seen by themselves and most likely discussed in their families.

As for the reasons which didn't fit into the above mentioned categories, I split them in girls' reasons and boys' reasons.

**Table 5: Girls' reasons versus boys' reasons**

<b>Girls' reasons</b>	<b>Boys' reasons</b>
For inner rewards: to be appreciated, to be proud of, to be respected, to have a high status, to prove something, to rise self esteem, for own pleasure, to discover new things, to meet their expectations	For inner rewards: for own good, satisfaction, wellbeing or education, to be appreciated, respected or congratulated, for own pleasure or personal development, to manage things in life, to meet own expectations, to enrich culture or to widen horizon, to prove something
For external rewards: to be rewarded, to get a trip as reward, to get a diploma, to earn enough money, to buy what they want, to be set as an example	For external rewards: to earn money, to own a house, to won a price or a reward, to afford to have what they want
For higher motivations: to understand the world around, to face challenges and real problems in life, to manage their lives, to develop their abilities, their brains, their psychological capabilities	For higher motivations: to understand the world better, to face life and future, to develop knowledge, to discover new things, to have success in life and a high status, to have a good reputation, to fit into society
To help the others: little sisters or brothers, other people to learn how to learn and to explain basic notion to other people	To help the others: future children, to help other children when needed, with their homework or explaining things
As a duty: there is no other choice, they have to	As a duty: they have to
Unusual reasons to learn: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I get bored just staying on mobile and on Facebook and I want to do something else</li> <li>- If I will not put my brain at work, then my brain would lose its main ability</li> <li>- Instead of just hanging around and leave my brain to sleep, I prefer to learn</li> </ul>	Unusual reasons to learn: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Due to Internet</li> <li>- I am too lazy not to learn</li> <li>- I have fun learning</li> <li>- I learn by pleasure</li> <li>- I want to make a change in this world</li> <li>- So that no one can make jokes on</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- This way I will not get Alzheimer so easy</li> <li>- To avoid to be ignored by the others</li> <li>- To change something in my country</li> <li>- Usually people who learn more and more efficient live longer</li> <li>- So that no one can fool me selling me bad things</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>me</li> <li>- So that no one could laugh of me</li> <li>- To avoid being a beggar with no school</li> <li>- To find out how people use to live</li> <li>- To have a better country</li> <li>- Why not to learn?</li> </ul>
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**Source: Author's table**

Now let's mirror the main reason to learn in the previous mentioned study with the one in this study (the reasons are in decreasing order).

**Table 6: Comparison between the reasons to learn in two studies**

Reasons to learn in the previous study	Reasons to learn in this study
To have a good career (or job)	Personal improvement (including to have high grades, to become an important person)
What I learn will be useful in the future	Future studies, jobs and careers
To have high grades	School related reasons (including learning impact, due to teachers, I like to learn)
What I learn is interesting	Family related reasons
To have a high status in the future	Other reasons
To be in the top of the class	
I like to learn	
Due to the teachers	

Source: Author's table

Compared to the previous mentioned study, "personal improvement" is the most important reason to learn for the children in Bârlad, while for the children from Bucharest "to have high grades" is the third most important reason and "to have a high status in the future" comes in the second half of the reasons. One possible explanation could be the

difference between the socio- economic background of the two groups and this also highlights a potential future research to investigate the influence of the socio-economic background on the reasons to learn. Both groups considered “Future jobs or careers” as one of the two major reasons to learn and this proves that children in both groups are aware of the role of learning for their future jobs. School related reasons to learn are considered important, although not in top of the reasons to learn for both groups. This study found also important family related reasons, while in the previous study these reasons appeared only as reasons not to learn. Due to the fact in this study the children didn’t fill in questionnaires with a fixed range of reasons, I encouraged them to come up with contra- factual reasons (to avoid to-type of reasons) or even unusual reasons and this brings a deeper insight look of their perception on the reasons to learn.

To what needs do these reasons to learn correspond? The answer could be found in the table 7.

**Table 7: The correspondence between the reasons to learn and the needs**

<b>Reasons to learn</b>	<b>Needs</b>
Personal improvement	Safety Self-actualization
Future studies, jobs and careers	Safety
School related reasons	Esteem
Family related reasons	Love
Other reasons	Self-actualization Physiological-mainly for “To avoid to” subcategory

Source: Author’s table

There were found 1020 reasons not to learn, of which 52.64% were identified by girls, therefore the proportion girls-boys is almost similar and consistent with the school population. The proportion of the reasons not to learn identified by the A grades students is significant, 43.72% of all the answers.

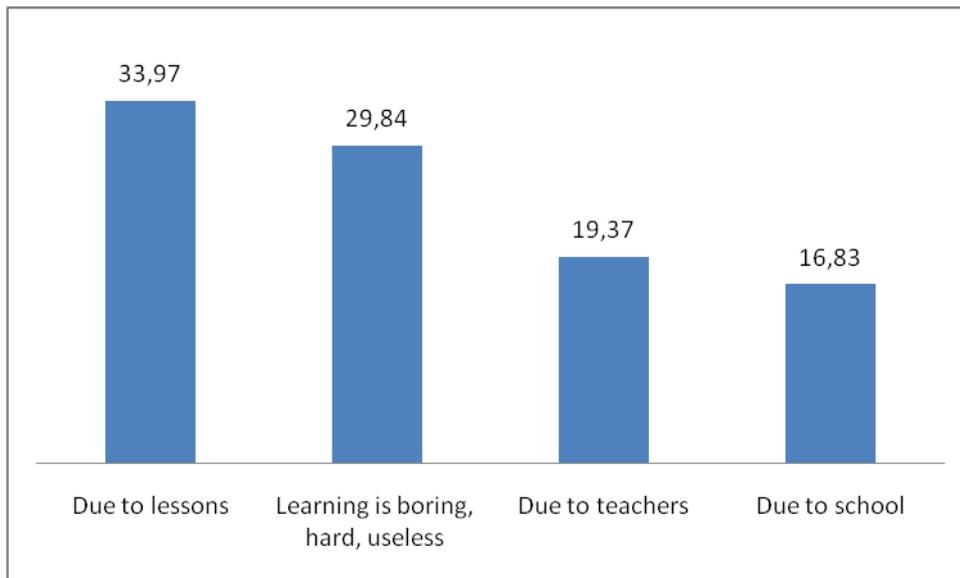
**Table 8: The reasons not to learn**

Category	Total responses		Of which female		Number of respondents with grades higher than 9 (A grades)	
	No	%	No	%	No	%
School related reasons	315	30.9	159	50.4	136	43.2
Other preferences but learning	315	30.9	155	49.2	136	43.1
I don't like or want to learn or I don't understand	238	23.3	146	61.3	104	43.7
Lack of motivation	99	9.7	47	47.4	45	45.4
No or other reasons	53	5.2	30	56.6	25	47.1
Total	1020	100	537	100	446	100

Source: Author's table based on respondents' results

One of the two most important reasons not to learn is the "School related", one in the opinion of the students, a reason upon girls and boys agreed almost equal, including also a high percent of A grades students. The second most important reason is related with the fact that children are not willing or able to learn, called as the majority made of girls said "I don't like or want to learn or I don't understand". Of equal importance reason is "Other preferences but learning", almost equal seen as important by boys and girls, while the boys seem to have more problems with time management compared to girls. Finally, we have a smaller percent of students admitting their "Lack of motivation", again mostly boys and the category "No or other reason", including an interesting subcategory of students admitting they have no real reasons not to learn.

A deeper analysis of "School related reasons" not to learn reveals the results in figure 5.

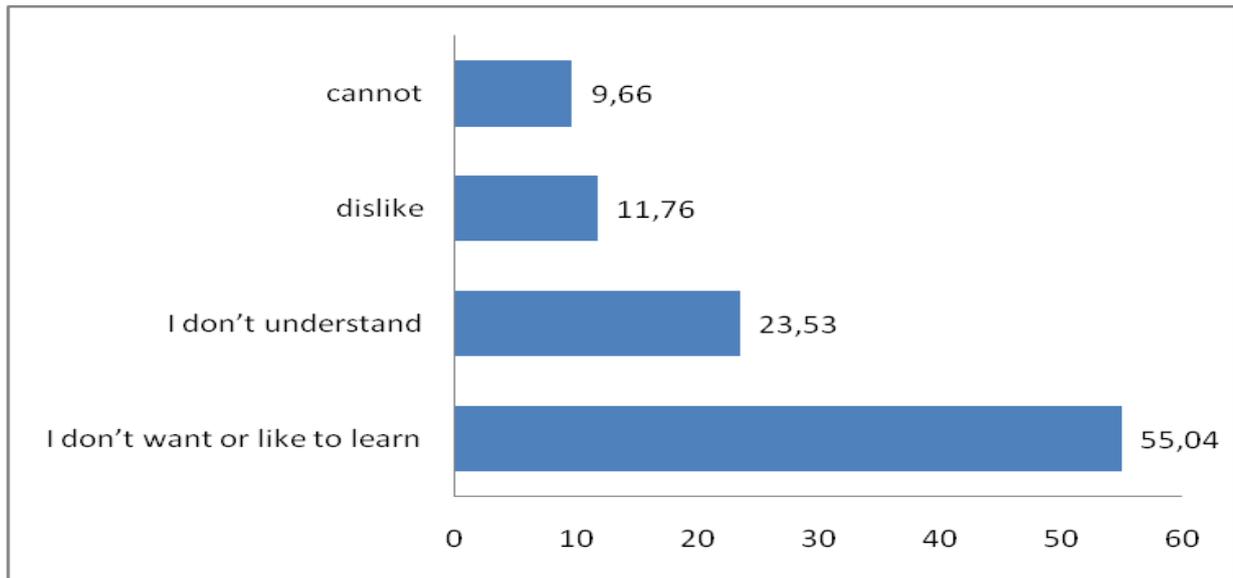
**Figure 5: Subcategories in “School related reasons” category**

Source: Author's figure

Almost one in three students considered that the way the lessons are is the main reasons for them not to learn. They mentioned the lessons are boring, not interesting, not interactive, they found them hard to understand, useless for their future, they highlight the lack of discipline and found it hard to cooperate with their schoolmates during lessons. The second main reason seemed to be their conviction that learning is either hard or boring or useless or any combination of those. For almost one in five students, teachers are seen as a major reason not to learn, in their opinion teachers are old fashion, not interested in the way they teach, too severe, asking too much from their students, too strict in evaluations. The last reasons is related with the whole school environment, from basic conditions in the classrooms to poor school management. The boys are the majority for “Due to lessons” and “Due to school” reasons and the girls are the majority for the other two reasons. There is a pretty high percent (43.6) of A grade students who agreed that learning is boring, hard or useless.

The subcategories in the other most important reasons not to learn are shown in figure 6.

**Figure 6: Subcategories in “I don’t like or want to learn or I don’t understand” category**

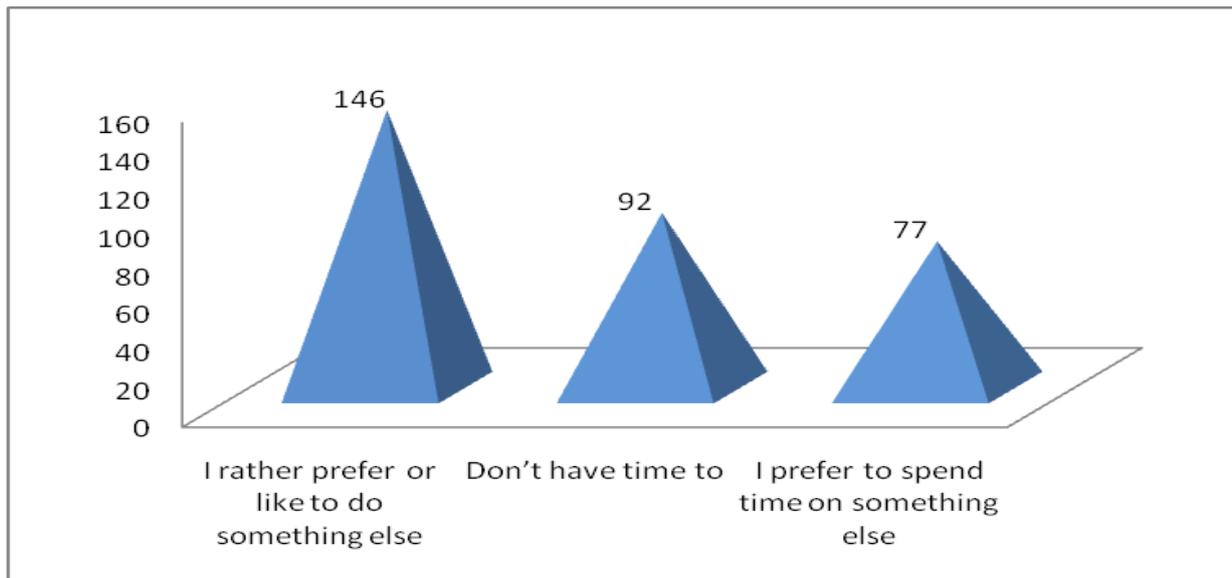


Source: Author's figure

More than half of the students admitted they don't want to learn or they don't like to learn, mostly girls (59.5%) and slightly than a quarter admitted their reason not to learn is that they don't understand, again mostly girls (71.4).

In “I rather prefer or like to do” subcategory, most of answers are from boys who prefer to spend time on other activities instead of learning, mainly they prefer to play in any form, outside, team plays, computer plays or just to spend time with their friends and, therefore, they don't have time to learn.

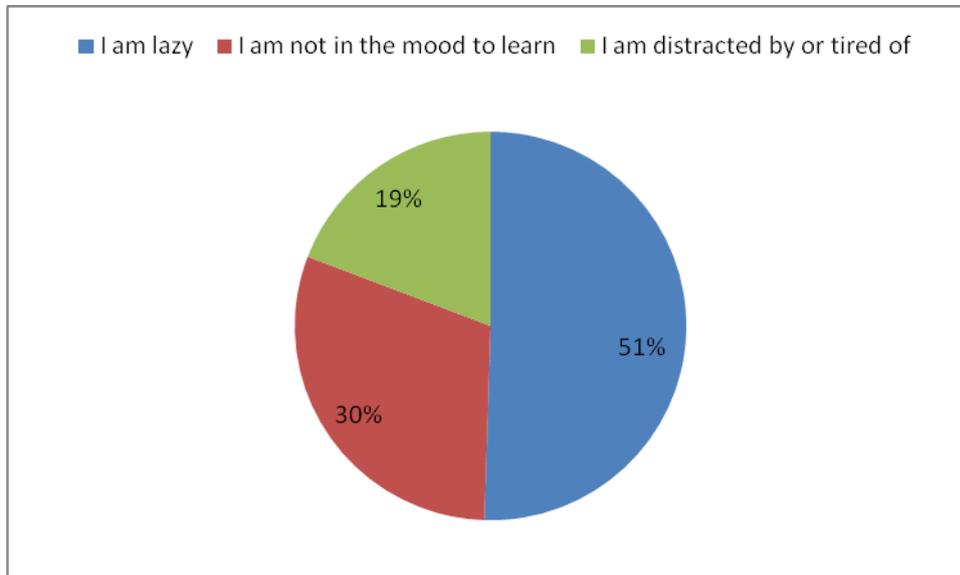
**Figure 7: Subcategories in “Other preferences but learning” category**



Source: Author's figure

The results for the “Lack of motivation“ category are split between “I am lazy”, meaning too lazy to learn, “I am distracted by” and “I am not in the mood” to learn. These options are almost equally split between girls and boys, as well as between A grade students and the other students.

**Figure 8: Subcategories in “Lack of motivation” category**



Source: Author's figure

Finally, there are 34 respondents, of which 19 are girls, who admitted they have no real reasons not to learn. As for the unusual reasons included in this category, I split them into “Girls’ reasons” and “Boys’ reasons”.

**Table 9: Girls' reasons versus boys' reasons not to learn**

<b>Girls' reasons</b>	<b>Boys' reasons</b>
Concerning childhood	
Learning is ruin my childhood	The childhood is unique and should not be used to learn
Concerning friends or colleagues	
If I learn, I will make a fool of myself in front of my colleagues	None of my friends is learning anymore
Concerning free time	
If I learn, I have no free time for myself; If I have free time for myself, I don't learn	If I would learn (which I don't anyway), I would not have the weekend free to do what I want
Concerning learning decisions	
I know that if I won't learn, I will become homeless, with no job, alone, starving to death and still I decided not to learn	If I sleep I will be relaxed, if I learn I will be tired, therefore my decision is obvious
I am aware that I cannot do anything in life without learning and still I will not learn and that is my final decision	I am a rebel
If I would decide to learn, I would have to change myself	If I would ever decide to learn, my life would change for ever
If it would be my choice, I would quit school	
Unusually reasons	
I can always cheat on tests	Because I know I will make a prank or two and things will go wild
I simply don't like to learn, although I know learning is important for my future and to have a job	I don't like how some of the children are dressed, they should obey some rules
It's not a good thing to learn that much	

Mental health is more important	
---------------------------------	--

Source: Author's table

The results are consistent with the ones in the previous study, identifying reasons related with the children's capabilities and willingness as: don't like to learn, don't want to learn, cannot learn, don't understand and also reasons related to school as: don't care about school, due to teachers, due to lessons, learning is boring, learning is hard, learning is useless. But this study highlights some different types of reasons not to learn as: other preferences but learning, poor management of time, lack of motivation, false excuses, bad decisions. Also these reasons were seen as having the same importance with the classical "School related reasons", they appear in this study because the children had the opportunity to write their reasons in their own words and they also prove that children are aware that they have external reasons, but also internal reasons not to learn.

### Conclusions

**Table 10: Reasons to learn versus reasons not to learn**

Reasons to learn	Reasons not to learn
Personal improvement 27.8%	School related reasons 30.9%
Future studies, jobs and careers 26.2%	Other preferences but learning 30.9%
School related reasons 18.4%	I don't like or want to learn or I don't understand 23.3%
Family related reasons 14.5%	Lack of motivation 9.7%
Other reasons 11.4%	No or other reasons 5.2%

Source: Author's table

The motivation to learn and, therefore, the decision to learn is up to children themselves and so is the decision not to learn and this study shows they are aware of that. The answers proved that the children know that they learn for themselves, to improve and to develop their skills and capabilities, are aware that what they learn and how they learn will help them to shape their future, their future jobs and future status. Of course the motivation to learn can be fostered by school, as well as by their family and it is interesting that only 7 out of 1185 considered the school and the family as integrated. As

for the motivation not to learn, beside the classical type of reasons related to school, considering that anything (school environment, lessons, subjects, learning process) and anyone (teachers, family, friends, colleagues) is to blame, except the respondent, other types of motivation were admitted by the respondents. Among these reasons, extra school preferences were identified as being in competition with learning for the same period of time and, not surprisingly, any other preference was considered more important compared to learning process. Because learning is hard, boring and useless, while the other preferences are considered easier, exciting and useless or not, at least funny. Personal limits of capabilities and skills were also identified, leading to I cannot, I don't want to, I don't like to, I don't understand. The laziness and the rebel type reasons were "proudly" admitted and mentioned by some of the respondents.

The results are consistent with the ones in the previous studies and, in the same time, they offer an interesting insight for the Romanian students aged 11 to 15. The limitation of the study is that the sample was made from students only from urban schools and only from one town in Romania. Further research should be conducting in order to investigate the influence of the place of origin on the reasons to learn and on the reasons not to learn.

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