

A gap year does not weaken study success

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A gap year between high school and the start of university studies does not weaken young people's enthusiasm to study or their overall performance once the studies have commenced. On the other hand, adolescents who continue to university studies directly after upper secondary school are more resilient in their studies and more committed to the study goals. However, young people who transfer directly to university are more stressed than those who start their studies after a gap year. These research results have been achieved in the Academy of Finland's research programme The Future of Learning, Knowledge and Skills (TULOS).

"For [young people](#), the transition from upper [secondary school](#) to further

studies is a demanding phase in life, and many adolescents are tired at the end of upper secondary school. The demanding university admission tests take place close to the matriculation examination in Finland and require diligent studying from students. For many, a gap year offers an opportunity to take a break and think about future choices while developing a positive view of the future," says Professor Katariina Salmela-Aro, the principal investigator of the study.

The transition period from [secondary education](#) to further studies is a key phase for the development of young people. It is a phase in which adolescents ponder over important future choices regarding educational directions and career goals.

The impact of a gap year on young people's motivation to study and their future educational path was studied for the first time in the Academy of Finland's research programme The Future of Learning, Knowledge and Skills. The research was conducted in Finland with the help of the FinEdu longitudinal study, which followed young people for several years after upper secondary school. A corresponding study was conducted concurrently in cooperation with Australian researchers among local youth in Australia.

"In the light of our research findings, a gap year between secondary education and further studies is not harmful, especially if the young person only takes one year off. When these adolescents are compared with those who continue their studies directly after upper secondary school, those who take a gap year quickly catch up with the others in terms of study motivation and the effort they put into their studies," says Salmela-Aro.

If young people take more than one gap year, however, they may have more difficulties coping with the studies and with study motivation. "In the transition phase, many young people are left quite alone, which may

make the transition to a new study phase quite challenging."

According to the research results, those young people who begin their further studies directly after upper secondary school are more resilient in their studies and more committed to their goals than those who take a gap year. In addition, adolescents who continue their studies immediately after upper secondary school believe in their ability to achieve their goals more than those who start their studies after a gap year. On the other hand, they find studying and aiming for study goals more stressful than the students who take a gap year.

"The [research results](#) also suggest that students who take a gap year are slightly more susceptible to dropping out of university later on than those who transfer to university directly after upper secondary school," says Salmela-Aro.

The study has been published in *Developmental Psychology*.

More information: I wish I had (not) taken a gap-year? The psychological and attainment outcomes of different post-school pathways. Parker, Philip D.; Thoemmes, Felix; Duinevald, Jasper J.; Salmela-Aro, Katariina. *Developmental Psychology*, Vol 51(3), Mar 2015, 323-333. [dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0038667](https://doi.org/10.1037/a0038667)

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