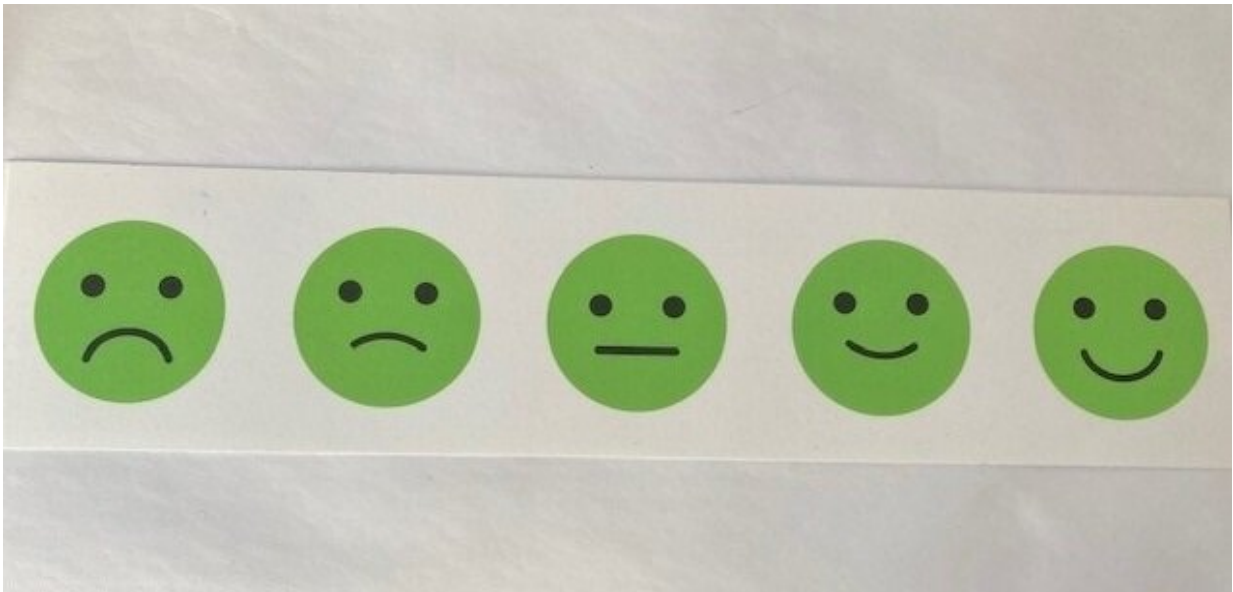


Well-being at school and sense of competence are linked, says study

March 14 2023, by Steinar Brandslet



The test uses emojis to make it easy for pupils to answer. Credit: Hermundur Sigmundsson, NTNU

New research emphasizes how important children's well-being is for their sense of achievement.

Pupils' sense of how good their results are at school is linked to how well they are thriving, both in the [school setting](#) and with the subject matter.

"We're finding a connection between pupils' well-being at school and the

subject matter, and with how well the pupils think they're able to do the [school work](#) in all the subjects we examined," says Hermundur Sigmundsson, a professor at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology's (NTNU) Department of Psychology.

Sigmundsson is part of a research group that wanted to see if there is a connection between pupils' well-being and their sense of competence. The results have recently been published in an article in the *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*.

Questionnaire developed by the researchers

Researchers at NTNU have developed a test to look at the connection between well-being and how students perceive their own skills. Students used emojis to enter their responses.

The survey included 378 Icelandic pupils ages 6 to 15. Sample questions from the survey were:

- How do you like school?
- How much do you like reading, maths, science and physical education?
- How well are you doing in reading, maths, science and physical education?

The researchers then investigated whether they found any connections between pupils' well-being at school and reading, mathematics, science and physical education performance, and whether this had any effect on how well the pupils perceived their competence in the various subjects. They found clear connections.

Gender differences

The researchers found some gender differences.

"Girls generally like reading better than boys do," says Sigmundsson.

It is well known that girls are much better at reading on average than boys. Many boys never learn to read well enough, which applies both in Iceland and in Norway.

"Girls also feel that they are better at science than the boys. But boys like physical education more than [girls](#)", says Sigmundsson.

The oldest score the lowest

The researchers also found a striking development. The older pupils appear to be less comfortable at school and in all subjects except [physical education](#), and also feel that they do worse in the subjects than the younger ones.

"The oldest [pupils](#) seem to do worse in reading, mathematics and science, while also feeling less competent in the subjects," says Sigmundsson.

"This shows how important it is to see the school as a holistic system where the view of the various subjects is reflected in the view of the school itself, and vice versa," he said.

It is difficult to say why the oldest students feel this way, but it may have something to do with a lack of choice, which in turn can lead to less passion for the subjects. More passion can engender more courage and more flow.

Have to look at schooling holistically

The connection between well-being and a sense of competence should make us think about how we see school.

"This shows how important it is to see the school as a holistic system where the view of the various subjects is reflected in the view of the [school](#) itself, and vice versa," says Sigmundsson.

More information: Hermundur Sigmundsson et al, Well-Being and Perceived Competence in School Children from 1 to 9 Class, *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* (2023). [DOI: 10.3390/ijerph20032116](https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph20032116)

Provided by Norwegian University of Science and Technology

Citation: Well-being at school and sense of competence are linked, says study (2023, March 14) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2023-03-well-being-school-linked.html>

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