

Motivated supervision increases motivation when writing a thesis, study finds

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Students working on their Bachelor's or Master's thesis usually have supervisors at their side who guide, accompany and possibly also correct them during this time. If students have the impression that their

supervisor is passionate and motivated, this also increases their own motivation. Grade pressure, on the other hand, has no direct influence on student motivation during this time.

These are the key findings of a study conducted by psychologists at Julius-Maximilians-Universität Würzburg (JMU). Dr. Anand Krishna, research associate at the Chair of Psychology II: Emotion and Motivation, was responsible for the study. The team has now [published](#) the results of its research in the journal *Psychology Learning & Teaching*.

The pinnacle of learning

"We surveyed a total of 217 psychology students across Germany who were writing their final thesis or had written it in the previous two years," says Krishna, describing the approach. For many students, this thesis represents an important milestone; after all, it can be seen "as the culmination of learning and an expression of the skills acquired during their studies." Accordingly, it is important to keep [motivation](#) as high as possible during the work.

The theoretical basis of this study lies in so-called Expectancy-Value Theory. Put simply, it assumes that people multiply the attractiveness of the respective goal, i.e., the value, with the probability of achieving it in their work.

The result of this calculation then determines the respective motivation. Or, in concrete terms: a good grade in the thesis is a prerequisite for an attractive job—so the value is high. However, those who feel overwhelmed by their work will see their chances of a good grade decrease. Accordingly, motivation is also low.

"The close correlation between students' motivation and their assessment of their supervisor's motivation is not really surprising," says Anand

Krishna. However, there have been no scientific studies on this to date. What he finds more interesting is the finding that the [pressure](#) of grades in the final thesis is not directly related to student motivation.

Grade pressure increases stress and motivation

"Viewed in isolation, our analysis shows a positive correlation between grade pressure and the value aspect of motivation. The greater the pressure that students feel, the higher their motivation ultimately is," says Krishna. At the same time, however, more pressure always means more stress, which in turn lowers motivation.

"Based on this data, we believe it is plausible that grade pressure boosts motivation through the value of the grade, but also increases student stress and therefore ultimately does not contribute to motivation," Krishna concludes. It is important for him to point out that the results of this survey only indicate correlations, not causal relationships. However, the patterns in the data would not contradict the theoretical causal explanation.

Given that motivated supervisors play an important role where the grade is of great importance for future prospects, Anand Krishna and his co-author Julia Grund therefore consider it important to motivate and incentivize supervisors especially. After all, such measures will most likely be reflected in the perception of their [students](#) and ultimately lead to a better grade.

More information: Anand Krishna et al, Student-Perceived Supervisor Motivation and Grade Pressure as Predictors of German Psychology Students' Thesis Motivation, *Psychology Learning & Teaching* (2024). [DOI: 10.1177/14757257241239622](https://doi.org/10.1177/14757257241239622)

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