

Motivation for Learning and Study Habits: Empirical Evidence from Mexico

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Abstract

In upper secondary education, study habits and motivation relate closely to academic performance and student persistence. This study examined the relationship between study habits and motivation for learning among high school students. A quantitative approach with a descriptive–correlational scope guided the research, using nonprobabilistic convenience sampling; the sample included 224 students aged 15 to 18. Data collection relied on the HEMA questionnaire (70 dichotomous Yes/No items). Female students reported more consistent study

habits than their male counterparts, particularly regarding time organization and exam preparation. With respect to motivation, favorable levels emerged in focus/study orientation (90.2%), time valuation (87.1%), and confidence in learning (84.4%), whereas reflection on learning (37.9%) and creative–critical attitude (49.1%) lagged behind. Statistical testing indicated a very strong positive association between study habits and motivation ($r = .856$, $p < .001$). The study contributes empirical evidence of this relationship at the high school level and supports the diagnostic relevance of the HEMA within a regional context in Sonora. Overall, strengthening motivation toward learning aligns with greater consolidation of effective study habits; therefore, the study recommends implementing interventions that enhance intrinsic motivation, self-regulation, and study strategies, with particular emphasis on metacognitive competencies to consolidate learning and improve academic performance.

Keywords: High School Students, Study Habits, Motivation for Learning, Academic Performance

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Introduction

In upper secondary education, study habits and motivation for learning function as essential factors influencing time organization, autonomy, and perseverance in the face of academic challenges. The absence of consolidated habits and sustained motivation generates a vicious cycle that leads to low academic performance and, frequently, to school dropout (Cortez, 2019; Hernández & López, 2021). Emotional variables, such as stress and anxiety, further compound this situation, as recent studies have identified them as key determinants of self-regulation and readiness to learn (Armenta Zazueta et al., 2020; Armenta-Zazueta & Siari-Vizcarra, 2022). These findings indicate that learning relies not only on cognitive abilities but also on socioemotional factors and on the strategies students deploy to cope with academic demands, which underscores the need for comprehensive education at this level.

At the international level, evidence shows that students who develop structured study habits and personal autonomy sustain higher levels of motivation, particularly when academic content connects with everyday life and highlights the practical usefulness of knowledge (Moreno-Murcia et al., 2024; Pallo-Pilalumbo & Pilalumbo-Pallo, 2024).

In Mexico, González Molina et al. (2023) and Cortez (2019) report that poorly organized study habits correlate with lower intrinsic motivation and reduced academic performance. At the

regional level, studies conducted in Sonora (Hernández & López, 2021; Sotelo Castillo et al., 2023) warn that the absence of clear goals and limited self-regulation relate to patterns of disengagement and insufficient performance across different high school campuses.

Based on this body of evidence, a gap emerges in the joint analysis of study habits and motivation within specific educational contexts, such as the Colegio de Bachilleres del Estado de Sonora, Álamos campus. Within this institution, recurring difficulties in academic achievement, limited interest in school activities, and weaknesses in learning self-regulation have appeared, which justifies the relevance of the present study. From this context, the following research question arises: What relationship exists between study habits and motivation for learning among students at the Colegio de Bachilleres del Estado de Sonora, Álamos campus?

The general objective seeks to identify the relationship between study habits and motivation for learning among high school students. The specific objectives aim to assess both constructs using a standardized instrument, determine the degree of association between them, and identify areas of opportunity that may inform the design of pedagogical strategies. The study gains relevance insofar as its findings provide useful information to strengthen self-regulation, intrinsic motivation, and academic engagement, elements that prove essential for improving academic performance and reducing school dropout. In this way, the research offers empirical evidence of the positive relationship between study habits and motivation, contributes to psychopedagogical knowledge in upper secondary education, and supports the validity of the HEMA questionnaire within a regional context in Sonora.

Theoretical Framework

Study Habits

In contemporary education, study habits represent a core component of autonomous learning, as they enable students to organize their time, regulate effort, and assume responsibility for their own educational process. Habit formation requires constant practice and discipline, since only deliberate repetition allows a behavior to integrate naturally into daily routines. García (2017) explains that a habit should not be understood as a mechanical act, but rather as a meaningful practice that combines experience, reflection, and learning. When students fail to consolidate their habits, academic performance tends to become irregular and increasingly dependent on external factors.

Recent research highlights the relevance of self-regulation and planning in strengthening study habits. Cortez (2019) and Hernández and López (2021) report that young people who organize their time and maintain clear work routines typically achieve better academic outcomes and show greater persistence when facing frustration.

Elizalde (2017) adds that teacher guidance plays a crucial role, as it supports consistency and reinforces students' commitment to their learning process. García García (2019) and Vásquez (2016) likewise agree that habit consolidation depends on both institutional support and the sense of personal responsibility promoted by the educational environment. Along the same lines,

González Molina et al. (2023) demonstrated that students with stable routines not only attain better results but also develop discipline, attentional control, and self-confidence—qualities associated with balanced academic and emotional performance.

The development of solid habits encompasses reading comprehension, time management, and the effective use of learning resources. Moreno-Murcia et al. (2024) and Sotelo Castillo et al. (2023) observed that the sustained practice of these behaviors enhances motivation and reduces procrastination. Study habits therefore function as an essential tool for achieving lasting learning outcomes and fostering a responsible attitude toward knowledge.

Motivation for Learning

Motivation operates as the internal drive that directs students' behavior toward the achievement of academic goals. Within educational practice, it sustains interest, concentration, and effort in the face of learning challenges. Llanga et al. (2019) argue that motivation depends largely on the value students assign to what they learn. García (2024) distinguishes between intrinsic motivation, grounded in interest and personal satisfaction, and extrinsic motivation, linked to external incentives such as grades or recognition. Although both forms contribute to learning, intrinsic motivation generates more enduring effects and promotes greater student autonomy.

The role of teachers proves decisive in this process. Valenzuela et al. (2015) emphasize that educators who connect curricular content with students' everyday experiences foster more meaningful learning. Mora et al. (2024) explain that students with high personal motivation display resilience and commitment, even under conditions of intense academic demand. Emotions also exert a direct influence on readiness to learn. Armenta Zazueta et al. (2020) and Armenta-Zazueta and Siari-Vizcarra (2022) showed that stress and anxiety undermine self-regulation and negatively affect academic performance, particularly during stages marked by strong academic pressure.

In upper secondary education, motivation links closely to school persistence and the construction of meaningful learning. Pallo-Pilalumbo and Pilalumbo-Pallo (2024) found that students who understand the practical usefulness of knowledge maintain a more stable commitment to studying. González Molina et al. (2023) demonstrated that a lack of organized study habits leads to diminished motivation and lower academic performance. Similarly, Sotelo Castillo et al. (2023) observed that the absence of clear goals restricts self-regulation and reduces interest in learning, confirming the connection between motivation, discipline, and academic achievement.

Relationship Between Study Habits and Motivation

The reviewed literature consistently indicates that study habits and motivation reinforce one another. Students who plan their work and maintain consistency tend to show greater willingness to learn. Conversely, when interest and satisfaction with learning emerge, study behaviors become more stable. Moreno-Murcia et al. (2024) note that motivation strengthens when students perceive tangible progress and experience a sense of control over their own learning

process. This interaction fosters perseverance, self-confidence, and autonomy—core components of deep and sustained learning.

Types of motivation relate directly to the ways students organize and regulate their learning. Table 1 summarizes the main characteristics of intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and amotivation, together with their links to study habits. This comparison illustrates how each motivational orientation influences students’ consistency, autonomy, and academic discipline.

Table 1. Relationship Between Types of Motivation and Study Habits

Type of Motivation	Main Characteristics	Relationship with Study Habits
Intrinsic	Arises from personal interest and a genuine desire to learn.	Encourages consistency, effective time management, and autonomous information seeking.
Extrinsic	Relies on external incentives such as grades or social recognition.	Promotes task completion, although with lower levels of self-regulation and reflection.
Amotivation	Reflects a lack of interest or perceived meaning in learning.	Relates to inconsistent habits, disorganization, and low academic performance.

Note. Author’s own elaboration based on Valenzuela et al. (2015), Llanga et al. (2019), and Mora et al. (2024).

The theoretical review enables an understanding of study habits and motivation as complementary variables that exert reciprocal influence on one another. Examining both dimensions facilitates a clearer interpretation of the learning practices that prevail in upper secondary education. The conceptual foundations reviewed also justify the use of the HEMA questionnaire as an appropriate instrument for assessing the relationship between these variables within the educational context of southern Sonora.

Methodology

The study adopted a quantitative approach with a descriptive and correlational scope. The descriptive level allowed for an examination of how study habits and motivation manifest among students, while the correlational approach served to analyze the statistical relationship between both variables without altering the group’s natural conditions. This methodological structure proved suitable for understanding how these factors relate to one another within the context of the Colegio de Bachilleres del Estado de Sonora, Álamos campus.

Table 2. Sample Distribution by Semester, Age, and Sex

Semester	Age	Males	Females	Total
First	15–16	34	59	93
Third	16–18	41	38	79
Fifth	17–18	21	31	52
Total	—	96	128	224

Note. Author’s own elaboration based on the sample applied at the Colegio de Bachilleres del Estado de Sonora, Álamos campus.

The instrument employed consisted of the Study Habits and Motivation for Learning Questionnaire (HEMA), designed by Orejudo and Sánchez-Cabrero (2014). This questionnaire, widely validated in psychoeducational contexts, assesses factors related to academic performance and motivation for learning. It includes 70 dichotomous-response items (Yes = 1, No = 0). Of these, 61 items correspond to seven dimensions of study habits (environmental factors, physical and emotional health, study methods, organization of plans and schedules, exam-taking practices, information seeking, and written and oral academic communication), while 9 items assess the motivation for learning dimension. Responses were summed and averaged by dimension, yielding values ranging from 0 to 1 that represent the proportion of positive responses within each category. This procedure enabled the identification of the degree of presence or absence of behaviors associated with study habits and motivation. Data processing relied on Jamovi software, version 2.6.

To verify the instrument’s reliability, a pilot test with characteristics similar to those of the final sample took place. Internal consistency was examined using Cronbach’s alpha coefficient, with results reported in Table 3. All values exceeded 0.70, and the overall index reached 0.89, which confirms the high reliability and robustness of the questionnaire.

Table 3. Cronbach’s Alpha Coefficients

Dimension	Cronbach’s Alpha
I. Environmental Factors	0.81
II. Physical and Emotional Health	0.84
III. Study Method	0.88
IV. Organization of Plans and Schedules	0.85
V. Exam-Taking Practices	0.83
VI. Information Seeking	0.79
VII. Written and Oral Academic Communication	0.82
VIII. Motivation for Learning	0.87
Overall Instrument	0.89

Note. Jamovi, version 2.6.

The application process unfolded in several stages. First, institutional authorization was obtained and the questionnaire was adapted to a digital format. Subsequently, informed consent was requested from participants, who completed the instrument voluntarily and confidentially through Google Forms. Once data collection concluded, the dataset underwent cleaning procedures to remove incomplete or duplicate records and was then organized into a statistical database for analysis.

Data processing included descriptive statistics—such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations—in order to characterize study habits and motivation for learning. Pearson’s correlation coefficient (r) was then applied to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between the variables, using a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$. This analysis made it possible to identify association patterns and to provide empirical evidence regarding the correspondence between study habits and motivation among high school students in southern Sonora.

Results

Descriptive analysis revealed clear differences in study habits between male and female students within the sample of 224 participants. On average, male students obtained a mean score of 0.53 with a standard deviation of 0.33, reflecting variability in the application of study strategies. This result suggests that, although some male students display adequate practices, consistency does not appear uniform across the group. In contrast, female students reached a mean of 0.71 with a standard deviation of 0.31, indicating a more consistent tendency toward time organization and academic planning. Overall, the findings show that female students demonstrate more structured study behaviors, whereas male students exhibit greater dispersion in their responses. This difference appears in greater detail in Table 4, which presents descriptive values by sex.

Table 4. Descriptive Results of Study Habits by Sex

Sex	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Males	0.53	0.33	0.02	0.81
Females	0.71	0.31	0.15	0.99

Note. Values represent the proportional mean of affirmative responses (Yes = 1, No = 0) on the HEMA questionnaire.

An analysis of the instrument’s specific dimensions indicated that most students perceive favorable conditions in environmental factors and in physical and emotional health, which reflects a general awareness of self-care and its connection to learning. By contrast, scores related to study methods and time organization show lower percentages, suggesting that nearly half of the students do not apply structured strategies to plan or review their academic activities. As shown in Table 5, the most consolidated dimensions relate to well-being and environmental conditions, whereas the weakest areas associate with time management and academic planning.

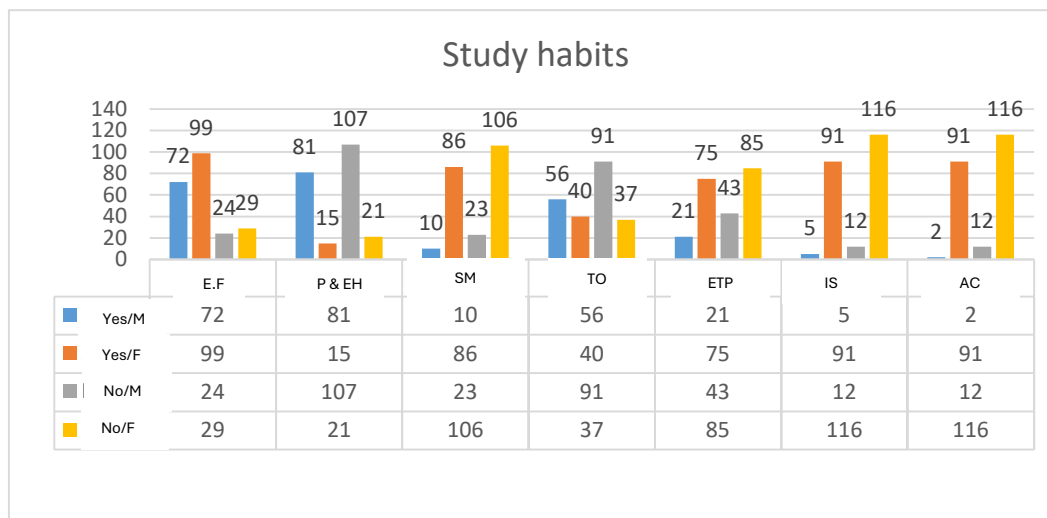
Table 5. Percentage of Favorable Responses by Study Habits Dimension

Dimension	Favorable (%)	Unfavorable (%)
Environmental Factors (E.F.)	78.4	21.6
Physical and Emotional Health (P&EH)	81.2	18.8
Study Method (SM)	56.7	43.3
Time Organization (TO)	52.9	47.1
Exam-Taking Practices (ETP)	63.4	36.6
Information Seeking (IS)	60.1	39.9
Academic Communication (AC)	65.7	34.3

Note. Author's own elaboration based on results from the HEMA questionnaire.

As shown in Figure 1, gender differences align with the data reported in Table 5. Female students display a higher frequency of affirmative responses across nearly all dimensions, particularly in time organization, information seeking, and academic communication. By contrast, male students show lower consistency in the application of structured strategies, which reinforces the need to strengthen self-regulation within this group.

Figure 1. Overall Results by Dimension



Note. Source: Author's own elaboration.

With regard to motivation for learning, the overall mean reached 0.61, reflecting a generally positive disposition toward studying. The dimensions with the highest percentages of favorable responses included study focus (90.2%), time valuation (87.1%), and confidence in learning (84.4%). By contrast, the lowest percentages appeared in reflection on learning (37.9%) and creative–critical attitude (49.1%), which reveals the need to strengthen metacognitive and reflective processes. The data appear in Table 6.

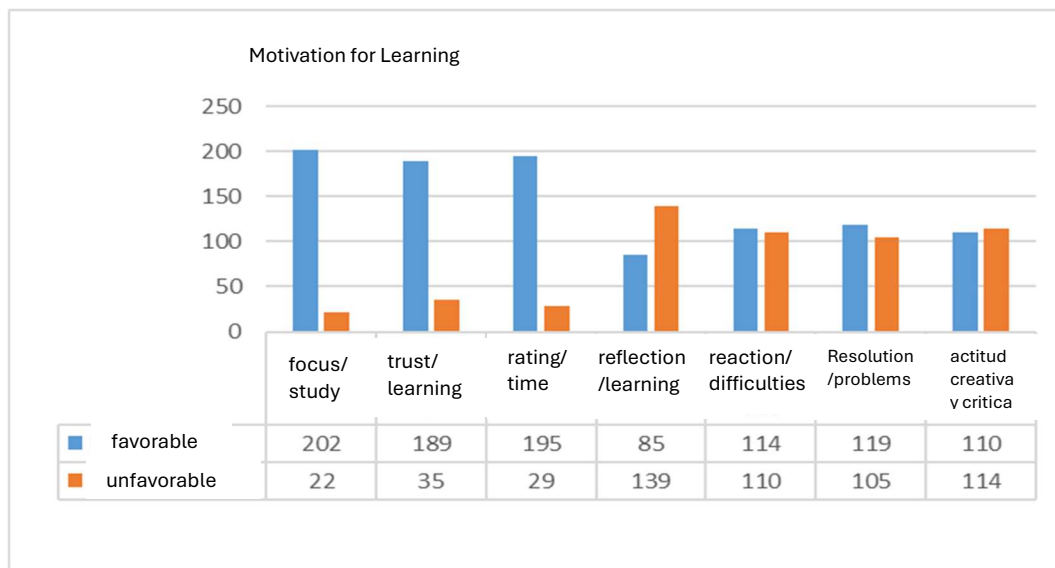
Table 6. Descriptive Results of the Motivation for Learning Variable

Dimension	Favorable (%)	Unfavorable (%)
Study Focus	90.2	9.8
Confidence in Learning	84.4	15.6
Time Valuation	87.1	12.9
Reflection on Learning	37.9	62.1
Creative and Critical Attitude	49.1	50.9

Note. Author's own elaboration based on results from the HEMA questionnaire.

As shown in Figure 2, the motivation results confirm a clear positive trend in the dimensions of study focus, confidence in learning, and time valuation. By contrast, the lowest levels concentrate in reflection on learning and creative and critical attitude, which highlights the need to reinforce cognitive self-regulation and analytical thinking.

Figure 2. Overall Results by Dimension



The overall analysis of the variables yielded positive mean values for both constructs: 0.53 for study habits and 0.61 for motivation for learning. Pearson's correlation, reported in Table 7, produced a coefficient of $r = 0.856$ ($p < .001$), indicating a very strong positive association. This result confirms that, as motivation increases, the frequency of behaviors associated with effective study habits also rises. Although motivation remains slightly higher than study habits, the observed pattern suggests that not all students succeed in translating their interest in learning into concrete actions, which constitutes a significant pedagogical challenge.

Table 7. Correlation Between Study Habits and Motivation for Learning

Variables	Pearson's r	Significance (p)	Interpretation
Study Habits – Motivation for Learning	0.856	< .001	Very strong positive correlation

Note. Calculation performed using Jamovi software, version 2.6. Significance level $\alpha = 0.05$.

The results provide evidence of a direct and statistically significant relationship between study habits and motivation. Students with higher levels of motivation tend to organize their time more effectively, plan ahead, and sustain consistent attitudes toward learning. These findings support the usefulness of the HEMA questionnaire as a diagnostic instrument and offer empirical evidence capable of informing pedagogical strategies aimed at strengthening intrinsic motivation and study habits at the upper secondary level.

Discussion

The findings indicate that study habits and motivation for learning maintain a positive and significant relationship among high school students at the Colegio de Bachilleres del Estado de Sonora, Álamos campus. This association suggests that motivated students more frequently organize their time, plan academic activities in advance, and develop more effective learning strategies. This result aligns with the arguments proposed by Flores and Cotrina (2024), who emphasize that intrinsic motivation fosters persistence and consistency in studying, thereby generating sustained academic engagement. Similarly, López-García and García-Martínez (2022) reported that planning and self-regulation relate closely to higher levels of self-efficacy, which in turn strengthen students' willingness to learn and maintain stable academic performance.

Within the analyzed population, the most robust dimensions included study focus, confidence in learning, and time valuation, revealing a generally positive orientation toward learning. According to Moreno-Murcia et al. (2024), these dimensions associate with autonomy and with students' perceptions of the practical usefulness of knowledge—factors that enhance intrinsic motivation and consolidate academic discipline.

However, the dimensions of reflection on learning and creative–critical attitude displayed unfavorable percentages, which suggests limitations in the development of metacognitive competencies. This result corresponds with Rodríguez et al. (2021), who explain that the absence of self-reflective strategies hinders deep understanding of content and constrains analytical thinking, thereby affecting learning quality.

Gender differences also emerge as a relevant aspect of the findings. Female students reported more consistent study habits, particularly in time organization and exam preparation, whereas male students exhibited greater dispersion in their practices. Previous research has documented similar trends, indicating that female students often show stronger orientations toward academic responsibility and goal attainment (Hernández & López, 2021; Cortez, 2019). These results

reinforce the importance of implementing personalized support strategies that account for gender differences and promote self-regulation across all student groups.

The educational context of southern Sonora may partially explain these patterns. Upper secondary institutions in this region often face limitations in the implementation of academic guidance and tutoring programs, which affects the consolidation of study habits and student motivation. In addition, teaching practices that prioritize memorization restrict opportunities for autonomous and reflective learning. These conditions manifest in the low scores observed for critical thinking and reflection on learning—dimensions that require active methodologies and academic dialogue spaces capable of encouraging student participation. Strengthening these areas remains essential for developing analytical, argumentative, and self-regulatory competencies that support meaningful learning.

The findings also coincide with Mora et al. (2024), who argue that high personal motivation enhances resilience in the face of academic stress. In this sense, the results from the Álamos campus confirm that emotional well-being and self-confidence exert a direct influence on students' willingness to learn. Armenta Zazueta et al. (2020) and Armenta-Zazueta and Siari-Vizcarra (2022) emphasize that anxiety and academic pressure undermine self-regulation and motivation, which may explain why some students, despite showing interest, fail to translate motivation into consolidated habits.

Overall, the results suggest that the development of study habits cannot be understood independently of motivation and socioemotional factors. When students perceive themselves as capable of achieving their goals and recognize the usefulness of what they learn, their study practices become more consistent and sustainable.

These findings support the conclusions of González Molina et al. (2023), who identified a close relationship between motivation and academic discipline among upper secondary students. Furthermore, they highlight the importance of promoting school environments that encourage autonomy, collaborative work, and critical reflection.

The very strong positive correlation obtained ($r = 0.856$, $p < .001$) represents the study's main empirical contribution, as it demonstrates the close linkage between motivation and study habits in everyday school practice. This result, together with the high reliability values of the HEMA questionnaire ($\alpha = 0.89$), supports the instrument's diagnostic relevance in Latin American contexts. Consequently, the study not only provides empirical evidence regarding the relationship between both variables but also validates the applicability of the HEMA questionnaire in upper secondary education in Sonora, thereby contributing to the methodological strengthening of future research on youth learning.

Conclusions

The results demonstrate a positive association between study habits and motivation for learning among high school students. The high correlation level observed ($r = 0.856$, $p < .001$) constitutes the study's most significant empirical contribution, as it confirms the close connection between motivation and study habits in academic practice. Within the analyzed sample, the dimensions

of study focus, confidence in learning, and time valuation stand out, suggesting a favorable disposition toward organizing academic work. At the same time, lower scores in reflection on learning and creative–critical attitude point to limited development of metacognitive competencies, which remain essential for deep content comprehension.

The evidence obtained supports the diagnostic relevance of the HEMA questionnaire among upper secondary students in southern Sonora. The internal consistency achieved confirms its suitability for the integrated assessment of study habits and motivation in Latin American contexts with similar educational realities. This methodological contribution holds value for future research and for school leadership teams seeking brief and reliable tools for academic monitoring.

These findings also inform concrete educational actions. Implementing programs aimed at strengthening intrinsic motivation and self-regulation appears advisable, particularly through academic tutoring, time management training, weekly planning, and early preparation for assessments.

Additionally, incorporating active methodologies that promote reflection on learning and critical thinking through analysis, argumentation, and problem-solving activities connected to real-life contexts would prove beneficial. In institutions with conditions similar to those in Sonora, such initiatives may benefit from academic and socioemotional guidance spaces that foster well-being and sustained engagement in studying.

Future research should further explore the role of metacognitive competencies, examine gender differences in greater depth, and design pedagogical interventions that integrate teacher monitoring, formative assessment, and systematic reflection spaces. Exploring the performance of the HEMA questionnaire across diverse populations and other upper secondary subsystems would also help refine interpretation criteria and expand its diagnostic scope. Advancing along these lines will allow empirical evidence to translate into more effective and sustainable school practices aimed at improving learning outcomes.

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