

Learning is easier with a positive attitude, finds meta-study

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Students who think positively about their own abilities and their subject are more likely to achieve the goals they have set for themselves. Conversely, a lack of confidence in one's own abilities can lead to goals

being missed. This is shown by a meta-study conducted by the DIPF | Leibniz Institute for Research and Information in Education and other institutions.

The study examined the interplay between [motivation](#) and learning success, for which the researchers analyzed data from five intensive [longitudinal studies](#). The [results](#) have now been published in the journal *Contemporary Educational Psychology*.

All of the longitudinal studies used included daily surveys. Although these studies each addressed different research questions, they all included data on daily learning, goals, and assessments of one's own competencies. Only [university students](#) were surveyed.

Across the five studies, data sets from 841 students were collected, analyzed with multilevel analyses, and synthesized in a [meta-analysis](#). Depending on the study, they belonged to different subjects, subject groups and semesters.

"With the five studies, we had a large and very diverse data set available for follow-up use," explains Dr. Maria Theobald, first author of the recently published paper. She adds, "It would have been very costly to conduct such an extensive survey on our own."

The results of the study

All five studies confirmed a central thesis of motivation research, according to which there is a connection between confidence in one's own competencies, interest in the subject and success, says psychologist Theobald. One thing follows another, she says. "Students who achieve their learning goals one day are more motivated to continue learning the next."

Just like this virtuous circle, a vicious circle has also been shown. For example, motivation drops if learning goals are missed the day before—some of the respondents procrastinated on the following day, i.e., postponed learning until later. Those who procrastinated regularly were less likely to achieve their goals.

At the same time, failing to achieve goals did not necessarily cause this vicious circle to turn on. Instead, students dealt with failure in very different ways, including some who were not discouraged and subsequently tried even harder.

The researchers identified another virtuous circle in terms of values toward the subject area. Those who were interested in their subject were also more likely to achieve their goals. Motivation is therefore an important factor in explaining learning success at the individual level, emphasizes Theobald.

In addition to such motivational aspects, the authors also compared how much time the various test subjects spent on their tasks. However, the DIPF researcher emphasizes that no correlation was found between the amount of time spent studying and the achievement of learning [goals](#). "Those who spend a lot of time studying do not necessarily do so out of pure professional interest, but perhaps also because the tasks are perceived as difficult."

Although the studies only surveyed university [students](#), it is very likely that the results also apply to other age groups, such as schoolchildren. To be sure, however, this would need to be tested in a sample of school-aged children, Maria Theobald concludes.

More information: Maria Theobald et al, A multi-study examination of intra-individual feedback loops between competence and value beliefs, procrastination, and goal achievement, *Contemporary*

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