

School results boosted by improved focus in class

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Researchers from the University of Adelaide say attempts to improve children's attentiveness in the early years could be rewarded with better literacy and maths abilities by ages 6-7 years.

In a study led by the University's School of Population Health, researchers investigated task attentiveness and the ability to regulate emotions, using data from more than 3400 children who participated in the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children when they were aged 2-3, then 4-5, and again at 6-7 years.

The results, published in the journal *Child: Care, Health and Development*, show that children who have greater improvements in their ability to attend to and persist with tasks during their early years have better [academic achievement](#) by ages 6-7.

"Around the world there's a lot of interest in how children develop 'self-regulation' skills that will help them in later life. There has been very little about this in Australia so far, so this research is aimed at better understanding Australian children's self-regulation and its impact on education," says the lead author of the paper, Dr Alyssa Sawyer, a Postdoctoral Research Fellow in the University's School of Population Health.

The study found that task attentiveness from ages 2-3 to 6-7 years was associated with improved literacy and maths achievement during the early school years, while [emotional regulation](#) showed smaller effects on

academic outcomes.

"Children who show greater improvement in their ability to attend to and persist with tasks may be more able to take advantage of educational opportunities when they commence school, resulting in higher academic achievement," Dr Sawyer says.

"Emotional regulation was positively associated with a slight improvement in literacy, but not in maths, suggesting that task attentiveness may be more strongly associated with educational outcomes."

Dr Sawyer says this research points to the potential for intervention at an early age to help children to further develop their [attentiveness](#).

"The current thinking in this field is that the rate of return on investment is much greater when resources are put into early childhood development. There may be opportunities here for interventions or activities that strengthen [children](#)'s ability to focus and persist with tasks, which in turn could help them in later life.

"Whether or not we could intervene - and how that might be done - would need to be the subject of future research," Dr Sawyer says.

More information: "Are trajectories of self-regulation abilities from ages 2–3 to 6–7 associated with academic achievement in the early school years?" *Child: Care, Health and Development*
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Provided by University of Adelaide

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